

H97-66-10

Robert Sheldon

July 23, 1964

Fairbanks, Alaska

Robert Sheldon was in Skagway, Alaska in 1904. M.F. Hall's son was interested in the same girl that he liked. He wanted to compete with the horse and buggy that M.F. Hall's son used. There were many buggies in Skagway because people brought them to use during the gold rush. People in town ordered gasoline engines to use on rowboats. One of the boats had been submerged and needed to have the engine cleaned out. The owners brought the engine to Bobby to have it cleaned. It was a three cylinder, three and a half horse power, two-cycle engine. He bought the engine from the owners. He had lived in Washington when it was a territory. He was born in 1883 in Snohomish, Washington. He remembers hearing about a horseless carriage when he was in Seattle. It was 1897 and he never did get to see it. He had always been fascinated by wheeled machines when he was a young boy. He arrived in Skagway and was advised not to go over Whitepass because it was the middle of winter. He talked about his father's early experiences. His father once traveled to Wrangell and partnered with Jack McQuisten. His father returned to New York and married. They moved to San Francisco and had their first child in 1871. Once a year Jack McQuisten would write a letter to Bobby's father, Robert E. Sheldon, Sr. In 1897 they received a letter from Jack McQuisten about the gold rush. Bobby was the last child at home and he joined his father for the trip to Alaska. His father died after they moved to Alaska. Bobby stayed at Skagway. His first job was selling Seattle newspapers. There were gambling houses in Skagway. This was at a time of the Spanish War. He was interested in machinery. He worked at the power plant in Skagway.

He decided to hook up his small engine to drive one of the buggies to impress his girlfriend. He put it together with bicycle sprockets and chains. He would drive up to his girlfriend's house and honk his horn. His girlfriend married M.F. Hall's son after all. He said that he was raised with the belief that everything happens for the best. He talked about putting all of his money into Mt. McKinley National Park. After the beginning of WWII he was put out of business.

He talked about his business driving passengers to Valdez. He traveled with many types of people. Two government engineers were taken to the coast by Bobby. They were covered from head to toe in mud because they had to dig themselves out of the mud so many times. The traffic on the road was one way. He would buy gas in Valdez and Chitina and leave it along the way at different roadhouses. When he had twelve automobiles he used a truck to haul out his gas ahead of time. Danny Morenzie was hired by Bobby to drive the truck and distribute the gas. He taught Dick Callahan and others to drive. The different roadhouses along the way were: Sixteen mile, Eighteen mile, Piledriver, Munson's at the Salcha River, Frank Bridge's roadhouse called the Overland Roadhouse, the Fox Farm Roadhouse (John Taylor's), Birch Lake (owned by Jimmy Chisholm), Dad Martin's Roadhouse, Sullivan's Roadhouse, Gordon's roadhouse, and Donnelly's roadhouse. On the Richardson there was Tenderfoot roadhouse, Rika's roadhouse, Charlie Miller's roadhouse, Rapids roadhouse, Miller's roadhouse, McCallum's roadhouse, Youst, Paxson, Myers, Our Home, Poplar Grove, Sourdough, Gulkana, Tazlina, Copper Center, Willow Creek, Upper Tonsina, Tekal, Beaver Dam, Tomikin Drop, several around Thompson Pass, and several more to Valdez. Once when he was at Dad Martin's Roadhouse, Jimmy Chisholm came in with frozen feet. Jimmy had mushed from his burned down roadhouse. The roadhouse people

were happy to see the people coming through, but little by little the automobile put the roadhouses to an end. He talked about gasoline hill which was so steep that you had to have a full tank to get to the top of the hill.

[after the talk during coffee hour so Bobby Sheldon and others are difficult to hear]

Bobby talks about Colonel Richardson wanting to get an automobile through the highway in 1913. Bobby asked to drive the car from Valdez to Fairbanks. There was already a hired driver and mechanic. So Bobby decided to drive his own car from Fairbanks to Valdez. He passed the other car at Copper Center. There were horses all along the way in case the driver and mechanic needed to be pulled out. Bobby arrived in Valdez before the other car made it to Fairbanks.

Another speaker, Frank Young tells a story about U.S. Marshal W.T. "Stubbs" Irwin. Irwin bought one of the first Dodge cars sold by the NC Company in Fairbanks. While Frank took Irwin's car to get gas the attendants, Axel Carlson and Harry DeYoung stole all the liquor that was in the car. Frank was fired because the liquor was missing until Irwin found out who the real thieves were.