

H97-66-44

Tom Long

Fairbanks, Alaska

April 26, 1962

Tanana Yukon Historical Society meeting

Tom Long's father and two brothers came to Dawson in 1898 and stayed for two winters. One brother stayed in Alaska, John Long. He was the first or second commissioner in Fairbanks. His father moved to Salt Lake City and married and had two sons. In 1911 his father returned to Alaska and went to Ruby in 1911 at the time of another gold discovery. He came into Dawson in 1915 with his mother and brother. They waited for break up for a month in Dawson before heading to Ruby. There were many boats on the Yukon River at that time. When he landed in Ruby he was a young boy but he remembers a busy town. There were many horses in town. All the wood and supplies were hauled by horses. Long Creek was where the first mining started in Ruby. The tributaries to Long Creek also had gold. Grainstone Creek and Poor Man Creek also had mining on them. You could look up and down the creeks and see one boiler house after another. Each outfit had quite a few men. There were at least four saloons, four grocery stores, a drug store, newspaper, theater and two hotels. There's nothing left of the town anymore. He attended grammar school in Ruby and attended high school in Fairbanks. The only mode of transportation in the summer time was by boat or by foot. In the winter they used dog teams or they walked. They always kept seventeen dogs. His father would travel to the Iditarod in the winter. Ruby at one time had two lawyers. E. Coke Hill was one of the lawyers. He was later a judge. There were races in Ruby, Nome and Iditarod. Seppala raced in Ruby. They would race from Ruby to Long Creek and back to Ruby in one day. In the winter time the mail would come into Ruby by dog team. The teams had 21, 17, and 23 dogs. The mail would come twice a week and were very regular. Sometimes as many as three men would show shoe ahead of the dog team. The load was up to 800 pounds of mail. They had two big sleds and the man would ride on skis. The sled would have to be guided by the g pole. He describes how they used an *oija* board.

Ruby wasn't as large of a gold center as Fairbanks or Dawson but a lot of gold came out of it. It was also a good size fur center.

Ruby had a Moose Lodge and Pioneer Lodge (Igloo no. 5).

He has worked over a large part of Interior Alaska. In 1927 he went down to Ruby to stay with his folks. Noel Wien was flying to Nome at that time. Noel would stop at Ruby to refuel. Tom wanted to get a ride with Noel from Ruby to Fairbanks but the plane was always full. Tom finally decided to walk up the river to Nenana. It took him eight days and cost him only twelve dollars. He stayed at roadhouses along the way.

He talks about the size of the boats on the river. There were wood camps all along the river to provide fuel for the boats. He said there was one boat, the Eison that was so large it burned up all the wood along the Yukon River.

[Questions from the audience that can't be understood]

Dave Stanford was one of three black men in Fairbanks at one time.

The schools in Ruby had both Native and non-Native children. There were about forty-five kids in the school. They had one to two teachers. The teachers were always getting married and new teachers were brought in.

He talks about his walking trip from Ruby to Nenana. He rested one day in Tanana and traveled about thirty miles a day. The roadhouses were about fourteen miles apart. Some were twenty miles apart. He was about nineteen years old when he made the trip. The trail was good. From Nenana to Tanana the mail was hauled by horses. The trail was parallel to the river and inland. The sleds were small behind each horse. The trail had a lot of travel on it so it was packed down. Anderson was running the Fish Lake roadhouse. He walked about 240 miles.

In 1939-1940 he used a dog team to take the census. He traveled to Tanana and Manley Hot Springs. It took him two months to cover his area. He traveled 1200 miles. He was counting the prospectors and trappers. He traveled five days for one man and it cost the government 185 dollars. He traveled along the Yukon River. He had to haul his own dog food and slept in a tent. He describes cooking for the dogs.

In 1928 he ran the Fairbanks-Chatanika dog race. He had eleven dogs. He was in high school at the time. He would hitch up the dogs after school and travel thirty or thirty-five miles. Two days before the race he ran the course. The course went out to Fox to Dome and then to Chatanika. The trail was drifted over in spots. It was -30 the day of the race. He had two dogs on the sled before he got into Chatanika. He was second into Chatanika. He describes the whip they used. The dogs were trained to keep going. He lost his heavy gloves and by the time he got into Fairbanks he had frozen his fingers back to the second joint. He didn't lose any fingers. It was about six hours for the entire race. He was fourth in the race.