

H97-66-30  
A.H. Humphries  
Fairbanks, Alaska  
May 29, 1964  
Pt. 1 Side A

A.H. Humphries was born in Yorkshire, England. He came to the United States in 1906. After working in New York City he came up to Alaska. He joined a friend who was traveling from England to Alaska. He wanted to work outside after working indoors. He arrived on the west coast broke. He got a job in Seattle. He learned how to drive a truck and then did billing. He then worked on a construction job until he had enough money to get to Alaska which was \$45.00.

He headed up to Alaska and the work at that time was on railroad construction and the Kennecott Mine. He ended up in Cordova. This was in late February or March of 1910. Cordova was full of men. It was a real frontier town. After spending the night in a bar they finally found a place to stay the next day. He went out looking for work in the railroad yard without any luck. It took about three weeks to find a job. He can't remember how he existed without money during that time. Cap Lathrop had an express business with six horses, ice business and water business. A.H. went to work on camp forty nine where the bridge was. They had to walk through about a mile of snow to get to the camp. He talks about his different jobs as a young man and shows a photo of Queens Bridge from 1909. He thought the camp looked tough but it turned out to be the best camp on the railroad. He had to shovel snow into the locomotive for water for his first job. He said the wind was blowing so hard it was difficult to get any into the locomotive. The next morning they went to work hauling freight across lake in front of Miles Glacier on sleds with donkeys. It had to be unloaded from flat cars. He talked about Scotty Fox. There were all sorts of supplies food, lumber, hay, railroad ties etc. They used coal to fuel the train engines. He worked there for two or three months. He decided to go to Tekel. It was run by the Healy Company. He discovered that he had left the better camp. He stayed there a little while and learned to lay track. He then went to work as a deck hand on a steamboat. They used wood for fuel. There were three steamboats that were packed overland from Valdez to Chitina and then reassembled on the Copper River. He was on the Nazina. The steamboats operated from Tekel to Chitina (mile 130). They were blasting out a road at Wood's Canyon. He enjoyed his job working on the steamboat. He got off at Chitina and decided to walk to Fairbanks. Chitina was just starting out as a town. Billy Tibbs and Tom Holland had the only completed cabin. He started out to Fairbanks. He stayed at a new roadhouse the first night at Tonsina River. He met up with George Taylor and George Flowers. They headed to Copper Center. They were offered a job with the Alaska Road Commission. Blix was the roadhouse keeper in Copper Center. Charlie Cowle had a saloon in Copper Center. They worked for the road commission. Fred Walters was the foreman. He learned to use the shovel. He learned to work from a Swedish man on the crew. He learned to use an ax, too.

The Fairbanks trail was simply a slash in the woods. His job was to widen the trail. They cut down small trees and dug ditches. They also put in culverts. At that time the trail was just used in the winter. The road commission had camps for them. They had good cooks in the camp. He worked the whole summer on the trail. This was in 1910. He went up to

McCoy's camp to help complete the bridge. He became sick and went down to a tent hospital at Chitina. When he went back to camp he met John York. They were partners for quite a few years after that. From Cordova they went up to mile 21 on the railroad. At that time there was a bit of excitement at Lake McKinley, claims were being staked and there were two crews driving tunnels. Doc Chase and Judge Tukerting had these operations. George Hanley was also on the mountainside. George later guided Dora Keen and then married her. He and his partner trapped a little bit. The next spring he saw thousands of geese and ducks. They had been living on porcupine and grouse. He decided to go back to Chitina. The road commission hired him again. He worked with Lars Holland the next year. They built culverts and bridges. The previous year he worked on the Chitina cut off. He learned to use the ax from his Norwegian partner. They put in timber culverts. He describes how they constructed the culverts. Lars Holland had been with Captain Abercrombie. They put piers in the middle of the Gulkana River. They went down to Millers Creek. They used a donkey engine and he describes how they installed the piers. They installed a bridge across Jarvis Creek. Paxson's Roadhouse was there at the time. Nicholas was running the Youst Roadhouse. They walked out to Valdez in 1912. He traveled over to Juneau for work. York got a job surveying. A. H. went to see Bob Thane and was given a job as a mine accountant at Perseverance Mine. George Jackson was the superintendent. He worked as the mine accountant for about thirteen months. He started to contract the hauling. He used horses. At one time he had the largest hauling outfit in the Territory. He freighted from Juneau up to Perseverance Mine. They used freight wagons and used sleds during the winter. He talked about an accident on the road with the horses. The driver was quick to cut the leads so the wagon wouldn't go over.

In 1915 he married a lady from Dawson. She died in a diphtheria epidemic in 1918. He had a daughter that was two years old. This set him back quite a bit. The war was going on all this time. He stayed in Alaska and became engaged in the fishing business. In 1918 the United States got involved in the war.

#### Pt. 1 Side B

They lost their horses in the accident but no one else was hurt. It was 1915 when he got married. Her family was the McManus family from Dawson. She died in 1918. He had a two year old daughter. He became engaged in the fishing business in Juneau. In 1918 when the U.S. got into the war there were a lot of food administration regulations. Someone from the audience asked about Harry Steele. He was a newspaperman in Cordova. A.H. said when he was in Valdez Oklahoma Bill Hanford was running a store. Marv Brund and Tony Dimond also had stores. He later met Bill Hanford in Seattle. You went into Valdez for supplies. They bought horses from the Geological Survey. Between Chitina and Valdez they found discarded pack saddles and halters. Back to the fishing business in Juneau. He had two boats and a scow. They bought fish and salted them and sent them to Seattle. The next year in 1918 he went up the Taku River with Bill Strong. They had three flat boats. They used one of the big boats as a scow. They had 2000 pounds of gill net. They fished right at the river for canneries in Douglas. That was the last year that fishing was permitted in the river. For the next year they had to go trolling. They could put out seven or eight lines at a time.

He came up to Fairbanks in 1939. He went outside one winter and he encountered Bill Gulky. He was a Dawson miner who had worked on the El Dorado. He talked A.H. into coming up in the spring. They went as far as Gulkana and then walked the rest of the way. They went out to the Middle Fork. Bill showed E.H. how to prospect. Bill stayed on at the site and A.H. went back to Anchorage to get his daughter. He walked out through Slate Creek and came out near Paxsons. After getting his daughter they went back to Cordova. This was in 1922. He got a job in the railroad yard. He organized scrap. One of the men working with him was a sea captain. He ran into Bert Kneeling. He offered him a job. So the next morning he went up to Kennecott and worked in the store. It was a very nice place to live. When he first saw Kennecott Henry Watkins was the bookkeeper. Bill Gale was working there.

Break in interview.

He went up to Kennecott for the first time in 1911. He went to work in the mines and worked with Johnson. He worked in the store for a while for a Mr. Moore. He processed invoices. He found some of the invoices eleven years later when he returned. Jim Dennis was the tramway foreman. He was a very entertaining man. Dusty Rhodes was the electrician. Hal Langstrom was the master mechanic. Dr. Munch and Dr. Gillespie were doctors at the mine. He walked from Kennecott to Chitina to find a dentist. It was rough dentistry. He stayed in Chitina that winter. They had a cabin by the lakeside. There were lots of rabbits and free wood. You could build a cabin wherever you wanted. O.A. Dawson had a feed warehouse. A.E. got a job with the Alaska Road Commission the next spring with Lars Hahn. They started out in the middle of March and put in a pier in the middle of the Gulkana River. They put a bridge in at Millers. They put in some bridges on the summit and worked on Jarvis Creek. He quit in the fall and walked into Valdez. He went back to Juneau and found it a good place to be. There were new gold mines. He didn't have any problem getting a job. He was working as a mine accountant at the Perseverance Mine. He stayed with them for a year and took over freighting. (same as last talk)

Henry Valentine was the mayor in Juneau. He mentions Judge Jennings and a few other people from Juneau. Frederick Hyder was the geologist at Alaska Gold Mine. Raab was one of the engineers.

There were boats coming into Juneau every day. There were boats from the west coast and the boats that went to Skagway. Everyone went down to the docks to meet them. He talks about fishing again on the Taku River. Paddy Morrissey was their hired man. He was about 65 at that time.

He had sent his daughter Outside.

Pt. 2

June 25, 1964

Tape starts with A.H. talking about the Toklikoff (?) River. He talked about the Indians coming down through on the river from Tetlin. The Indians had a superstition about the river.

After fishing he went down to Seattle to see his daughter in the fall of 1919. Dick Wilson, a friend who was a mining engineer in Juneau, was managing for a coal company near Seattle. He offered A.H. a job delivering coal to the miners. He worked there for six or

eight months and then the miners went on strike. He went back to Seattle after selling the truck. He had a job offer from the Kennecott Mine. A friend convinced him to go back to Alaska. He talks about all the different steamships he has taken from Seattle.

He did a little prospecting in 1922 in Chistochina (as described above)

He stayed at the Kennecott Mine from 1922-1938 when the mine shut down. He worked as the storekeeper, statistician, and acting postmaster. Sig Wold was working there at that time. Sig went out to McCarthy and went into business for himself. He was a likable and energetic person. Rupert Johnson worked as a millwright. Rupert learned to fly when he lived there. Saunrich brothers bought a plane and taught themselves to fly.

He arrived in the Tanana Valley in 1939. The Kennecott Company found him a job at the FE Company. He started to work at a warehouse under Walter Pratt in Fairbanks.

Someone from the audience asked why the mine shut down. A.H. said the ore decreased. The ore that was left was increasingly difficult to mine. They explored for copper the last year the mine was open. There was a strike on the railroad at the time and he talked about the unions. Someone from the audience talked about working at a smelter that handled the copper. A.H. said Jim Crawford was the assayer at the mine. Jim was a lively man with lots of hair at that time.

His first wife was named Gladys Swenson who was born in 1896. She was the daughter of January Swenson. There were lots of Dawson people visiting her family.

He met his second wife on a steamer coming back from Ketchikan. They got to know each other on the way to Cordova. He went back to his job at Kennecott. They were married in 1927 at Kennecott. Jane Forester was her name. When the Kennecott Mine closed down his wife went back to visit her family in Iowa. When he was settled in Fairbanks he sent for his wife.

Someone from the audience asked about another mine.

He talked about his statistician job at Kennecott. He had many calculations to make every day. He worked out how much copper was produced and the costs for copper. Someone from the audience talked about visiting the mine. He was asked about the discovery of Kennecott. A.H. said a prospector was seeking a place for pasturing his animals. He saw green up the hill and it turned out to be copper and that's how it was discovered. By the time they built the railroad there was two years worth of ore on site. A.H. said the bridge was built across the Chitina and Copper River every year. He talked about the Million Dollar Bridge.

He was asked about his job with the F.E. Company. He said the government shut gold mining down when WWII started. He was put in charge of the store for the F.E.

Company during the wartime. They sold a lot of stuff to the government.

Someone from the audience asked if he was at Kennecott when the Chisana stampede started. A.H. said he was in Juneau.

A.H. returned to talk about selling material and tools to the government when he worked for the F.E. Company. Anything that was needed was sold to them. He had to parcel out the material to the different agencies. Someone from the audience started talking about being an inspector at that time and the amount of waste.

His daughter was born in 1916. She was named Magda. She was just two when her mother died. His daughter is married. His son, Bill, was born in 1928 at the Kennecott Hospital. He describes the hospital. Dr. Peterson was the doctor at the time. He was a good surgeon. They also had three nurses on duty at the hospital all the time.

They discuss the population of Alaska before and after WWI. A.H. said the boom times in the populations didn't last very long. Stampedes bring the populations up. Discussion about LaTouche Mine which was located in the Prince William Sound between Cordova and Seward.

He retired at the age of 65 from the F.E. Company. He hadn't been able to work for them for ten years so he didn't get a pension. He was called back and worked another year for the company. He started working for the federal government at Ladd Field and Eielson. He administered the foods contract at the mess halls and personnel accommodations. He worked thirteen years for the federal government. He had the distinction of being the oldest man working at Fort Wainwright.