IDITAROD TRAIL INTERVIEW - JACK MORRIS

July 13, 1980
McGrath, Alaska

BLM Interviewer:

Tom Beck

JULY 13, 1980 - JACK MORRIS

(Tape No. 1, Side A)
(Radio playing loudly in the foreground)

INTRODUCTION

INTERVIEWER: .....Sunnyvale, California. Jack was born October 25th, 1902. The interview is conducted by Tom Beck of BLM's Anchorage District Office at the home of Amos Turner in McGrath, July 13, 1980.

Jack first arrived in Alaska in 1930. His first job was working as a deckhand on board the steamship Tana, which worked the Kuskokwim River between Bethel and McGrath. Jack settled in old McGrath where he worked at Northern Commercial Company. In 1938 he built the first roadhouse in new McGrath, which he continued to run until it burned down in 1956. He rebuilt the roadhouse using an old Army barracks and eventually sold the roadhouse to its present owner, Joe Degnan.

(Tape No. 1, Side A, Log No. 0111)

INTERVIEW

(Some beginning portions of the interview is obliterated by the radio; it is turned off shortly)

(Log No. 0136)

Q So many -- yeah, so much to tell when you haven't been around for.....
A No. Always very enjoyable, you know.
(Indiscernible - radio interruption)

(Log No. 0155)
A Course, the most went in, and he was out the first night, and she used to work for me at the roadhouse.
Q Oh, really.
A She worked for me when the place burnt up.
Q Is that right?
A Around about Holy Cross, you know, she (indiscernible). That's the way she got away from the Mission, you know, because she started getting on her own and she and Smitty got married and bought the home there with fur money.
Q That right?
A Give up. So.....
Q You get to see Irv over there?
A Hmm?
Q You get to see Irv over there?
A Yeah, I saw Irv and Fran. Fran thought we was never going to get out of there, digging out their old picture albums, you know. So they were ranting on for a long time. Had to tell them about six times, I said, 'Irv, we've got to go. 'Oh, Irv, we got to go? Oh, we got to go.' So yeah, this and that, this and that, and they said, 'See our pictures

from where we lived before now, outside now,' and I said, 'Oh, (indiscernible).'

Q Well, that's.....

A And she was flying down in a month, you know, and says, well.....

Q Yeah.

A Well, now they got to go home and go to work. Didn't make any difference about me; I only worked Saturdays and Sundays anyhow, hell.

Q Doing your little store there, the little.....

A Yeah, the little store, yeah. Semi-retired, you know. Got out of the big shop because there was too many hold-ups for one person.

Q Really?

A Yeah. So I sold my lease and moved my stuff out and stored it, started in the flea market, San Mateo. I used to have to drive down about 30, 35 miles each Saturday and Sunday, and very good. Four and a half years I was there, you know. Then come along a guy that owned a big grocery chain, Petrini's Grocers, and they bought the whole mill there. There was lots of parking space there, it was just right for them. So then we was out.

Q I think semi-retired, that's probably the best way to be, not retired and not.....

A Right, no more (indiscernible). Hell, I'd have been dead before now if I'd stick around those stores there. They would rob you right and left there, you know?

Q Yeah, that's the way things are going now.

A Yes, indeed. You know, I pretty near got shot once, beat to death the next time.

Q Really?

A Just come in to rob my till, yeah. Yeah, I said hell, this is not paying -- adding up till now, but I'm going to get out of here. Parked my car on the block, block and a half away, you know, where you can, and come to work, then you got to go and hide -- with my briefcase along, you know, and put a little I'd taken in for the day. But you never can tell, when, wham, over the head.

Q No, it's not worth it, that's for sure.

A No. And so we joined the flea market, and we're happy there. So from there then, after that, then I moved down to Saturday Street Market. And that was further yet to go, but I was -- that was quite a job.

Q So when did you first come up to Alaska?

A It was 1930, in the old Depression times down there. Tough to make a living -- even tough to get a job, to say nothing about making a living.

Q Where did you come up from?

A Well, I was down in Southern California. I went down there from Seattle to make a stake to get to Alaska on, and the three of us went down from San Francis- -- from Seattle. And one of them got a job in a restaurant there washing dishes, Heiner. We used to go out and see him in the evening, and come evening time, you get a meal, you know. Then you'd always have to put the garbage out, out in the

back alley about 7:00 o'clock at night. I'd see lots of people come looking in the garbage can, had a sack, 'Oh, here's a nice piece of meat, piece of bread,' go to the next one, that's how they got their meals. A lot of them on soup kitchens waiting to get in the soup lines to get a bit to each. It was really tough.

Finally, this man come into town, was heading employment offices, and a lady says there's a fella from (indiscernible) -- no, no, no, no, no, that's wrong -- Lake Arrowhead. Then it was our turn. And he was new and he wanted an all new crew. He had restaurants and so forth, and so he wanted a dish washer and a bus boy. Of course, Arnie and I could do either one, we'd done lots of it. So we flipped a coin to see who would take what, and I got the bus boy job and he got the dish washing job.

And we went up, it was after the -- that year, so I was fixed pretty good toward spring, you know. And I was going to go to Alaska, but he says, 'Oh, no. I'm the big man in Yellowstone Park.' Which he was. So he wants the crew to take him up so they get a choice of two good jobs. One was manager of the cafeteria at Old Faithful Inn, or the other one was head yard man at the fishing bridge. Well, I chose the outside job. So I had crew of twelve men, and I designated which cabin (indiscernible) today and get kindling in for the stove and that.

And so then the season -- well, I went up early with them and helped them set up all the camps. I was in all of them. And in the fall, I helped them take them all down. And then I took care of the Mammoth camp because you got to keep it open till a certain date. A lot of snow, but I had so much men wanted to rent, I rented them to them. And of course, I went back on down to Lake Arrowhead and I worked for them again; couldn't go to Alaska in the winter, you don't want much, you know.

So I went down there to work for them again in the winter in the campers area. The next spring, pretty early I rode up to Seattle and I got -- bought my ticket on the W. M. Tupper to Bethel. So I had this friend that had come on -- I was working on the Northwestern, steamboat -- not steamboat -- the liner that goes from Seattle to Anchorage, or Seward. And so he come on there in the fall, and he was my partner fireman. Takes two (indiscernible). So he told me about he and his wife had a job in McGrath the next year, and they was going up, going up on the Tupper, and then they was going to work on the steamboat that goes from Bethel to McGrath, on the old Tana. She was going to be cook, and he was going to be fireman.

But I couldn't get on -- I couldn't get up the first year. I was a little bit in love, you know, and kind of hard to break away from the old gal friend. But we finally had little differences, and so the next year, I said, 'I'm really going to go.' I wasn't getting rich down there in the Depression -- I had enough to go, I know that. So I sent up to Seattle and bought my ticket on the Tupper, and I go, 'Sandy, I'll be leaving next Saturday.' 'You really

don't mean it.' 'Oh, bah. Sure I do. Here's my ticket.' 'Oh, no. Stay.' 'No, I'm going.' 'All right, stay another week and break a man into your place.' I said, 'All right.'

So I did that, and then hightailed it to Seattle. Got the old W. M. Tupper. They was loading up there, and I went to Bethel, was a grub for the whole Kuskokwim River, you know. So I vowed that I'd take the first job that I found, and I going to stay five years, see if I liked it or not. Went in, I went out, but I'm going to tough it for five years to see.

So the next morning I got a job as deckhand on the old Tana, taking off the freight, storing it away, you know, and then we'd come along up the river, we stopped at each camp along and take off the freight, sack of spuds on my shoulder, or maybe a crate of spuds. In them days, we had a lot more, barter or whatnot, ever would come. And they brung in a lot of lumber that year for, I think it was, Kalskag going to build a new school. All right. One on each end, then pick it up, lean it on your shoulder, back (indiscernible) shoulder, you know. I was a little kind of small for that kind of work, you know what I mean, but I stuck it out. So I used to have to go to the toilet quite often to, you know, get a little breather. Said, 'Well, I got to go up there for a minute and I'll be back.' So that worked out all right.

So we made one trip up and back down, and then the next trip, Bill Liskey, the cook, he had a little camp called Liskieville above -- oh, above around Stony River, in that locality. He says, 'Jack, how about you take the flunky job here?' I said, 'No, you hired that Native boy, Sammy.' I says, 'I wouldn't want to take his job.' 'To hell with Sammy. I want you as my partner, see. I like you, and that'd be all right.' 'Well, if you say so.' 'Yeah, I want Sammy to take your job. He's been a longshoreman a long time, you know, a deckhand.' So it was the first job, and I was very thankful (laugh). The angels were looking after me, I think.

Q So what were you doing on that job?

A So then I was a flunky, waiting on tables, washing the dishes.

Q This was in Liskeyville?

A No. No, on the steamboat.

Q Oh, on the steamboat.

A Still on the boat. Still on the boat. 'Cause, see, they go all summer long up and down, up and down, up and down, then in the fall, the fall boats comes in with the groceries. They just keep it going all summer up and down, I don't know, eight, ten, fifteen trips, something like that. I never kept track of them.

Q How long did it take you to get up from Bethel to McGrath?

A Well, that'd depend to. Now, if you had no rain, low water, you get stuck on a bar, you might be there three or four days. Or if you had high water, you could come right on through. And stopped at all the little camps along the river and put off their grub they had ordered, how much you

had to go, or if you hit there just the right time and you worked and it was still the right time, well, then stop for a dance for a couple, three, four hours, you know. It was very accommodating to all the people -- lonely people along the river. It was really entertainment for them.

So we got to McGrath and paid off, and that's just where I wanted to come in the first place.

Q When was this, in about 1930?

A 1930. Yes, sir, 1930. And the captain got me, put us working on the boat, the blankets all the way, put tin cans around the bed legs so the mice wouldn't get up into them, and cleaning up, cleaned the stove and the pots and pans, they was all clean and put away, which I did that. And the next spring, I didn't know what I was going to do, but I was going out trapping with Charlie Oaks. He had come up a couple years before that. He told me about he had a job up there, and he'd write to me back and forth and telling how much you could make cutting cord wood for all the steamboats and the dredges and all. They paid $20 a cord. You could go on any of those streams and pan out good wages, but there's -- all of that's just other big stuff, you know, and gold, why -- I got a trap line that's 50 miles long, he says, catch lots of beaver and muskrat and marten. Oh, boy, he really had it. I said, boy, I know now it's the place for me. See, just think, cut a few cords of wood and pan out in the whole stream, you got it made.

Q So they leave the Tana out there during the -- and the end of the season in the fall?

A Oh, yes, go right up to -- as far as they could on the old ways, and then when the river went down, she was plumb off. Left a watchman for the year. But I found out they was only paying $6 a cord for wood. And I found out that Charlie didn't have a trap line -- he never did had. I found out Charlie never panned a pan of gold. I goes in the NC Store, and I says, 'Oliver' -- you know, and I met him and his wife, and, 'What you going to do, Jack, up in this country this winter?' 'Well, I'm going out trapping with Charlie Oaks.' 'Stay away from that little son of a B, he's no good.' 'What do you mean he's no good, speaking about my friend like that?' I mean, writing back and forth for a year, year and a half, two years, telling me how good everything was. He says, 'You'll find out.' He says, 'He's a liar and he's a thief.' Goddamn, that set me back a little bit.

Well, I shouldn't be telling you all this stuff, but you asked me to.

Q No, that's all right.

A So Charlie wasn't in town; he was up the river someplace. And he come down, 'Hello, Jack.' He'd been aboard the boat, the Tana, took the Tana down. 'How you doing?' 'Fine,' you know, 'Fine.' I says, 'You going on you trap line this winter?' 'Oh, yes, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, we'll get together after a while. I'll see you later and we'll come up in the fall. We'll get things arranged this fall.' I said, 'Okay.' It was after that that I talked to

Oliver, see, and I didn't let on. But he never did get around to going out trapping. By that time, I decided not to go. You know, different ones told me, said, 'Don't go. He ain't got no trap line. He's just giving you a line.'

So it was that year, I believe, yeah, he went to work on the little steamboat going between here and Takotna, and damn if the boat didn't get a moose. You know, you're not supposed to have moose on a boat. Well, they need meat for the men. Taking them straight from here up. Damned if he didn't go down and tell the game warden. They pinched the boat for old White Dog Smith and Frank Lange.

Q What was White Dog?

A Well, he was master of the boat. It was his boat. And Frank Lange and him and Charlie Smith. Little Charlie Smith. There was a big Charlie Smith, so he was little Charlie Smith. They called him White Dog Smith because he had a dog team of all white dogs. So they was part of this, the freight in the cellar. And in the winter, I don't know, they had a pool hall over in the old town.

Q Charlie?

A Charlie and Frank Lange, yeah.

Q What was the name of that boat, do you remember, that went up the Takotna?

A I think that was called Nanabelle.

Q Nanabelle?

A Annabelle, if I'm not -- yes, it is. It was. So let's see. I could be wrong there, but I think Annabelle. So that's the way it went, so they canned him off the boat. Got them pinched for feeding the men. Not supposed to be moose, but he squealed on them.

So then he come down and goes to Mrs. Langley, and Mrs. Langley was the husband (sic) of the chief engineer, and it was the Langley Company that owned it and they built a boat called the Langley. Well, he says, 'Is that goddamned little Jack Morris in town?' 'Yeah.' 'Well, I run into him down in Seattle and he tried to break me and my wife up.' 'He did?' 'Sure. Bought her a big fur coat out there and a messing around and, God,' he says, 'he's a dirty little bugger. He's no good.' Hey. That's what he told May Langley. May Langley tells somebody else, then somebody else tells me, 'Did you know Margaret outside?' 'I never met her till right here in McGrath. Never saw her in my life.' So then they start telling me the story that Charlie told them, that I bought her a big fur coat out there and I was running around with her, trying to split them up. Imagine that.

So I put them all right. I says, 'You bring him in front of me and let him tell me that.'

Q Yeah.

A Tell you that then. But they never did.

Q Tell me a little bit about White Dog Smith. You say he ran the river boat and he also had a pool hall at.....

A Yeah, a pool hall for the winter.

Q .....in old McGrath.

A Yeah, in old McGrath. Yeah. And they'd go on up in the

hills for a little bit sometime in the winter, Frank would, or, you know, White Dog would, you know. They trapped a little bit, you know, and they had to make a go. Yeah, and he come down with some juice of some kind; I don't know, it was pretty good. You know. I don't say they was up there making it, I think, but they was trapping a little bit. But that was the lifestyle, and something had to go along with the old pool hall. They had the pool table in there, a little old bar, make a little home brew now and then, you know. Well, that's the way they make their living.

Q Where was that in old McGrath? Can you remember where they had the pool hall?

A Oh, very well. As you get off, hit the point from here, you walk up by Bill Kruhm's Roadhouse. Next was a little cabin or two, and then there was White Dog's pool hall, and then the next door to it was another Langley house, but the game warden lived in there at that time, Emma Halson, Mr. and Mrs. Halson. And then you go across a little slough there, which because a bridge first here I come (sic) -- there was a little bridge across there, and that was the NC Company Store there, warehouses and store. And then on up the river bank was all these houses, cabins or house, you know. You say houses. Well, Peter Michael's Roadhouse, that was a house; it was no logs. Most of the rest of them was logs, like that.

When it came up around, you went around the bend, lived old Spitten Jim, Jim Ebnaw. Called Spitten Jim, (spit, spit) yeah, goddammit (spit, spit) that's right, yeah. But he couldn't hear. You ask him something, he'd say, 'H-u-u-u-h? What'd you say?'

Q What did Jim do?

A Just trap. Trap and get his pension. Yeah, and he lived down -- well, he lived up here, but he'd go down to a trap line down the river a piece. And he was a trapper, get his pension, and, yeah, he was -- went down -- first came down, 'Jack (indiscernible).' Okay. Get the blanket around him and cut his hair, get the wash rag. We had to clean him up a little bit. You know, his hair was pretty dirty. So I'd get these hair -- 'Oh, don't worry. I'm just going to take your hair off, that's all.' 'Oh, well, that's all right.' 'Now, if you'd just sit still for me, I'll clip all that long hair over the ears,' and scrub him up a bit in the meantime. 'Oh (spit, spit), goddammit. How much do I owe you, Jack?' I said, 'You know very well you don't owe me anything. After all, you're a neighbor, you know, when you come in.' 'Oh, you're not going to treat me that way.' He'd throw down a couple bucks anyhow.

Q How much did a haircut go for in those days?

A Oh, it was a dollar and a half to two and a half. I cut a lot of hair then. And my sister came up, put me in the roadhouse. She took up barbering; she cut a lot of hair too. And the Pete Egress, I used to go up to him for my haircuts, you know. 'Well, Pete, I need a haircut.' 'All right. Be with you in a minute.' Now I go up to see him this time, I said, 'Well, cutting much hair?' 'No, I'm not

barbering any more.' His wife does the barbering. The next time I went up, she was barbering a guy's head. So we come to each other, you know, and that's the way we got by.

Q Did White Dog run mail or anything? He had a dog team of all white dogs.

A Oh, he did before I got in here. Yeah, that was before time. Yeah, he had the dog team. I don't know where he did go to. I don't know that. But another one that lived up the Kuskokwim a little bit, there's the guy that really hauled the mail, Charlie Konig. He had his family there; he had one, two, three, about four girls and one boy, I think. At the time I come in, see, they put out these mail bids every year, I believe, if I'm correct on that. Maybe that was a two-year bid. I think every year they had to put in a new bid. And if any mail from Nenana now -- well, I guess in the old days, they come from Anchorage. I think so. I'm not sure about that.

But he run the mail, so by the time I come, the airplanes had outbid the dogs. And jolly old Charlie, he felt pretty sorry about the team. Of course, Charlie was, 'Well, what am I going to do? I've been on the mail team for years.' Then comes the airplanes, so he started gassing up the airplanes, taking up the freight, the Nenana River where it froze up, you know. So he and Ellen, his oldest girl, she was about 16, 17 then, I guess, they'd gas up the airplanes, he'd get -- she'd get up on the ladder and get the funnel into the thing, and Charlie'd hand up the five-gallon cans. They were hauling five-gallon cans; no pumping then, and nothing to pump it in with. Cut the whole, turn it upside, gurgle, gurgle, till she's full, get down. Get up in the morning, warm it up, you know, in the winter time, put the freight in -- he was just as busy as he was with it on the dog team. So you see, nature takes care of all those things. Right?

Q Right. Whatever happened to Charlie? Do you know?

A Yes. He -- Vi, his wife, died. He moved across the river with the rest of us, had a little cabin there, and Freda, his oldest daughter, got married and moved outside, to one of the miners over here. And Charlie got a little stroke like, you know, so he moved out. He went up there when.....

Q How about White Dog?

A No, White Dog -- oh, what did happen to White Dog? Well, he stayed; he didn't go out anyplace. He might have went -- I don't know. Now, isn't that funny. I'm a blank now. Frank -- White Dog died kind of a long time ago. But Frank, he lasted about up till just a few years ago.

Q Frank Lange?

A Frank Lange, yeah. He lived on this side. He was living over here when I left, and I left in January -- the first part of January 1960. Frank was still here, getting his social security, then he finally went down to the home. That's where Frank passed on. He was a good old man, you know, good years.

Q You mentioned there were two roadhouses in old McGrath?

A Oh, yes. Bill Kruhm's, K-r-u-m (sic), Bill Kruhm, and

Dave Clough, C-l-o-u-g-h. Clough was in Takotna, and he had a mink ranch up there. There was a lot of mink then, you know. So about the time I got -- I guess it was the same year, came on down to McGrath and he -- in one of those old log buildings alongside there, well, not far from the pool hall, a couple of doors, he opened up the roadhouse. Bill Kruhm had his down at the heart. But Bill, he'd go out on those tootins' and all, you know. See, four days, it is pretty tough to buy a loaf of bread so he could get a bite to eat. But poor old Ed was always there plugging. And, you know, it takes a lot of work for the winter, the bunkhouse and all that, 'cause he slept a few people too, you know.

All right. He'd get through cooking in the afternoon, and he'd hook up that -- he had two dogs, I believe -- get in the woods, he'd saw, saw, saw, saw, saw, saw by hand, stack up the woods, cut it, then he'd start hauling. Dave take and hauling that damned wood and stack it up. Don't you worry, by the time spring come he had his year's supply of wood -- poor Dave. A little old guy. He was up in the Nome area in the '98.

Q Oh, is that right?

A Yeah, he was an old-timer really.

Q So they both took in -- both Kruhm and Clough, they took in boarders too in the roadhouses?

A Oh, yes. Yes. Yeah. So Bill, he finally -- I don't know, he got sick and moved into Fairbanks, and supposedly he died some time ago, quite a long time ago.

And Dave, when the town moved over, that set poor back Dave alone. He just got through putting up another building over there. So he had to go on this side and put up another building nobody owned. It was illegal, though, for years, so -- and people -- some of the people that'd been with him for years, you know, they'd go over, but it was inconvenient. So he moved across and went alongside of MacGuire's Tavern, he put up a three-story building, big black celotex on the outside.

Q Where MacGuire's is now?

A Yeah -- no, right alongside of it.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A When you're going in MacGuire's, just on the right.

Q Right.

A It was just a little (indiscernible). It was probably no further than 15, 18 feet from MacGuire's Tavern. But after I left there, it caught on fire and went down too. Yeah. So, well, then -- what happened then? Well, my place, you know, took some boarders up above my place.

Q How much did they charge then for, you know, room and board?

A Well, the first one, upstairs, right over the lobby, my lobby, course, in them days, I had seven bunks up there, called it the bull pen. I got a dollar a night for a bed. And then I had a couple of rooms up there; I got two and a half apiece for them a night -- single. And then the -- that thing's too small. I just figured on bare lunches, you see. Maybe someone wanted to flop, put up the cots up

there. But the pilots come, and, 'We don't want a sandwich. We want a meal.' They forced me, so I had to add on a kitchen and a dining room, see. So I added that on in the next year.

So then I had a little bar about five feet long just outside of my kitchen, so that didn't work out, so Ma McLean had died, which was the old original Kruhm Roadhouse -- he raised mink there also. And so I got the bars from over there at that town, and I got the logs out of it, and I bought me -- they built me a two-story dance hall.

Q Where was your -- you built the original roadhouse at Joe's Roadhouse?

A You bet I did.

Q And when was that?

A That was in -- let's see -- it was '30-something -- one, two three, four, five -- '37 -- '38. I went outside for the first time in '37, and I got myself married -- tangled up. I used to live with -- work for this gal's father as an undertaker and put it off, you know. So I went back in about 15, 18 years later and said, 'Hey, we're still the same, so let's get married.' I went back to visit my folks. The (indiscernible) it was a big mistake. She was taking a fifth of whiskey everyday.

Q Is that right?

A Made her stay in the bed for a week. Hell, first marriage, nine months, I says, 'Goodbye.' I sent her back to Philadelphia, there out of Fort Hazel. So.....

Q So you built the first one over there around '37/'38.

A '38.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A Yeah, '37. Three, four, five. '37 and seven years, we went out and I come in in the fall, come back. Early spring '38. We laid the foundation of my place on the 12th of June 1930 -- '31 -- no, no, '38.

Q '38.

A '38. It was Irish, Renee (sic), and she was in Oregon, and her father was in Oregon. And in order to work for the undertaker, I had to join the Orange -- the Irish men, you see. They're just the opposite of the Catholics. You know, the Irish men are fighting each other, but it's the Catholics fighting the Protestants. That's what it amounts to. I had to join, you see, in order to keep the job, so I joined up. So on the 12th day of August, we laid down the foundation for the old Morris Roadhouse, the original one.

Q What happened to the original?

A She burnt up, I think, now, it was along in '56, '55 or '6. I don't remember. Evidently (indiscernible) a cigarette up in one of the rooms. Because the fella, the salesman come in to take the order -- my spring order for groceries, Condon and West Coast Grocery, I said, 'Well, Connie, I'm about to run down, so I can just look at my -- see how many peas and corns I got, seeing about the order.' Pretty soon, he hollered, 'Hey, Jack, fire upstairs. Fire.' And I ran up, ran up my stairs, looked right across the bull pen over there, the fire was coming right through up there,

and through the ceiling, and it come right from that room next door.

So this was a -- it wasn't a salesman; now I forget who he was. I knew it then, but he was in that room that night. He probably come down before he shaved, laid down a cigarette, see, it probably dropped down and got the -- sure. There was one gal in the room beyond that; she couldn't come this way anymore, didn't have any escape this way. She jumped out the window. Broke her pelvis. I don't remember who that was now. She was one of the Native girls here. So awhile back, over there in Anchorage, and got her fixed up, you know.

Q So you rebuilt then, huh?

A Yeah. So it was about two hours, nothing left. I had a pair of coveralls and my little Washington slippers and that's all I had. Well, Marta Nesfelt come over, you know, she's right behind me there. So she'd come over, and I'd grab my armful of clothes in the closet; I had some hanging this way and that way. It didn't work out. So I just -- to hell with it. And I had some moving pictures down there, and I grabbed those, took them out. Marta had just come to the back door, and we rolled my safe out the back door and dumped it out, and that's all I got out. And I went around (indiscernible). I stopped at the local -- my liquor store, took out the liquor, and the dance floor door, the bar door was open, and they was carrying out what they could get out. I had an old piano in there, and they took that out. And, oh, it was a mess.

Pretty soon it got over to the -- had the flag hanging out the top of the window over the dance hall and somebody got a ladder and they took that down. The steamboat saw the smoke, so they pulled up in ship yard. They just got through unloading my grub, you know. So they come down, and by the time they got here, hell, it was too late. The fire was breaking through the old dance hall then, and Floyd walked through -- well, the smoke was coming out of the (laugh - indiscernible). And then the roof caved in and the rest. Oh, two hours, it was all over.

(Tape Change - Tape No. 1, Side B)

Q So then you rebuilt the roadhouse.

A Yeah. I wasn't sure I was going to do it because I had no lumber to build with or a darn thing there, you know. Used to have lumber mills here, but there was none there then. So I happened to think, there's the old Army mess hall down here. The Army, you see. So I went down and took a look. Good shape 'cause it's setting up on pilings four or five feet high. A hundred feet long with a 30-foot lean-to in the back, which was the soldiers' wash room, shower room.

So Eric Howard had bought that at the sale when the Army left. So I says, 'Well, the only way I can make it is if I can buy that and move her up.' So I flew over -- Eric Howard was mining over on Friday Pump there, and I think it's a creek now. But he says, 'Oh, old Jack, I hear you

had tough luck.' I said, 'Yeah. My place burned down.' He says, 'Well, that's too bad.' I says, 'I come over to see if you want to sell that old Army mess hall there.' 'Yes,' says, 'I'll sell you the old Army mess hall.' 'How much do you want for it?' 'I'll take just what I give for it, $1,000.' 'Okay. I'll take it.' Shook hands, 'Soon as I get home, I'll send you the check.' 'All right, Jack.'

So then how are we going to get it up? Russ Stallcud, that used to work with us, he came down here with a communicator. He had got (indiscernible) you know how they get sometimes. So he says, 'Jack, we'll go in together and I'll help you build it up again with part of it.' 'That's fine with me, Russ.' So we went to the woods and cut down some big skids and built a boat, you know, so we could load this jigger on, and we had old Cass to bring us up there. We got to the CAA, and it was something like that, between them and the civilians, to help out. So all it took, I had to pay for the fuel, and they furnished the Cat and the driver.

So I said all right. So we got the sled built. First we went to the woods and we cut some (indiscernible), was some old poles over there that they used to have on the road from here to the Beam Station. And they was kind of dry, and so we (indiscernible), and we put those in piling, put them all down eight feet apart. So we took off -- sliced off about 35 feet of that thing and cut it off and loaded it over on, and we told them, 'We're ready in the morning.' 'All right. Be there.' So now the big Cat hooked onto it and come on up -- little bit of snow. It was cold. And we come up, so we had to come this side of the park line and make -- curve around and go down Punt Street, making the curve, she got caught on the hard frozen ground and she busted one of the skids off.

We said, 'Oh, boy.' A fellow says -- two of us, two of us was helping him -- 'What do we do now?' I says, 'Just go home and get your supper and go to bed.' I said, 'I'll figure that out. I'll let you know in the morning.' So I go down on my knees, talk to my Father in heaven, 'cause I am -- I'm not religious, but I believe in him. Asked him, and it come so clear to me. All right. The morning (indiscernible). All's you got to do is jack it up, jack it up, pull it out to where the one broke off, and cut the other on off same thing, and (indiscernible) her up again. It's all the same; we have to make our houses a little bit shorter then. So we made about twenty-five-foot houses then. Very similar process again, and put them up there.

And there was a little preacher up here and had a little church, Sunday's God, I think it was. And he come by, and at first, he's setting there, and there was all the sticks sticking up. 'Jack, you mean you're going to put this over on there?' 'Sure. Going to try it at least. I think we can do it.' So Tibsy's got the sawmill, and he has some big six-by-sixes, about 20 to 24 feet long, and about, oh, five or six of them, it was easy to put it on top of the pilings and put it over on the sled, yes, and jack it up and

put some -- put one right across underneath it, and then get out my pipe, a weld pipe, you know, cut showers, use it for rollers, and you had your lawn. Go over there, and was -- put it where I wanted it. The first one went in the back, and the next one did, and the next one did. The lean-to, have two men go out in the back; that's our kitchen and their pantry and the bathroom. That was a 30-foot lean-to.

Got them all pushed together and put her back together, and then I started getting equipment. Our two-by-fours that we needed had to all come from Anchorage in the airplane. And lots of insulation, 'cause it took the old (indiscernible), or the old celotex off the walls and fill it with -- put insulation put back on that. Then I got the knotty pine from Anchorage, stood her up and down; plywood for the ceiling, and I got tavern oak for our dance floor. That's oak -- good oak floor right in there. That come from -- oh, from foot-and-a-half to three-foot pieces, you know. It's beautiful, and different colors. So we got that down, and I ordered a cook stove, new cooking utensils and beds, and for my rooms that I had there, and a rocking chair for each room, and a medicine closet -- chest with two (indiscernible) on each side.

Q Hmm. You had it all.

A Had a wash basin in each room, and the bed, and then they got down comforters for each room. I fixed it up just like I wanted it.

Q Right.

A Had it all come in on the airplane, but by God, we got her in. We opened her up in April, I think it was, the next spring. And boy, you ought to see the people that were there; they even come from Anchorage. We had lots of bouquets from Anchorage even; the back part was filled over, filled with bouquets of flowers.

Q Huh. That must have been something.

A Yeah. I've got some beautiful pictures of that town, snapshots, you know.

Q Let me ask you a little bit about when the town moved over here. Was that -- how was that decision reached? Who was over here?

A Dan Sprague. Dr. Dan Sprague and Billy the Kid.

Q Billy the Kid.

A Yeah, he had a little trading post over here, you see, but he had an old black horse. And right in front, where that short runway is now, he had a big potato patch there.

Q Billy the Kid?

A No. Dan Sprague was -- he was the head of it, and Billy was his helper, you know. Well, they was old, old men, both of them, you know. And old Dan, he used to like to go and play a little poker, you know. But he chewed tobacco. So they was coming across the Kuskokwim, (spit) he spit out his tobacco juice, you know, on both sides of the trail, so he could find his way home. He used to stay all night, you know, and in the morning he'd start for home. He couldn't see that far, but he'd follow his tobacco spit. And so.....

Q How did they reach the decision? Was that sort of a

town.....
A No, no.
Q .....decision? Everybody just slowly moved over?
A Oh, no. I'll give you the reason though. Lou Laska was the manager of the NC Company Store.
Q Who was that?
A Lou Laska. In fact, he come to Alaska when he was one year old. Lou L-a-s-k-a, Laska, L. L. Laska. All right. He was the manager of the NC Company Store, and he got me to work for him. See, after the boats, I worked for NC Company or something roughly like that, two or three years. And Lou was the Postmaster then, see, 'cause the post office was always in the NC Store to bring the people there. Actually, a good drawing card.

So Frank Larson had a cabin on this side. It was a blacksmith shop -- not a blacksmith, but a shop where he'd make things, you know. So he made a deal with him. There was always floods over there. He's going to move over there, and he got with Bill Gregg from Wenatchee, and his mother had a little money. Yeah, I guess they did; they was up in the apple country. So Bill come up and they formed a company between them called Gregg & Laska. So he moved the post office over, that's all.

And I -- that was when I just come back with my new wife, and so I helped him fix his store, build it up, all of his cold storage and his warm storage, helped him dig a well. And so then he says, when you get this done, build a little place alongside, see, a little boat house. And he says, 'Jack,' says, 'you've been just like a brother to me, you know.' I'd do the cooking and all, you know, and do the washing and all that stuff, you know, and house work too, besides the store's work. So he says, 'When we get a shipment of groceries and all the stuff in, you buy your groceries from us when you get your roadhouse up, and I'll give you 10 percent above cost landed. That's what I'll charge you. You've been more than a brother to me.' 'Fine, Lou. That's fine.' Sounded good to me.

So I got a little lumber, and some of them owed me some money in Takotna, and they moved the sawmill up there so they could bring down lumber, you know, and we worked out those bills and different ones, and some lumber from up above, and so we're building their store and their warehouse and everything. There was lumber and some windows left over and so, of course, so I got stuff from them, you see, too. Brought down from every place. And I did practically the work myself.

Vern and I come down one day. He was married and lived up there. I said, 'Vern, would you like to give me -- would you like to work for me a little while, give me a hand tomorrow?' 'What doing, Jack?' 'Helping build this house. It hasn't got the walls in it; I raise up the walls, you know, and it's pretty hard for just one to do that, get them tied in, anyhow, together and I'll be all right.' 'Well, sure,' he said. 'I'm no carpenter, but I'm pretty handy with the tools.' I said, 'All right. Come down in the

morning.'

So he helped me get the walls standing up and the rafters started. Couldn't get rafters long enough to reach from the peak to the edge. So I made sort of a hip up there. See, it comes from there to the hip and down. Like they made the old hip barns. It wasn't quite so pronounced, but that's the way I made a go of it.

Q So then people sort of followed you after you got that over there?

A Oh, yes. And when they got that, then the post office is here, and they had to come over here for their mail, didn't they, huh? See, he was smart. If he never got the post office, they'd probably go away, yeah.

So another thing, then, followed by, well, I say this maybe is not the truth, you know, but the NC Company kind of conveniently burned down that next year.

Q Over on the old.....

A Over in the old town. And poor old Dave plows over in the Edsel. Well, it was their own insurance company. So then run and build up another store over there; they come over on this side. They bought the old Dan Sprague's homestead; that was a homestead, you see, which starts right in by my old roadhouse, the line. I was on this territorial ground. So when you go to the little NC Store there, they moved over their old houses, but they built the new store there. So all right, the store was there, the post office was there. What's the rest to do? Follow. You know. And that's the way it happened. As far as my recollection goes.

The two things I do not do, one is lie and the other is steal. I might not remember exactly something, but I think I've told it pretty straight.

Q Do you remember much of the trail, the Iditarod Trail?

A No, not too much of that. By the time I got here, there wasn't mo- -- that -- they wasn't doing it over the fast anymore, they was coming in those airplanes. But from here on, like Takotna, also I had been on that one myself. That's all I know about, that one.

Q Where did you go when you used to go from here to Takotna or something? Did you mush dogs over that?

A Oh, yes, mm hmm (affirmative). Yeah. I didn't have a complete team, but I'd get a few dogs from Konigs, you know, put them in with mine. They give me two dogs when I first come, little pups. One got poisoned and died, so I only had one, Mike, and the first time -- I forget whether it was Thanksgiving. Along in there anyhow, had a big shindig; they had what they call the Pioneers Home up there. No, no, no. Pioneer Hall.

Q Up in Takotna?

A In Takotna, yeah. So I go up there, and gee whiz, I went up with the dogs and got in town. I didn't know anybody up there. (Indiscernible) Bobbie Laurie was there, he said, 'Well, Jack, come out to my place.' They had two roadhouses there, two. So I went down to Bobbie's place, and we danced for about three days and nights, and the women would bring up lots of grub, set it on the table there, you know, and

some had a little -- whole brood and so forth. Bobbie Laurie played the mandola or ever what it was, stringed instrument, and I think it was old Cap McLain played the organ. Yeah. We had a ball. After two or three days, take the dogs and go back home.

Q Do you remember the rut that you found?

A Oh, yes. When you're going to Takotna now, the planes go right over the -- you can see the old dog train -- trail down below. I believe, if I remember correctly, about 19 miles by dog team, and about 15 by air, roughly. By air it wasn't quite (indiscernible) a dog team. Go down, you look down there, I says (indiscernible) play them, yeah, I saw that quite a few times. 'Oh, yeah,' he says, 'you can see it if you look down.' And sometimes it's on this side when it goes up over that hump, you know, then it's on this side for a ways. Yeah, you can see it yet, if you look for it.

Q Did you ever go up past Takotna up to Ophir or anything?

A Oh, yes. I went up one year, went on up beyond Ophir and up the creek. Some ground up there I wanted to stake. And so we got way up there; there was two teams of us. I think it was Albert Ivy and -- what's his other name? I forget who that was. But Albert Ivy, I believe it was, and myself, I had a team. We went up, stopped in Takotna for the night. That was enough for one day, you know, for us. Then we kept on going, and we stopped part way up there and -- I forget his name. Baker, it seemed like it was. I forget. We stopped over night. It was pretty cold, pretty gusty, maybe 45, 50 below. So we had a good feed there and we got up early in the morning and we went out and we went on up the creek. I don't remember which creek it was now. We was going to stake on the upper end of it.

So we got in there. The woodcutter was in there and taking care of the camp for the winter, you know, and splitting the wood. I forget his name -- two of them there. A big bunkhouse, so made us welcome there. We tried to get up there, tried to get up a couple of times, but there was so much overflow underneath the snow, you see. Didn't get a chance; too much snow, too quick, and the overflow, you stepped in there, and when -- 12, 14 feet of water is no good. We tried, but we failed there. So we come back. We stayed about a week, waiting; maybe it would get colder and -- but it didn't. I says, 'Well, we did the best we could with the tools we had, so we'll head back home.'

All right. So we're coming back and into Takotna, 70 below zero when we reached Takotna. And the next morning, it was 72. That's the coldest I ever saw it, only the one time. I've seen it 60 and 65, 68 lots of times, but never 70. But it was 70 that time when we come into Takotna. We stopped at old Warren Alfred's place. We stopped up there, got warmed up a little bit, two or three days. Then took off and come back home, and that was the trip. You know? I had lots of good foot gear for that weather, a parky and all, but I'd have to roll and get ahead of those dogs and jump up and down, you know, get the feet circulating again.

Q Did you wear shoe packs?

A Oh, no. No, you don't wear shoe packs when you get cold down in your feet. You'll freeze your feet in a few hours.
Q What'd you wear?
A What they call moccasins. They're rawhide moccasin. And they're leather, but they're rawhide, but then you put on maybe two, maybe three pair of regular wool socks -- no cotton. Wool. And the bottom of there, old -- the old man, a (indiscernible), who taught me how to pan and sink a hole in the bedrock. Virtually he showed me how to make slippers that go inside. All right, they got big felt insoles, you know, that go in the bottom?
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A And I could take two of them, sew the ends together, cut them off so that they're kind of straight. Sew the ends together and then bring them around and start another one on the bottom, and you sew the bottom right on there. You got about that much felt all the way around it.
Q Yeah, about a half an inch.
A Yeah, all of half an inch. And then your two or three pair of good heavy wool socks, and boy, your feet's going to be all right. Going to be all right. But after it gets, oh, 30 below zero, you don't want to walk shoe packs. Good conductor of the cold, you know.
Q Yeah.
A Come right in, and you couldn't get enough socks, that many, on. You'd have to have a big bear -- I had (laugh) 12, 14 inches by the time -- I wear a shoe about a seven and a half or eight. Yeah, but, you see, today then you got your big moose hide mitts, you know, with the fur on the back. So you hold up the fur to your face when the wind -- you know, like that? Got the harness on, put the harness over your head. You're never really -- if you've got to stop for your dogs, you don't want to lay them down. Dogs get started and there go your mitts. So you just throw them behind you, take a turn on, and you've always got your mitts, and then you've got a liner inside. Not gloves, not so good, 'cause your fingers are separated.
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A They don't stay as warm. Mitt, wool mitt. Put them in there, and your hands can always stay warm. You work them. You work them, see. If they get cold, you work them. Yeah. And I always stopped and jumped up and down to warm my feet kind of, too, when I went on that trip.
Q Did everybody use a gee pole there?
A Oh, yes. I didn't have one on my sled because I didn't have a lot of loads, you see.
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A But I have been with fellows on a sled with a gee pole when you have a heavy load on, you know. So he rides his skis right in front of his sled, and the dogs are strung out there so they're not in the way, and he rides on there and then a fellow will ride on the break, if he's got another man along, to keep it slowed down, down the hills and so forth.
Q The first man would run -- would stay on the runners?

A He'd stand on -- no, no. He'd stand on a little pair of skis, and then was tied to the -- he was tied to the dog harness, you see, or the dog lead. That's where they fasten up the sled. So a little pair of skis. Some of them only had long skis, but they'd stand and get on there, and away they'd go, hanging on that gee pole, and the guy on the back for the brakes, put on the brake when you want to stop. No, I never had a use for a gee pole much on my little sled and the little things I was doing.

Q Do you ever talk to Charlie Konig about running the mails, what routes they ran?

A Well, not too much. You know, I don't know. He -- 'cause we all got -- always got through. The mail was the main thing, and it's got to go. And he was on that -- I don't know for how many years. I don't know, but he was one of the old, old-time mailmen, and he thought when the airplanes got the mail contract, he was finished. But he wasn't, you know. He was just starting his life. You know how that goes, living along this thing. Made good wages then; finally then he worked for NC Company, too, you know, and took care of the planes, and he made it all right. Yeah, he never told many stories about the dog team on the mail trail, you know.

Q What about when the steamer used to come up and they'd have big dances there at McGrath when the boat would stop over?

A Oh, yes, when the boat comes, gee whiz, yes. The dance was on. You see, they had a big whistle on that boat. They'd blow that whistle, you could hear them -- well, I got out on my roof and I'd watch for them coming, coming around Aroundabout Mountain, they call it. The steamboat used to get out here about a mile down and blow that old whistle. Boy, they was all on the river bank by that time. So they'd pull in and all come up, the party would start. Of course, the boy had to go to work the next morning; didn't feel like it sometimes, I guess. But yes, dance, every Saturday. Every Saturday night we'd usually go till 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning. No closing hardly, you know. Wasn't in the old days anyhow.

And -- but them's what would get me sometimes. I'd work all day and then up till 6:00 o'clock in the morning, and then by the time I get around and want to go to bed, well, there was a few women coming around, and I'd get an eye-opener, banging on the door, you know. My short day, we're going 12 hours a day, I'd say, roughly.

Q Is that right?

A From that to 35, 38 hours a day straight. Yeah, because if you work all night, and you got to get some pilots out in the morning and all, and they're bugging you, and when are you going to lock up and sleep, people going and coming?

Then when the Army come, you know, all those boys, 450 of them, you know, and there's only about 170 population here, well, they'd want to come up all night and dance, you know. They -- Toksook for them, but some nights I wouldn't open up 'cause we were dead tired. You got to rest

sometime. 'Come on, Jack. Are you going to open up for today?' Lots of dishes to do, and we always had a girl who -- she'd work and she'd want to go; I'd help her, you know, and get things -- and, 'No, I'm not open tonight.' 'Oh, come on. Open. Gee whiz, we want to have some fun.' I says, 'Look, I've been going now for about 24 hours. I've got to lay down for a while. I'm not going to open tonight, period.' Nothing doing. There was just days that I couldn't.

And you couldn't hire anybody. The girls didn't want to work anymore; they was having too much fun with the Army, and they didn't need to work. What the hell? Work making beds and dish washing and all? It was tough to get them to do anything. Even to keep a cook part-time to come out here from Anchorage -- you had to hire a cook from Anchorage or Fairbanks, and you didn't know whether they could cook or not. All right. We always paid their way out providing they would stay at least six months. And then we paid their way both ways. But if they was not satisfactory, they paid their way both ways. So that's the way it was. So if we didn't have a cook, I had to cook. If we didn't have a girl to do the bed work, I'd used to have to do it all. But you can't do it forever, you know. You've got to stop and take a rest once in a while.

Q Well, that's for sure.

A Well, some people get in that kind of a business, you know, and they can't take it. Just like Russ went in with me in the roadhouse. The next spring, he said, 'I give up, Jack. I can't take it. It's driving me crazy.' You know, 'I got to listen to everybody's troubles and cry on their shoulder (sic), give them advice,' and it was just another day's work for me, another's day job. You got another day, the job was done from -- you went to the next day. It didn't bother me any. You know.

Q When you were working on the -- like the Tana, did they -- what kind of crew did they have? How many.....

A Well, let's see. They would have from eight to twelve Natives, women, that lived in what they call -- oh, what'd they call it? -- a boat pan, I think, down underneath; they had bunks there. And then they would have a cook, and they'd have two firemen. They'd have a maid, and they'd have two engineers and the captain and the flunky. So there'd be around 17, 18, roughly, like that. Yeah, so I got the flunky's job, and I was cleaning up the dishes and, you know, I'd have to go up and straighten up, make up the captain's room and the chief engineer, and that was it, and keep the laundry done. Yeah.

Q That's what they called it, the flunky, huh?

A Yeah. Flunky, yeah. But then when Cap McLain died -- he didn't come back. (Indiscernible) when I was with them. So then we got another captain; he was an old man. I can't remember his name. He had white hair. But I was elevated then; he called me steward. I was no flunky, I was the steward. He'd say, 'Jack, I'd like to have you come up and cut my hair this afternoon, in an about an hour.' And, 'Oh,

sir, I can't do that.' 'How come?' I said, 'Well, you have Burt Tomatov. He's a deckhand, not me. He's the Native boy, you know.' And he was the oldest person in this camp, you know, but he just went out to the home just the other day.

So I said, 'Burt is your barber. He's going to feel bad about that.' He says, 'I don't give a damn who has been my barber. You're going to be it from now on. I want you to cut my hair.' I said, 'All right, sir. I'll do the best I can. Maybe I can't do such a good job as Burt.' He said, 'Never mind Burt. I'm asking you to do it.' So then from then on, I was his barber. I don't know; it was one of those things.

Q Yeah.

(Off record at Log No. 2705)
(On record at Log No. 3265)

RADIO EXCERPT

MR. IRV: There's very few facts today. They just -- I see a lot of books come out now with, look to be like trailer houses. Course, one thing, they're -- a lot of them are being stamped out of the same mold. And there's a lot of this, yeah, it looks good all right, to the eye, you know, until you start to getting close and pick it to pieces, and it's built fast. And it's a shame too, because that was a wonderful art.

NARRATOR: You've been listening to Gary Irv, and before him, two other Southeast Alaska boat builders, Palmer Odegard and Adolf Matissen, talking about old boats and boatwrights.

This has been "About fishing." I'm Walter Crouse. Thanks for listening.

(Music, fade out)

NARRATOR: "About Fishing" was produced for the Alaska State Library by George Figdor and Steven Levy at KTOO Studios in Juneau. This program was made possible by grants from the Alaska Humanities Forum.....

(End of Tape No. 1 at Log No. 3567)
(Tape Change - Tape No. 2, Side A)

INTERVIEW (CONTINUED)

INTERVIEWER: This is Tape 80-03A, the second of a two-tape interview with Jack L. Morris of Sunnyvale, California. The interview is conducted at McGrath, Alaska, on July 13, 1980.

Q Just going to ask you a little bit about old McGrath and if you could kind of describe it for me. We remember the -- we did a little bit a few minutes ago.

A Yeah.

Q Some of the buildings that were there and where they were. You said that there were two roadhouses.

A Mm hmm (affirmative). Then the game warden that was in the old Langley house. And that was Paulson, I believe, was the game warden when I come here. Next was the NC Company Store. Well, they had a few cabins across the old Takotna -- or across the old -- the Takotna River also. But that was my first home. I moved into a small cabin; the fellow died that spring when I come up, the same year, so I moved in there. And then on up on the other side -- they had a little airport there too, you know.

Q Where was that?

A It was right behind the NC Company. They cut off the roads, and when I got off from the boat that fall, they just had what they call the CCC, or something like that, you know, to give work to different people, you know. And, well, they needed somebody to help the fleet make that field a little larger, cut off more willow, so I went to work for them there, worked making the field longer, a little wider, made it a little safer. And then they had the old cemetery over there. I don't know what ever happened to that. We started a new one over here now; it's a nice one.

And we built a new bridge across that slough, just between NC Company and Halsons, built a mighty fine bridge there. It was sometime in the (indiscernible). He had gone there with Wardy, who had a heck of a time crossing. They'd go up in a little boat or something like that. And most of the buildings are all log buildings, old-timers, you know. Charlie Konig, he lived up the river an back in there. Charlie and, oh, two or three others lived back in there. Bill Kruhm had his mink pens back in there.

Q Where was that?

A Right on the point, you know, where he had his roadhouse. And just behind his roadhouse he had the mink pens. And but he had them there, but he didn't -- I think most of the minks was gone when they came in. He had finally got rid of them, I guess. Bill just had the Christmas tree time in his lobby there, of the old roadhouse, you know, and all the kids and things, they'd a few more inches and things, and boy, they'd have a ball in that place. And then the next year -- well, when I come in, too, the NC Company had just burned down and they was building up a new one. Just finishing it up as I got here in 1930.

So then the next year they had the Christmas in the store. They moved stuff back, you know, waxed up the floor, and hell, we danced there for maybe a couple, three days.

Q Did they build that new store in the same location?

A The same location, yeah. I believe it was the same location. All (indiscernible) from there at that time.

Q Yeah.

A And then they got out the pipes, and there it was, and he come out without any pants on -- (laugh) he had to get out in a hurry. But they was just building it up and getting started again when I got in there; that's in 1930.

Q Do you have any idea how many people lived there in 1930, say?

A Well, at that time, I'm not too sure, but probably 150. It'd be safe to say not over that. Counting all their kids and all, I don't doubt if there was that many. Could be. But then when we got on the other side, I used to have to get a petition to get my liquor license, and there was 170 people, period, in the town of McGrath. So I had to get a percentage of them, but some of those was too young, too young to vote, you see, and all like that, didn't count. So I'd have to get from 75 to 80 signers for me to get my license this year. It was a majority of the grown-ups. I guess there's quite a few more than that here now.

Q Yeah, I think there's about -- Marie Collins just told me the other day.

A Yeah.

Q It's quite a bit more than that.

A Well, I asked Frank when I come up. Well, it's full of houses now, roads all over. Geez, motorcycles, bicycles, and three-wheelers; trucks running all over. Golly.

I know the second year I was here everything closed up tight, the river stopped, Miller come up with his little boat, him coming up for the last trip with a little bit of freight. He lived in Crooked Creek. (Cough) Oh, excuse me.

Q Who was this?

A Miller. They call him Hoop Nanny Kaden. Her name was, oh -- old man knew her anyhow. His boy's in Takotna nowadays, Richard and some of the others. So they got froze in just down below here about eight ten miles; couldn't make it. He was stuck. He was there for the winter. So everything froze up. The little airplanes were landing right in front of the NC Store, you know, and everything's fine, snow. And be damned, you know, it didn't start raining. Raining, raining. The planes went away; they couldn't land anymore. The ice went out. Miller come up, unloaded his load, got his boat put away, and she started freezing again.

Q Is that right?

A Yeah. And most every year, in January or February, it would rain. Oh, I think it was the next year or year after that it rained and melted all the snow and everything was slick as could be. Then she froze up, and boy, you try to walk someplace. The little planes trying to land; it was slick, you know. They had to wait till you get some snow for -- on the brake a little bit. But that -- it usually always rains in January or February. I don't know. It's a funny thing. That's the way it happens.

Q I've got a map here. Maybe you can take a look at the map, you could tell me a little bit how the river's changed, if you can remember.

A Yeah. You want the light on?

Q Yeah, that might help.

A Might help a little bit.

Q It's not a real.....

A Geez, where are we now?

Q I think this is McGrath right here, and this is new McGrath, the airport. And here's old McGrath.
A Oh, yeah. Oh, that's old McGrath on that side.
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A Oh, yeah.
Q This used to be the trail, the NCC trail here.
A Uh-huh (affirmative).
Q Here it's going up to McGrath, and then -- and out that way.
A So this is Old Nenana Trail here.
Q That's right.
A I believe. Yeah.
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A Yeah, and then on up to Medfra and past Apple Mountain, which I have prospected. I had a prospect out there, you know, drilled.
Q Did you?
A Yeah, I didn't drill, no. It was points (indiscernible).
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A Been around top of the mountain.
Q Out at Apple Mountain?
A Oh, yeah. The trail went right on by there. Now you can go on the river from McGrath. Where's Apple Mountain on this? Over in.....
Q Up in here.
A Yeah, it'd be up further.
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A Well, you take the old Takotna River up around in here and then you can walk into it, oh, about five, six miles, I guess. And we sled the things incoming there, I guess, a bar, so Sutton there.
Q Mm hmm (affirmative). Has this river changed here since old McGrath was right in there? Is it -- you were talking earlier.....
A Oh, golly, yeah. Here it was. You see, the Takotna River used to come this way. There's a new opening there and all. And it come this way, and it came out here. Here's where it come out in the Kuskokwim, right there. Come right by the NC Stores, and here was all the cabins along here. So here, to go to Candle Creek, if you want to go with the trail -- or to Takotna -- you had to cross the trail across, and it come up on the ground right here. No, this wouldn't go through. You took on the ground, and it hit the ground here, and here you went. That's the one out to.....
Q So this was.....
A .....Candle Creek.
Q Right here, it was.....
A Oh, there was ground.
Q There was ground.
A There was ground right across there. Oh, yes. Hell, it was probably a hundred feet across there when I come here.
Q So the Candle Creek Trail, then, you could just go right from here right.....
A Yeah.
Q You didn't have to cross the.....
A Yeah. Yeah. So it kept eating a little bit more, and

there was stores out on this thing, you see. Ma McLean had a store out there, and another old fellow. What was his name? Oh, gee whiz. He got sick and I took him to Anchorage; the first plane ride I ever had. I don't remember his name now.

But anyhow, it kept getting more and more. So it eat its way through here.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A So instead of the Takotna going on that well, the Kuskokwim come down, and it went up and found a town. That's the reason it closed, 'cause it dropped the silt in there and it come this way.

Q So when this joined, did it change the direction of the Takotna?

A Oh, yes. Yeah. That's what I say. The Kuskokwim run up past on this way, and they came out here.

Q Huh.

A We're the -- that's the reason it closed up, 'cause the Kuskokwim, you know, had lots of silt in it, and it dropped all of the silt in there. So I was standing out on the porch there one morning at the NC Company. Was a fellow going someplace. I says, 'You see the way this river's running?' He said, 'Sure, I see the way it's running.' I said, 'Along up this way.' He said, 'That's right.' I said, 'Would you agree that last year the river was running in the opposite -- running this way?' He says, 'I've heard of these guys that have missed too many boats, and now I've actually seen one.'

(Laughter)

A Which it was the truth. Come around the other way.

Q About what time was that? Do you remember what year?

A Oh, gee whiz.

Q In the '30s sometime?

A Yes, it was in the '30s. It was probably '34 -- '35, '36; '35 or '6, right along in there, I would say. If I remember rightly, I was working for the NC Company then. I worked on the boats about four years, I think it was, and I worked for NC a couple of years. And I worked for Road Commission cooking a year, and then took my first trip out; that was seven years. Yeah, boy, he said I've really seen one now; I've heard about them.

Q Well, it is hard to believe.

A Yeah. You know, now I've (indiscernible) long time, I look around a little bit. There's all those heavy willows over there now. She's all closed in.

Q I was going to say, you haven't been over there to see it.....

A No.

Q .....see what's over there.

A Amos took us for a ride on up at Takotna a ways, and then he -- the next day or two it was raining most of the time. Then he took us up to Tatalina, up past Candle Creek and back, and I saw a couple of beaver and so forth. And but he swung around in there, but he says there's the pathway to get up in there, but we'll come another time. But we never

got around to getting over there again. I wanted to try my metal detector over there around the old pool hall, you know. But it's too tough to get in there, so we didn't make it.

Q Yeah, that's a shame. I understand there's a few of the old boats still there, the Quick Step.....

A Oh, yeah. I saw it from the airplane one night.

Q Oh, did you?

A Coming back from Takotna, he swung way out over and around, and I says, 'Oh, there's the old town, and there's the old Quick Step, and what's left of the Lavelle Young.' I could see them right there; that was the old ship yards. And right across there was a -- Howard Langley, he used to stay in with his wife, and he'd be the watchman for the boat, you know, and just sort of watched it. And then in later years, after I come in -- he was there for two or three years, and then he got ailing, but he was pretty well crippled up with arthritis, something. He was pretty lame, so then he would go outside and come back in the spring, and then he didn't come back at all anymore.

Q When did they abandon that, the Quick Step and the (inaudible)?

A I don't know about the Quick Step. No, I don't. That's where I come.

Q Yeah.

A The Tana run roughly about three years, maybe two years I worked on the Tanner, and then they started building the Langley. And perhaps the third year I was there, it probably could have been the fourth year, the Langley went into operation. Yeah.

Q And what'd they do with the Tana, just tied her up?

A Just tied her up, up at the back there, and she's still tied up there. Yeah, I saw her. I saw her yesterday, last night. Yeah. Yeah.

(Interview concluded Tape No. 2, Side A, Log No. 1195)