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H97-66-13

B.J. Bingle

Fairbanks, Alaska

November 8, 1965

H97-66-13 Side A. Reverend Burton J. Bingle was born in northern Ohio. His parents were George and Della Bingle. He had one brother and five sisters. He was educated in northern Ohio. He worked on the family farm and traveled to high school for three years by horse and buggy. He attended college in Illinois for six years. After college in 1923 he worked in Wisconsin and Kansas. After seminary work he worked in Idaho and then Alaska. He came by steamship in 1928. He mentioned a few people on the boat including Sam Baker. They arrived in Cordova. The Presbyterian Church had three operating churches in Alaska at that time: Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Cordova. Dr. Gryce was at Barrow. Yonnie Yule was in Fairbanks. By fall they had their first Presbyterian meeting in Cordova. To begin with he had services in the evening. The church was a center of activity for the church and the town. He was in charge of the boy scout work in Cordova. Frances Bowden helped with the scouts. His mission work included McCarthy, Kennecott Mine and Chitina. They had services in the Native villages as well. At Kennecott they had services at the mine. He thought some of the finest people in the north were at the mines. Everyone came to dinner at the dining hall all dressed up. He talked about riding the tram bucket up the hill. Sig Wold and Ruben Johnson were at the mine at this time. He talked about a funeral at the mine that was a case of mistaken identity. Other places they visited Copper Center, Gulkana, Paxson, and Nabesna. During the depression they handled the wood yard in Cordova. They paid the wood cutters. They gave out clothes and flour. In 1932 there were a lot of fishermen that were hungry. They were eating clams and seagull eggs. Bingle and others went out to the area to provide food and clothing. Since fuel was so expensive he and Merle Thomas cut their own wood for fuel. It was a rough time for many. He then moved to the Matanuska Valley right before it opened up to the farmers in 1935. All the workers arrived at one time by train. Jim remembers the caterpillar tractors being shipped to the Matanuska Valley. B.J. didn't think they were prepared enough for the farmers. The workers were there to clear the land and build temporary housing for the farmers. The farmers arrived several days later. B.J. worked in the Matanuska Valley for six and a half years. He provided a radio for the farmers. He also put out the first paper for them. Jack Ohlman started a permanent paper. Kay Kennedy also worked on the paper. B.J. wanted them to have a place to congregate. He was given basic tools and several men to help him. It was used for church, Red Cross, the library and colony meetings. It was later used for a hospital. The farmers were worried about getting food for the winter. B.J. suggested that they fish. They collected fish at the Knik Arm. They canned the salmon for the valley. He said the fish were plentiful. They fished for about four weeks. They used the Matanuska Experiment Station for canning. They built a church headed up by Neal Miller. There were a thousand trees in the church building. Lawrence Arndt worked on the building. The church was built in 1936 or 37. He built his own house in the fall of 1935. A lot of scarlet fever hit the valley the first summer. They started to work on the youth camp at Kings Lake in 1937. Dr. and Mrs. Albrecht, Clyde King, Max Sheridan, Walt Hunt, and I.M.C. Anderson were all involved with this project. It was community owned. He then moved up north in 1941. They changed to the National Missions work. They worked along the railroad and the highway and occasionally went to the Arctic. He went to Wales and Saint Lawrence Island for short period of times. He was at Wales during the winter when the snow was very deep. Jim said he took mail up to Wales by dog team from Nome. B.J. said he traveled by dog team

from Teller to Wales. They had a church in Nenana and he visited there until 1942. He would visit construction camps along the railroad. He visited Whittier when the tunnel was being worked on. They visited the coal mines in the Matanuska Valley. He would also visit Fern Mine and Independence Mine. He visited Willow, Talkeetna, Broad Pass, Curry, and McKinley Park. He would have services for the bridge crews. He knew Paul Wadden. In 1942-1945 he traveled down the highway next to the railroad. He provided services at Big Delta. He found out about the construction of the Alaska Highway. They covered the Glenn Highway. He talked about providing services to the men working on the highway construction. He would carry a projector and films with him. Dave Croft also worked the highway from Robertson River to the border. They also went into the Canadian camps.

H96-66-13 Side B Someone from the audience asked about the proportion of people attended his services. B.J. Bingle said that they had singing and everyone would take part. Everyone in the railroad camps would attend the services. Almost everyone on the road camps would attend services, too. In the late forties he went to Barrow and Umiak a few times for the Navy when the oil exploration was active. He took care of the Canadian camps until 1953. They took care of Destruction Bay. He started working on the railroad only. His group covered Summit, McKinley Park, Healy, Garner, Ferry, Old Clear, and Julius. He had eleven different stops that he made. In 1949 they started to work in the College area to build up the congregation. Harry Chaplin had another congregation. He was on the road a lot of the time. They had a lot of volunteer help building their church at College. 13:00