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John Miscovich

Tanana Yukon Historical Society

Fairbanks, Alaska

Side A

John Miscovich is conducting a mining operation at Otter Creek. He was born on Otter Creek about three miles from the town of Flat on March 7, 1918. He has lived there his whole life. His father came into the area in 1910. His parents were Peter and Stanna Miscovich and were married in Iditarod. George, Eva, Ann, Alda, Howard and Andrew Miscovich were his siblings. He has three children, Peter II, Myra, and Sandra. His wife came from Yugoslavia.

His dad was working in a coal mine in Wilkinson, Washington and read about the Iditarod strike. He headed for the Iditarod. He arrived in 1910 and started cutting wood for pay. He was also working on the tramway from Iditarod to Flat. In 1916 his father had some ground on Discovery and started his operation. His family was a major part of the development of that district. John still operates in the same area. He is interested in telling the story of Flat and Otter. His father and mother ran a bathhouse for many years. He made his own steam boiler which is still there. He took the hoist engine and converted it to a motor on a washing machine.

Someone asked about the hard time getting freight into the area. John said people traveled from Fairbanks and down the Yukon River and up the Innok~~a~~ River and Iditarod River. During the dry seasons they used horses and mules to haul the barges. It was a major problem developing the area. When the river froze up they traveled on the river from Ophir and Ruby. When a dredge broke a crankshaft they had to haul it in by dog team. Some of the things that were done physically sound impossible today.

George Riley was shot there before John was born. He was a progressive pioneer. There was also a mail robbery done at Ritalin Roadhouse. Black Bear. He saw the first plane fly into Flat. He remembers Wiley Post taking off from Flat.

His family had a whole creek where they mined. His father restaked a lot of old claims. They own the entire Otter Creek area. They did very well before the war. His father used more modern equipment. He had the first hydro-electric equipment on the creek. He was instrumental in getting the road developed into the area. His father had a very limited education but accomplished a lot.

They attended a grade school in Flat. Their family numbered seven which was pretty close to the whole population of the school.

George Riley brought the first dredge into Flat in 1914 on Discovery Creek. It was rebuilt in 1938 and it is the dredge that John operates. George Riley also operated in Tolstoy and the Manley Hot Springs.

Tom Jensen came to Flat after the war. He may have been there in the earlier days. Mr. Donnelly developed the bank and navigation on the river. He was a real asset to Flat. Flat has many attributes that could fit into the historical society program. John would like to see an old tractor brought in this summer. It was a tractor that was used to haul wood when the Guggenheim's had a power plant for their dredge operation on Flat Creek. The tractor was steam powered and could haul a hundred cords of wood on sleds. It is a monument to some of the early pioneering of transportation. There's also a steam boiler

and hydraulic elevator. He has numerous photos of the early days in Flat. A lot of the machinery replaced horse power.

Maude and George Muchler took part in hauling a lot of the heavy machinery in the early days. There was a Rasmuson that lived in Flat when he was a small boy. All seven of the children in the family were born in Flat. They all survived and grew up healthy. It was a hardship to be a pioneer and raise a family. His mother's honeymoon was a trip from Iditarod to Discovery. She had breakfast with six other men for her honeymoon breakfast. The women of those days deserve a lot of credit.

The early mail carrying days were of great interest to everybody. They made the schedule every week. Everyone enjoyed the winters. He lived in Flat until 1930. Everyone had a very active program in the winter. They had dancing and programs. The pioneers were one of the very active lodges.

Iditarod was a very active place at one time. They had saloons, moving pictures, telephone company and printing press. Flat and Discovery were also very active at one time, too. One of the pioneers of Iditarod and Flat was Tootsie. She lives in Sitka. At one time she was on trial for bootlegging. E.B. Collins put her in jail for six months.

There is more game in the Flat area now than in earlier days.

He went back to work in the Flat area after attending high school in Fairbanks. They expanded over to Ruby. They had to strip a lot of overburden. He has made a film about the operation. He hopes to use his Intelligine automatic control water power machine. He has designed and worked on the machine for twenty years. It is used in fire fighting and the pulp wood industry. The first machine was modeled in 1948. The miner's didn't accept the idea of the machine.

Everyone raised a garden in Flat. For his family it was a necessity. His mother and siblings worked a large garden. They also had goats for milk. They had fish and reindeer meat. His mother salted the fish and salmon. They fished in the summertime. The reindeer herds came from Holy Cross. The Ralph and Al Loman had the large reindeer operations. Frank Fox brought the reindeer in every year. The Wekter brothers brought cattle down the river every summer. They walked the cattle across country from Ruby. They slaughtered the cattle along the way.

They hunted ptarmigan in the winter. They disappeared from the area. Living off the land was an important part of your livelihood. They still garden in Flat and hunt moose in the fall.

They had years when the rabbits were a problem. They ate the rabbits when the numbers were large. Now there are fewer rabbits. They have ducks and geese in the area now. They used to be hunted in the fall. There have been fox and wolf in the area. The area has never had too many fur bearing animals.

Someone asked about load mining in the area. John said that he has been looking into the Golden Horn Mine. He hopes to be developing the area. He hopes for a road from the Kuskokwim River some day. The cost for development is high. He is hoping for a pioneer access road.

Someone from the audience asked if there were other minerals in the area. John said yes there's coal which could be investigated. There's also antimony. There's a large deposit of antimony in the area. The geologists said there probably isn't oil there. There is no more wood left in the area for heat so investigating coal would be good for the area.

Pioneer access road means a road that is possible by truck. It doesn't have to be four lanes just wide enough to carry a truck or tractor. It should be passable after freeze up. Then they can arrange to have supplies brought by truck. River travel can be difficult if the water is low. The transportation companies were: Day Navigation Company (Harry Downey and Glenn Day), Ira Woods of Holy Cross and in the early days, Wallace Langley. Wallace Langley recently returned to visit Flat. There are many boats left that tell the story of Iditarod.

Someone from the audience asked about getting the relicts out of Iditarod and asked if it was a matter of money. John said he hopes Art Peterson will move the old steam tractor from Iditarod to Fairbanks. He was concerned about having a place to store the relicts. There are a number of things he thinks would be of interest to the public. Discussion about restoring, moving and finding a home for the relicts left in the Flat area. He discusses the facilities involved with the centennial and the need for planning. He talked about the monument at Discovery. He wonders if there is more money for monuments in other areas such as Flat and Ophir. He would like to get more people to appreciate what is out there to be preserved. He worries that waiting another ten years will be too late to save the relicts. There was a bad forest fire in Flat three years ago and the fire fighters removed many of the relicts in the abandoned buildings.

Harry Reid asked about roadhouses in Flat. John said in Iditarod there was the A.B. Hall for dances, Shermeyer's Roadhouse, Tootsie's place, Bill Crumb's roadhouse. In Flat Paul Azonion, Henry Durant, and George Adams had a roadhouse. John said that the roadhouse could also supply a bottle of white mule anytime you needed it. His uncle John Bagoy had a roadhouse in Discovery. There were a lot of people with unique names in the early days. They had Three-step Louie, Snowshoe Kid, Hootenanny Kid and the Going Kid were some of the famous names. They had names like this because in their own way they did something remarkable in the area.

John Beaton and William A. Dikeman discovered the first traces of gold in Flat in 1908. They came back in 1909 and did their staking. The stampede happened in the latter part of 1909 -1910. John Beaton discovered the gold on Otter Creek. His family went down on the Sophia in 1918. Dikeman's roadhouse was one of the stops on the Iditarod. He made his fortune and left. Tom Achen and Frank Dawson were miners in the area. Sam Applebom had a store in Iditarod and did well. He packed clothing and sold it to the men out at the creeks. Dave Strandberg and his family were on Otter Creek. He talked about Ralph Rivers and Guy Rivers. The Guggenheims were also operating in the Flat area. They had a large dredge and shut down in 1917. His father had a lease on all their holdings after they quit. They eventually lost the property.

Side B

Riddle of the roadhouse. A robbery at the roadhouse was preplanned. They knew the certificates were going to arrive in the mail. Bill Duffy was bringing in the dogsled mail and Nellie Duffy was involved too. Schumeyer was arrested and put in jail where he confessed. Markum was the lawyer who fought the case. It was robbery but Nellie was let free. John thought there was about 60,000 was stolen. Someone from the audience talked about how the money was taken out of the country by using tobacco cans.

John said he tries to get this kind of stories from the old timers. There are a few of the old timers are still living. The newspapers did publish stories in the papers for a while.

John said that Fabian Carey was in the Flat area and was interested in preserving some of the artifacts. John said he prefers that the artifacts be preserved in a park.

He discusses the prospect of roads in the area such as a road to Georgetown. A question from the audience about prospecting in the area. John said there was still prospecting in the area if people can get into the area. He said people returned after the tractor was introduced. He said if a road was constructed then more modern equipment could be brought in. Georgetown is located on the Kuskokwim. Small roads are important to the small community. He doesn't think the people are getting their fuel taxes back. He describes how easy it would be to construct a road in the area.

He thinks there are about thirty people living in the area in the summer months. They bring in about 300,000 dollars worth of gold. There are two dredges operating in Flat. He fears that the town is dwindling away. The Egoff brothers, the Thornton brothers, the Miscovich brothers and John Stevens operate mining operations in Flat. They are all small mining companies but they have big dreams. He hopes to stay with mining. He said all of the trails were developed because of gold. He said everything else came in after gold. They have gold, silver, lead, zinc, copper, antimony and some coal in the area. They have reports about the resources but they need exploratory work to see how large the deposits area. They need to bulk sample the area, but it takes money. He talks about the problems of getting the testing done.

Question about mosquitoes. John said when the snow is deep the mosquitoes will be bad. They have a postmaster who lives in Flat full time. There are about six people who live in Flat full time. Joe Ranjion, Fred Pearson, and Mrs. Joe Parker live there full time.

Schooling is a problem. There is a schoolhouse but it is no longer used and it is in poor condition. They have good water, lots of buildings in the town and about forty miles of roads. It is in a beautiful setting. They have had many visitors to the area.

He discusses how Fairbanks was the hub for transportation in the past and now it is Anchorage. Discussion of Anchorage's attitude. He said there is only service to Flat once a week. Jim Dodson used to fly. He believes that Fairbanks could be much more prosperous. Discussion about fuel taxes.

John discusses increasing employment in the area to keep the level of poverty down.