

H97-66-45

Forbes Baker

June 28, 1962

Fairbanks, Alaska

Tanana Yukon Historical Society meeting

Forbes Baker, Sr. was born in South Bend, Washington in 1893. His family then moved to Maine and Massachusetts. His father moved to Alaska before the rest of the family. The rest of the family came in May of 1902. They traveled on the City of Seattle which had originally been in service in the English Channel. They traveled to Skagway. Wrangell was a large town at that time. They had hundreds of totem poles on the beach. They arrived at Treadwell at night. He remembers the noise of the mill there. The docks were loaded with pyrite. They landed in Skagway on May 6, 1902. There were tremendous tides there. His dad met them at the dock. He had been on the Yukon. His father came with an outfit out of Washington that set up a large store and warehouse in Skagway. They would load up a barge loaded with supplies and float it down the Yukon. He had been to Rampart. He never did prospect or mine in the Dawson area. In 1904 he worked for someone named E.R. Peoples. They put together a boat (Tana) in Whitehorse. His father was made the captain of the boat and ~~the~~ traveled down the Yukon and then down to Fairbanks. That was the beginnings of the E.R. Peoples and Company in Fairbanks. His father stayed with the business until 1907 when he died. They lived in Skagway from 1902 until 1905. There were 3,500-4000 people in the town at that time. His father operated a small store in the winter. Dyea was almost a ghost town at that time. There were several companies of soldiers there at that time. A customs office was located there. During the boundary dispute you never knew if the boundary would change overnight. At one time a group of Canadians came and ran the Canadian flag up the flag pole. It wasn't until 1905 that the boundary was set.

The country around Skagway was wonderful for children. There aren't a lot of roads but the country is a paradise for quieter living. The White Pass Yukon route was recently completed when they arrived. They knew the Pullin family. Soapy Smith was still fresh in everyone's mind. There were four wharfs in town when they first arrived. He knew Robert Sheldon.

In 1905 he traveled to Fairbanks in early July. He had to stay in Dawson to wait for a boat. The traffic on the river was so heavy that you had to arrange ahead of time for travel or shipping freight. He stayed in Dawson with friends. He traveled down the Yukon and Tanana Rivers. There were lots of small boats on the river. Many of them were headed to Fairbanks. The boats had oars and poles.

In those days it was permissible to shoot moose and sheep for resale to the market. Fairbanks had five sawmills in the downtown area when he first arrived. Front Street was all dance halls and saloons. The NC Company had a store. The courthouse for the fourth judicial division was being constructed. In 1906 there was major fire from Cushman to Lacey Street. Their place was also burned down. Most of the groceries were burned up. He and his father moved into a cabin where the cemetery is now located. They ended up

gathering up burned up cans for their dinners. They never knew what they would be eating.

The different gold camps that were active at that time were Cleary Creek and Goldstream. Chatanika and Ester weren't very active at that time.

Everyone walked in those days. He remembers walking out to Cleary Creek and back in one day.

He attended school at Second and Lacey St. There was also a private school in town at the Methodist Church. There were 14,000-15,000 people in the town at the time he arrived. It was a moving population. People made their own entertainment. Plays were produced by a diverse group of people.

He left Fairbanks in 1910. He took an apprenticeship as a machinist. He left by way of Nome. He worked in Seattle for a while. He then joined the Army during WWI. He then returned to Fairbanks in 1921.

[questions from the audience]

Someone asked about caribou. Forbes said he remembers the caribou right in town.

He talked about Charley Joynt. Charlie was working for the Tanana Valley Railroad. Forbes traveled from Chena to Fairbanks on the railroad shortly after it was opened. The passengers traveled on flat cars with benches on them. The railroad ties were laid right on top of the moss. There were times when the engine went off the tracks. The additional road was later built out to Chatanika.

Fairbanks Creek was probably discovered in 1906. There was a lawsuit about mining on Dome Creek.

There were several newspapers in town. He worked for the Times.

The telegraph wires were put in about 1903-1904.

W.S. Thompson put the News-miner newspaper together. Caskey had the Citizen.

He operated a roadhouse on the Chena Hot Springs trail during one winter. It was located at the south fork of the Chena. He made a tent frame and came back to town for the tent and supplies. It was a cold trip back to the tent site. One of his customers was John Mole. He usually fed his customers game meat and ptarmigan. He had never cooked and here he was running a roadhouse.