

H97-66-31

Fred E. Walker

Nome, Alaska

July 9, 1960

Audrey Loftus, interviewer

Fred Walker was born in 1880 in San Francisco. His father was Russian. His father belonged to an organization that was involved in the assassination of one of the Alexanders. Quite a few of the group were captured. His father walked three or four years to the coast and boarded a freighter to San Francisco. He was under an assumed name. He then headed to Alaska and landed at St. Michaels. He was a marine engineer and got a job on the Yukon River. When Alaska was sold to the United States his father was told he could return back to Russia or become a citizen of the U.S. None of the Russians at St. Michaels wanted to return to Russia because they were criminals. His father married in St. Michaels. His mother was Russian and Indian. Fred had a brother and a sister. Fred considers himself an Indian. The family returned to San Francisco and his father had a job on ships going back and forth to Russia. His father was very proud of being an American citizen. When Fred was a young child his father didn't return from a trip. After two years his mother heard from him in Liverpool, England. He had been taken from San Francisco and forced to work on a ship. His father died in the hospital in England. He was put in an orphanage and stayed there for a couple of years. His mother returned to Alaska and remarried. His stepfather was a Walker. He took the name of his stepfather. His stepbrothers, James, Fred and Arthur Walker live in Holy Cross. He was put in a Russian school in San Francisco and they were not very nice to him. He lived with his aunt until he moved back to Alaska in 1886. He returned to St. Michaels to live with his grandmother. He spoke Russian in those days. In the early days steamer made one trip a year to St. Michaels. All of the outlying stations came down to St. Michaels for supplies. Captain Peterson was from the Alaska Commercial Company. He left on a trip during bad weather and had an accident. He lost the cargo destined for St. Michaels. All of the miners at Fortymile didn't have their supplies for the winter and had to leave. They made it to Unalakleet.

His mother received word that Fred was in St. Michaels. Her husband had a trading post near Tanana. Al Mayo was stationed at the mouth of the Tanana. Harper was at Dawson. They were AC traders. In 1888 he was shipped to Unalakleet. The Natives lived in dug out houses. The mission had started there. He stayed in Unalakleet until 1892. The missionaries were expanding. They were the Covenant Church. A.E. Carlson was the head missionary at Unalakleet. August Anderson was another missionary. They had plans to start a mission at Golovin Bay. It wasn't a successful mission. Fred was picked to be an interpreter for the missionary school. He picked up languages easily. He could speak several languages.

There was silver mine up near Fish River. The silver mine name in Inuit was called Ohmilik. It is written that way on maps. They had horses there. The horses were taken to Golovin Bay during the winter. The mission was put up in Golovin Bay. He stayed at Golovin for two years. Fred describes the way supplies were taken off the boat. Fred's aunt from the Outside came to Alaska and asked about Fred. She wondered why he

wasn't going to school. His mother was still paying for his education and he wasn't where he was supposed to be.

In 1895 the AC Company built the steamer Alice. It was the biggest boat on the Yukon at that time. They had a spark arrester on the smokestack to prevent fires. When Fred returned to St. Michael's he had a letter to report for duty for the AC on board the steamer Alice. One of his father's friends was the chief engineer on the steamer Alice got him a job with the company. He was fifteen years old at the time. The engineer's name was Hansen. That's when he became a Walker. He started working on the steamer and began to work with machinery. When he got to Fortymile he visited with his mother. He talked about the Russian dialect. When the pilots came through Alaska during WWII he could understand them.

He worked on the steamer Alice for three years. During 1896 they got into Circle City. They were the last steamer on the river for the year. The manager of the store at Circle City there told them about the gold strike. There were lots of passengers waiting for passage to Dawson City. The manager wanted the captain to take all the passengers to Dawson. They had to unload the boat all night to make room for the passengers. Fred thought there were 300 people on the steamer. When they got to Fortymile there were more people waiting for a ride. They got up to Dawson and people were jumping off the boat and taking town lots immediately. When they returned the boat they were supposed to keep quiet about the strike so the AC Company could set up business.

The second year he was working on the steamer they got to New Hamilton for overwintering. They spent Christmas at Andreski. He heard there were visitors in town. Captain Jarvis and Dr. Cole were looking for a guide to Point Barrow. They paid him to guide them to St. Michaels. He drove a dog team. It took him about twelve days to get to St. Michaels. He stayed at St. Michaels and finally Burtoff showed up. Fred took them to Unalakleet in two days. Burtoff had a letter from Jarvis that said Fred had to wait for a team of people and guide them back to St. Michaels. He waited there for a month and a half. He took the dogs back to St. Michaels.

The chief engineer of the steamer Alice came to St. Michaels. Fred said he hadn't been paid yet. Fred wanted to be put back on the AC payroll. He went on vacation with Frank Komarov off to Golovin Bay in 1897. There were four white men there. They were prospectors for gold. They were waiting for Tom Guarwick

One of his friends was trapping around Ophir and picked up gold in a creek and that was the beginning of the gold rush in that area.