

H97-66-60

William Cashen

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Fairbanks, Alaska

Bill Cashen started with his grandparents. His grandfather Nick King was born in Germany. After his older brothers were lost in the military so his parents moved him to California before he was taken into the military. He learned to mill on Sutter's Creek. His grandmother came from Ireland. She ended up in California. She married Nick King and lived in California for five years. They moved to Alaska about 1880. There was a lot of prospecting going on along the coast. In 1882 Joe Juneau and Dick Harris staked out some area. It was called Harrisburg before it was named Juneau. French Peter (Erussarv) went over to Douglas Island and found gold. He sold his claim to John Federal in 1881. Federal was smart enough to get some backing. They sent out to California for some experienced mill men and Nick King came up to Juneau in 1883. He was the first foreman of the mill. He was in Juneau for three years before he sent for his family. Bill Cashen's mother was a young child of five at the time she came up to Juneau. There wasn't much to the town. Oliver Anderson was one of the early businessmen. There were some mission schools. The Quakers had a school at Douglas Island. Later there was a school run by the sisters of St. Anne had a school and hospital.

His father was born in Michigan. His older sister and her husband were at the Treadmill Mine. His father came out with them to Alaska. His trade was blacksmith. He was twenty-one years old in 1894. He also went to work in the Treadwell Mine. He married Sadie King in 1901. One of the musicians at their wedding was Carl Erickson. There were quite a few people in the Juneau Douglas area that migrated into the Interior such as Bobby McKenna, Merle Thomas, Esther Oliver Hall and others. The mine prospered and the town grew. Eventually the Treadmill mine became the second largest gold mine in the world. This was hard rock mining. The Alaska Juneau Mine was also going on at this time. There were deep quartz mines that went under the channel. It was a big producer. He remembers there were many funerals for the miners. The safety precautions were very elemental. There were many foreign miners. Everyone would turn out for the funerals. There were almost daily accidents. The shifts were long. There were few holidays. His father continued to work at the Treadmill Mine and then the AJ Mine until his death in 1931. His father was a skilled worker and he was paid 165 dollars a month.

Bill talked about the makeup of the community. A mining community needs skilled men and hard working men. Douglas and Juneau had just about every European nationality. Everyone got along very well and everyone knew everyone. In 1917 the mine caved in. They were too close to the water. It flooded so badly there was a big slump. There was one death. It happened at the change of the shift. The miners dispersed to other places such as the Kennecott Mine. His father took the ferry every morning to the Alaska Juneau Mine. So they became one town. The bridge was built in 1934.

Sadie and Tom were married in 1901. They had eight children. All of them were still living and were aged forty to sixty. His older sister Francis joined the order of Saint Anne and teaches in British Columbia. She

also taught at Skagway. His brother, Tom is a banker in Juneau. His sister Cecil Mortenson lives in Gig Harbor. His brother, John, lives in Everett, Washington. His brother, Gerald is a teacher in Parkland, Washington. His two brothers, Frank and Harry are accountants in Juneau.

Douglas had a bad fire in 1926. It started at one end of town and swept through the Treadwell area. Another fire came through in 1937. For many years Douglas was on its last legs. It now has new houses and buildings being constructed. It keeps going even without the gold mine.

After he finished high school he interviewed with Dr. Bunnell. He offered him a scholarship and a part-time job. He came up in 1933 and graduated in 1937. He taught high school in Anchorage for a few years. He was hired to be an instructor at the university in 1942. He has been there ever since. Dr. Skaarland has taught there two years longer than Bill.

Someone from the audience asked him about his family. Bill said that he married Helen Cashen. They married in 1944 or 45. He has two daughters Ellen and Phyllis. After living many years on campus they moved this year to a house in town.

Someone asked about the first gold discovery in the Southeast. Bill said there was a lot of prospecting. Petz was a mining engineer that was working in the area.

Someone in the audience asked him about Chicken Ridge. Bill said he wasn't sure of the location.

Someone asked about the first airplane. Bill said Roy Jones came in 1923. They didn't get commercial aviation in until 1932 or 1933 when Pan American started running flying boats from Seattle to Juneau.

Someone from the audience made a comment about the Alaska Juneau Mine. Bill said it was a low grade ore and they moved massive volumes of rock. Bill had a job for a few days in the mill in 1928. It was a noisy place They had large crushers. He had to stand and pull the quartz out to put in the crusher.

Bill said some of the towns started schools in 1901. In Fairbanks they started schools in 1904. There wasn't any law to set them up before 1900. The state of Washington accredited high schools in Alaska in 1912. They accepted students from Alaska and the students didn't pay out of state tuition. Bill said that the city of Nome was a local school. In 1917 the office of commissioner of education was created. He thinks they did remarkably well in the towns. Bill didn't know what the salaries were for teachers in the early days. Someone in the audience talks about wages.

Someone asked about the early days of the university. Bill said when he returned to teach at the university there were still some of the original people. Some of the original faculty were still there. Otto Geist showed up about 1926. He came in to take the mining short course. Bunnell financed him to work on St. Lawrence Island. Bill talked about Otto Geist's American military career during WWI.