

H97-66-23
Charles Creamer
January 26, 1967
Fairbanks, Alaska

Pt. 1

Side A

Charles Creamer's family lived in a small mining town in California named Weaverville. His father was driving stage. The gold was at the grass roots level. His father would mine when he could find water. His uncle was on his way to Alaska and his father was convinced that was the place to be, too. They went up to Juneau in 1896 and staked claims at Silver Gull Basin. The gold strike in Dawson happened and they went up to Skagway and Dyea. They started freighting over the Chilkoot Trail with horses in 1896. His father sent for the family in 1897. His father was building a house in Dyea. He describes the landing in Dyea. They lived in a tent when they first arrived. They soon moved into their house. His uncle was killed soon after that in a boat explosion. They put in a tramway up to the summit. He remembers Soapy Smith's group trying to come into Dyea. His father sold all of his horses to the railroad company. In 1900 his father headed back north and ended up in Dawson. His father and uncle came to Fairbanks in 1903 and operated a saw mill. The family joined him in 1904. They were using a lot of lumber at that time. There were two other sawmills in town. His father ended up buying out one of the saw mills. In 1906 or 07 there was a fire in town and they could sell all the lumber they produced. Charles attended school with twenty-five or thirty students. Another school was built at Second and Noble when the population increased. Charles had missed a lot of schools because of his travels. He talked about running the mail contract between Fairbanks and Circle. He also worked in a barn. He talked about the cattle arriving in town. He started herding cattle in the summer. He decided to quit school about 1909. His sister, Maddie Stoker was running a boarding house. He was offered a bowling alley by Bill Coons who owned the California saloon. He partnered with Winnie Groon who knew how to run a bowling alley. They did a good business that winter. He returned to herding in the summer and the following fall he added the pool tables to his business. They started showing motion pictures in the California saloon. Women didn't go into the saloons.

He remembers the railroad bill celebration. Everyone celebrated for 24 hours.

In later years he worked for the railroad. When WWI started he was too old to be drafted so he volunteered. He describes his trip down to the Yukon and over to Nome to pick up more soldiers. They were traveling on the Sherman. It was a rough trip. It took them three weeks to get to San Francisco. Right when they left San Francisco the flu broke out. They ended up in Camp Dodge in Iowa. The flu was already at the military base. The ones that weren't sick were assigned as orderlies in the hospital. He never did get the flu. His best friend died in camp.

After the war ended he went back to Alaska. He traveled to Seattle and he joined Joe O'Conner on his way up to Fairbanks. He traveled to Chitina and ran into Ed Bartlett. He drove a team of horses into Fairbanks for Ed. He had seven passengers, too. At Delta Junction he had a difficult crossing.

He started a skating rink in front of the NC Company. He started an indoors skating rink, too at the roller skating rink.

He worked for the railroad for a while. He met his wife, Rosanna Golden, in Fairbanks. She moved to Washington. He moved down to Washington to get married and started a chicken farm.

In 1927 he took all of his stock and headed back to Fairbanks. He made it into Fairbanks and was able to sell his chickens. He started helping his brother-in-law at the dairy. He ended up buying the dairy from his brother-in-law. He got a loan from Billy McGrath. Charlie Slater wanted to sell his cows. They were making the payments. There were three or four other dairies in town. He ended up buying out all of their cows.

Bentley was another dairy farm in town that burned down at one time. Charlie Creamer was supplying milk to all the customers.

The land for the dairy was cleared by Merry who homesteaded the area. He used the area for meadows. Hinkley bought Merry out in 1908. In 1910 he built barns on the property. There were only twenty acres cleared when he first owned the dairy. Every winter there were Finns who would cut the woods. Creamer also had horses. They used the horses in the winter in the logging camps. He finally bought a tractor in 1934.

Side B

Charlie went up to the NC company and told them what he needed. The Seattle office wanted to add on twenty percent to the price. The Case machinery talked him into becoming a dealer and he got all of his machinery from them. After getting all of his machinery he sold all of his horses. He still owns his 1934 tractor.

Jim asked him about his railroad work. Charles said when he came back to Alaska he started working for the railroad. He worked on the steam shovel working on cuts between Fairbanks and Nenana. It was a two man shovel. They were working with frozen ground and it was difficult. He worked with Pete Anderson. He talked about engine no. 1 and the railroad from Chena and Fairbanks. The little engine went as far as Nenana. He also worked on pile drivers on the river at Nenana. He then worked in the Fox area. When he was out there the flu broke out again. He traveled back to Fairbanks. There were just a few people left who could run the trains to Chatanika. His sister kept a stash of moonshine hidden in the piano. This was in 1920 and he traveled down to Washington state to get married in Seattle.

He didn't think the territory was ready to be a state. The federal government was pouring a lot of money into the territory and they didn't have the taxes. When the taxes started it was too much. He talked about Eddie Austin who was a miner and his mining experiences with him. Eddie came through the area before Pedro's discovery. Charles and Eddie sunk a hole at Steamboat Pump. They hit water after only ten feet. Crazy Baker owned Four Below. They wanted to put in a bedrock drain on their property but Crazy Baker wouldn't let them.

He joined his brother-in-law and others that planned a road to Chena Hot Springs. He took up a collection and they cut a four horse trail from Fairbanks to Chena Hot Springs in 1910.

The coldest temperatures he ever experienced in Fairbanks was minus 68 in 1934.

He got his first truck in 1912. He used to drive a 1908 vehicle in the parades. He has donated it to the Centennial park.

They took three weeks to build the trail to Chena Hot Springs. He talked about going up to Chena Hot Springs by boat.

He talked about moose hunting. He would get 25 cents a pound for the moose and 50 cents a pound for grayling. He sold the meat to the Model Café. This was in 1905-1906. This was before the big fire.

He talked about the Vashon brothers. They were located in Tanana, Tolovana and Peter was in Fairbanks. Peter Vashon had a store at First and Noble.

In the early days there was a lot of smoke. He doesn't remember all the ice fog back then.

Jim asked about the railroad going up to Chatanika. He wondered if they would have to stop for wood. Charles said they would have to stop for water and wood at Goldstream and at the Gilmore, too. They would fill their pump full of water. They used engine no. 51 and 52. The engine no. 1 had a tender behind it. It had a little water jacket and it would run out of water frequently. He used to fire the engine.

His father's name was Charles N. Creamer. His mother's name was Martha Creamer. They were married in Weaverville country. He had six sisters. Their names were Hessie, Maddie, Francis, a sister that died in childhood, Genevieve and Marian.

May 25, 1967

In the early days the steamers would come up the Tanana River and they would stop at Chena. If the rivers were high enough they would come up the Chena River all the way to Fairbanks. If it wasn't high enough they would stop at Chena and unload to lighten the load. The two companies present in the early days were the Alaska Commercial Company and the North American Transportation and Trading Company operated several boats. There was so much trouble with the water that the NAT&T Company ~~they~~ located to Chena. When Barnette came there was good wood in Fairbanks. Chena was a little bit further from the mines. The first road went up through the cemetery and came in at Gilmore Creek. It was a tough road for horses. He said it is now called the Gilmore Trail. Joselyn came in and started the railroad from Chena to Fairbanks. They called it no. 1. They just cut the trees down and put the rails down on top of everything. The track was kind of wavy. After the road was put in the railroad was expanded to Happy and out to Goldstream as far as Gilmore. The rails then went up to Fox and all the way to Chatanika. The railroad was busy all summer. The Alaska Railroad eventually took over. Charles worked for the railroad after getting out of the army. Jim Cassady asked when the railroad was built from Chena to Fairbanks. Charles said it was 1905-1906. The engine and steel came on a boat from St. Michaels.

Pt. 2

Charlie Joint was an engineer. The Turner Street bridge used to go out every year and Charlie said he could put in a bridge that wouldn't go out. He built the bridge 1910-1912. The ice backed up when it hit the bridge. It jammed up by the Independent Mill. The graveyard was just ice. And between 5th and 6th Streets the river was flowing. Once they got the ice broke up everything was just fine. Then in June the logs came down the river and jammed up. They had to finally blast the bridge out before it did more damage. The steamer Tanana couldn't come up the Chena so it was brought up Noyes Slough.

Charlie said they never had a wreck on the railroad to Chatanika. They had to use a dog team once to pull it. Jim Christensen was the engineer and Sven Carlson was the fireman. Jimmy Rodenthal was the conductor. Captain Langley brought the first theatrical troupe to Fairbanks. They came from Dawson. Someone from the audience talks to Charles about his arrival in Fairbanks and his family. Jim asked about steamboats on the river. Charles said the Thomas flyer was an automobile used in Fairbanks. The Hungry Kid took the engine from that car and built a launch which ran from Fairbanks to Nenana. The speedboat hit a snag and went down and everyone was lost in the Tanana River. Charlie said he was on a boat once when someone went overboard. They never could find the person. He thinks the Tanana River is treacherous because of the heavy silt. The railroad to Chatanika used wood for power. They cut wood closer to Fairbanks because the miners had cleared it off near Chatanika.

Charlie talks about when the Indians were given the right to vote. It was against the law to supply liquor to Indians.

Charlie told a story about a traveling salesman. He came into Nome and always brought candy for the kids.

Jim asked about the Ruby gold strike. Charlie said by the time he got there everything was taken up. He talks about the Livengood gold strike. Billy Butler was a marshal in Fairbanks. Jack Allman was headed to Livengood. Billy Butler and Charlie started out to Livengood in April.

Charles ran into two bears on his trip.

Jim asked about the

rolling stock on the Chatanika railroad. Charlie said they did have passenger cars later on. They had triple track into Fairbanks. Charlie said they had Y-turnarounds in several places. There were several water towers along the rails.

He was mining up towards Pedro. He went blueberry hunting and ran into a sow with two cubs. He ran towards the cabin and stepped out of the way and she ended up inside the cabin. He was able to climb up on the roof and took a pick with him. She finally left through the door. He said he would see many bears in just a couple of hours.

Someone asked about a boat being sunk by an ice jam. Charlie said he used to herd for many of the companies. A boat was tied up at the riverfront and it was full of meat. During break up it sunk. They eventually raised the boat.

Jim asked about the agricultural history of Fairbanks. Charlie said Bill Young filed on the first homestead in 1904. The teamsters had horses and had to buy their feed through the NC Company. They cleared off the land and started to grow grain. After more land was cleared they put in a flour mill. They could raise good wheat on the hills. They had good flour from the flour mill. He talked about the different farm businesses that have gone out of business. The flour mill operated for quite a few years and then burned down. The flour business was called Golden Heart. Bob Bloom, Harry Badger, and McIntyre were all farmers. Someone from the audience said at one time 600 acres supplied all of Alaska. It was good wheat country. He said growing grain as far north as Hazard. Up on the hillside was the best place to grow wheat. After probation they started a brewery. He said the beer was good quality. The Bartels ran the brewery. There was also the Pioneer Brewery.

Charlie said in the early days there weren't a lot of birds stopping in the area. In 1905-06 they had to go out to the Tanana River to get birds. When Hinkley started a dairy there were a few birds coming out to the dairy. When Charlie took over the dairy he would clean the barn every day. They raised oats and barley. They would take the sweet ones (?) and spread it out on the field. The birds started coming and increased every year. He would put out the cull potatoes and the ducks and geese would eat those too. There were cranes, too. He talked about how far some of the birds travel. He saw swans on the Tanana River and only saw a few swans at the farm at any one time. He saw a couple of swans recently.

Jim Cassady commented about the NC Firehouse. It blew several times a day. Charlie talked about the old boats at Saint Michaels. He called it a graveyard for the boats. Jim said a lot of them were burned up for metal scrap.

An author in the audience talks about her book project about the first ladies of Alaska. (Helen Wendy Jones?)

Jim Cassady talked about historical articles in the Alaskan sportsman.

Irving Reed tells a short story about Anchorage.