

IDITAROD TRAIL INTERVIEW - JOHN POLING

August 2, 1980
Nome, Alaska

Interviewers:

Tom Beck - Bureau of Land Management
Bob Spude - Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

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INTRODUCTION

INTERVIEWER:Iditarod National Historic Trail interview with John Poling of Nome, Alaska. The interview was conducted at John and Lucy Poling's home in Nome on August 2, 1980. The interview was conducted for the Bureau of Land Management by Tom Beck and Bob Spude of the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

John is a local historian in Nome and the former head of the Carrie McClain Museum in that city. He has lived in Nome since 1962 and has been in Alaska for over 45 years. John first arrived in Alaska during his college days in 1935 where he worked summers for the Skagway White Pass and Yukon Railroad. John and his wife Lucy then moved to Sitka where John worked for the naval air station. The Polings moved then to Chenega Island and taught school for the BIA. They again moved and taught school for the BIA in Juneau where John eventually became the first Executive Secretary of the State Teachers Association. John took another administrative job in Nenana where he was superintendent of schools. Finally in 1962, the Polings moved to Nome where John taught at the Nome Public High School for over 11 years.

John has written a thesis on the history of public education in Nome from the Gold Rush days until statehood. The Polings live on First Avenue West near D Street, very close to the old Discovery Saloon.

(Off record at Log No. 0161)

(On record at Log No. 0162)

INTERVIEW

Q And we go -- he drove us out to Solomon yesterday, and he mentioned seeing Pete Curran.....

A Oh, yes.

Qgoing into Solomon with him.

A Mm hmm (affirmative).

Q We were wondering if there was anybody who might know about Port Safety or have been raised up at some of the roadhouses along the way.

A Yes, there is. In fact, old Mamie Maloney, whose father owned that roadhouse through the '20s, grew up there, and she lives in one of the senior housing buildings down here. She's a very literate woman, although she never went to school in her life at all. But her father educated her.

Q Mamie Maloney?

A Mamie Maloney, yeah.

Q In Nome here?

A Yes. Mm hmm (affirmative). Yeah, Mamie is here.

Q Is she in the phone book, or do we just get a hold of the senior housing?

A I'm not sure whether she's in the phone book or not. We can check that out. But her -- let's see. Mamie's husband's name -- first husband's name was Tucker, and he died. He

was a miner and a dredge captain out here. And then she married Eddie Maloney. But her husband's mother was that old lady Tucker over at Fairbanks who lived to be about 120 years old before she died, and her cousin, I believe, is the lady who has written several books on -- at the University of Alaska on skin sewing and weaving and that kind of thing.

Q And she was born at Port Safety or just.....

A I think Mamie was born out there. She lived her life, until she grew up, just a little solitary girl and mainly with her father and mother. Her mother was a Native woman, a part Native, and one time she got in a spat with her husband, so she said she was going over to visit a friend of hers at Cape Nome and the roadhouse, and she started over there and a storm came up, and she froze to death. Carrie McClain told me that.

And it's too bad Carrie had to die because she took a lot into the grave with her. But she told me a lot of things. I wrote a history of the public schools here from the Gold Rush to statehood, and I felt, after I'd researched it off and on for 10 years and finally wrote the thing, that I knew the people in that generation. I just.....

Q Felt that close to them.

A I just -- I felt that close. In fact, old Irvin McKay Reed graduated in 1907 here, the third graduate of high school. And I talked with him three hours over at Fairbanks one time, and he said, 'I wish I'd gotten acquainted with you years ago. We have so much in common.' And he was 78 years old, and of course, I was about, oh, 52, something like that.

Q Can we just sort of look over some of these roadhouses? And you can just -- if you don't know anything about it, fine. Maybe you can just kind of go down the line here and see what you know, or who might know something about it. Somebody mentioned the Carson City Roadhouse at Fort Davis. Is that.....

Interviewer: Or if there was a stock at Fort Davis.

Q Yeah, was there anything there at Fort Davis?

A Well, the Army was located there quite early, about from, I think, around 1902 until they closed that Fort out sometime in the late '20s, I believe. You know, the Around the World Flyers landed there -- or was it? At least General Street.....

Q Right.

Athen, Captain Street and his people were flying round-trip from New York to -- well, to back there -- up here and then back across Canada. They landed there in -- when was that? -- about 1922, I think.

Q Yeah. Right.

A So the place was operating until the late '20s, and then they closed it out. There was no reason for it.

Q Does the name Carson City mean anything to you? Was that.....

A Not to me, no.

Q Okay.
 A Because, frankly, there's a lot more that I don't know than that I do know.
 Q Well, that's fine. That's -- you know, that's what we.....
 A But Mamie could tell you that. She's a very articulate woman, and she's a good friend of Dorothy Jean Ray. So, you know, you can tell by that, by the friends she has.....
 Q Yeah.
 Awhat kind of a woman she is.
 Q How about the Cape Nome Roadhouse?
 A Now, the Cape Nome Roadhouse is -- has been selected as a national -- what do they call it?

Interviewer: Register.

A Register, put it on the national register of its own by Bonnie Hahn. It's still out there, and Bonnie's probably living there right now. So you might go out to that place, and also to Safety, and ask the fellow out there, a man name of Reeder owns it.
 Q How long has Bonnie Hahn owned the Cape Nome Roadhouse?
 A Well, at least 18 years because that's how long I've been here, and some before that. But her father came here back around 1926, I think it was, as the Superintendent of Schools. And her mother was teaching school here, and Bonnie was born here. She's lived here all her life. She knows a lot of history, too.
 Q Yeah, she's pretty knowledgeable.
 A So that'd be a good source for that.
 Q Then the area between Cape Nome and Port Safety, they call that Nuk?
 A Nuk, yeah. Nuk is just over the.....
 Q Over there.
 A Yeah, and it's between there. It's a settlement. You'll -- have you been there?
 Q Yeah. We just.....
 A Yeah, well.....
 Q We drove by it.
 Ayou know as much about it as I do, probably. It's where the old diggings have been made by John Boxstose (ph) and by Sig -- mmm, let's see. What's his name? An anthropologist, or he was a ethnologist from Harvard.
 Q Mm hmm (affirmative). Okay. Then Port Safety, talked about, see, the old telegraph station there.
 A Mm hmm (affirmative).
 Q Was it the same building, or was it two different buildings?
 A What?
 Q The wireless and the roadhouse.
 A The wireless and the roadhouse were different. The -- you know, General Greely tells all about these stations because he practically founded the Signal Corps, and all the wires that were strung out from here to Mexico were done by him. In his book, three -- let's see. It's My Life of Service, and it's on the shelf over there. He tells all about it. It's a remarkable book. And I read in the University of

Alaska library a 1902 report by him on the Signal Corps in Alaska. It's at the U of A library, just a little thin sheet, you know, or book -- booklet.

Q Okay. Any of that left out at Port Safety, the wireless?

A Well, I don't know what -- it says wireless telegraph station, so evidently, they had it there, or had one there sometime, but when the -- oh, at Port Safety, it says. Yeah. That would have been part of the line, see, that went out. And then I think it crossed -- where'd that go? Did it -- it went underwater over to Golovin, did it?

Q The cable?

A Uh-huh (affirmative).

Q No, down to St. Michaels.

A At St. Michaels.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A Yeah. Okay. Well, he told the difficulty they had in laying it across the water, so they gave that up and sold it -- sold the cable, which had sunk, to Boyd, A. E. Boyd, who started the phone system here. And his old building is still over there, you know, the same building. It's -- in fact, the phone company still operates from there. And let's see. What were we on now?

Q Roadhouses.

A Oh. The wireless, though, was moved into -- or at least it started at Nome. There was one here too. See, it says U.S. Wireless Telegraph Station. In fact, my wife's uncle, Larry Burrows, who was an operator there back in 1930 a few years, and then he went over to Candle, freighted the thing there, he lives on Backshawn (ph) Island. I think now he's retired, quite old, too.

Q Was there a roadhouse between Port Safety and Solomon? We were driving with Lil yesterday, and he mentioned a possible structure.

A Well, I've never heard of it, but if there was one, it would have been quite close to Solomon. It would have been at Dickson, where the Council City and Solomon River Railroad headquarters were. Some -- you know, people in your department have researched that and looking for national monuments and national sites.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative). Yeah.

A Some young woman was here working on that. So they might have had something at Dickson, but that didn't start, I don't think, that railroad, until about 1905 they started building that, and it lasted about five years, I think.

Q Was Dickson -- where -- do you remember where the.....

A Yeah, it was.....

Qthe other site this is.....

A Yeah, Dickson Road.....

Qwhere the old railroad cars are now?

A Yeah, right by the bridge.

Q Okay.

A Yeah. Mm hmm (affirmative).

Mr. Poling: Hi, Lucy.
Mrs. Poling: Hi.

Mr. Poling: This is my wife, fellows.
 Mr. Beck: How do you do?
 Mrs. Poling: Hi, gentlemen.
 Mr. Spude: I'm Bob Spude.
 Mrs. Poling: Bob Spude?
 Mr. Beck: I'm Tom Beck.
 Mrs. Poling: Tom Beck. And you came here from BIA in Juneau?
 Mr. Spude: No.
 Mr. Beck: No. We're actually with the Iditarod Trail. We're doing work on the Iditarod Trail, National Historic Trail Project Office from Anchorage.
 Mrs. Poling: Oh. Oh. And that's under -- is that a state.....
 Mr. Spude: Department of Interior.
 Mr. Beck: Yeah, it's.....
 Mrs. Poling: Department of Interior?
 Mr. Spude: Federal. It's everybody matching and working on the 1,049-mile trail.
 Mrs. Poling: And is that to be a national monument or a.....
 Mr. Beck: Well, they've designated it as a national historic trail.
 Mrs. Poling: National historic trail. Like some other trails.
 Mr. Beck: There are some other trails. The Lewis and Clark Trail is a national historic trail, and the Mormon Trail. They're different than like the Appalachian Trail, which is probably one of the best known, which is a recreation trail, which is designed for a lot of use. And these are sort of really commemorative kinds of trails.
 Mrs. Poling: Mm hmm (affirmative).
 Mr. Beck: So mainly we're just trying to get some information together about, you know, where the trail was, the local history, and put a history together of the trail; trail use and roadhouse use and things like that so we're trying to pinpoint some of these.

Q Then of course, there was the roadhouse at Solomon.
 Q Do you know anything about the one at Solomon?
 A No, I don't, except that the building is probably still there, that old hotel building. I'm -- but I don't know. The two main buildings there were that old hotel, or roadhouse; it's still there. It's a two-story building. And the school, and the school is still there, but it's kind of falling apart.
 Q What does -- does Pete Curran own something in Solomon now?
 A Yeah, he owned a house, and it was just crammed full of stuff. He abandoned it, and anybody who wanted to could go in and out of that thing. I've been in it -- it didn't even have a door on it. And I could see a lot of the history of his life. He was a mail carrier. He had all the old newspapers from World War II stacked up, all kinds of stuff just lying around. But since the land claims, of course, he's revived an interest in that property.
 Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
 A Which is -- which he should. It's sort of a nice site.

Q Do you have the literature of people who've used these trails, like the missionaries and all that?

Q We're sort of researching that right now. I mean.....

A S. Hall Young, who was a Presbyterian missionary, for instance, there's a book of his up there, and he tells about traveling over that trail the whole distance.

Q Oh, really?

A Mm hmm (affirmative).

Q That's very interesting.

Q What period was that?

A Let's see. Well, he was here in 1899. Almost died of the typhoid. He got down to 90 pounds, and he was a great crusader against booze, and a young bartender named Billy Murtagh saved his life. He pulled a gun on the guy that owned the only cow in town and told him he wanted a pint -- or he wanted a pint of pure milk a day. That's -- the doctor said that's the only thing that this missionary could hold down, and he was going to die. So Murtagh liked the missionary; he called him "father," in fact, and later went out of the booze business.

Q Huh.

A And he had a very profitable saloon here.

Mrs. Poling: John, there was something about that Iditarod Trail in that Hudson stuff, but I can't remember how much.

A Well, we'll -- Misadventures in Alaska, I think, is it on -- yeah, here's one. He tells a story about his typhoid. Bunch Grass Bill is what they called Billy Murtagh. And then he has this one on My Dogs, and this tells about his trip with his dogs from Nome right all the way over, and how hazardous it was. So I think you'd learn some real things. Now, he was an authority; he was there. So there is a lot of incidental literature on this.

There was an old man named George Waldhelm, a gold miner here, and he told me one time that you could go all the way to Seward and never spend a night out. These roadhouses were all spaced so that by nightfall or within a reasonable number of hours, you'd be there, and you didn't even have to take care of your dogs. They'd do it for you. They'd feed them and take care of them, house them, get them all ready for you. It was just kind of a taxi business. But you had your own taxi (laugh), of course, using your own dogs.

Q Did he go from Nome to Seward?

A Oh, yes. He did, yes. He'd been every place, old George had. But unfortunately, he had a heart attack and died about 10 years ago. He was at Teller when the Norgay came down there. They didn't know where they were. They'd gotten lost, and their airplane was getting all torn up, or their airship, from ice thrown back by the propellers. A year later, an American geologist came back to Teller. He came up every year. And he saw a Native, and he says, 'Well, what's happened the last year?' He says, 'Well,

Jesus in the whale (laugh) came from the sky and yelled down at us and wanted to know where they were.'

(Laughter)

A That actually happened. That old Eskimo, Jesus in the whale.

Q Does look like a whale, doesn't it?

A Mm hmm (affirmative).

Q Who were some of the other old-timers around you think that would be worthwhile talking to?

A Well, you can always talk the Walshes because Pete was born here around 1920

Mrs. Poling: You don't -- I'm not asking you to read this here, but.....

Q He was born here?

A Yes. Oh, yeah.

Mrs. Poling:Hudson Stock Alaska.....

A His ancestors, his mother came here in '99, and his father in 1907, I think. And old Mike Walsh was on the Board of Trustees at the University of Alaska for many years.

Mrs. Poling: Sometimes people -- have you ever had any.....

A And his father.

Mrs. Poling:thing by an explorer named, I believe, Allen? And.....

Q Anybody else you can think of?

Mrs. Poling:geological survey.

Q Anybody else? How about Pete Larson? Is he.....

A Yeah, old Pete Larson. His father was a Lap reindeer herder, and he's also on the.....

Mrs. Poling: And it was a lot more toward Eagle and the Tanana.

Interviewer: Hmm. Yeah. Henry Allen?

Mrs. Poling: Yes.

Interviewer: You've seen parts of that before.

A He's also in the senior housing.

Mrs. Poling: I can't remember whether it was specifically this, but it was in that area.

Interviewer: Mm hmm (affirmative).

Mrs. Poling: Henry Allen, John, does he mention him?

Interviewer: Very early. He may have lived along the Cook Inlet area parallel to the trail. That's.....

Mr. Poling: Yeah, Allen followed the rivers.

Interviewer: Mm hmm (affirmative).
Mr. Poling: Early. Before there was any Iditarod Trail.
Mrs. Poling: Mm hmm (affirmative).

Q Where is Pete here in town, and.....

A Pete, well.....

Qthe roadhouse?

A Well, he lives in town. You'd just have to call him on the phone. During the day he's usually working. He's always working for some company. You know, he's a good resource man, and also he can help them in other areas. But if you called him about noon probably, he'd be home for lunch. But he'll be home today; he's in town. And this evening, he'd talk to you any time.

Q Sounds good.

A In the old school yearbooks, too, which they publish, they called it the Aurora, there is a good account by a girl who tells the difficulties of getting the mail in the winter and the way it has to go. That was around 19- -- between 1910, 1913. I have those books, and they're also in the museum. So if you wanted to have copies made, you'd find a good resource there. And of course, the old newspapers, but it's tedious to follow that. You have to pick it out.

Q Right.

A I went through 16,000 pages of those on microfilm in a week over at the University. About went blind, but they had just microfilmed them, and I found this and it made a big difference in my thesis.

Q Yeah, those are helpful.

A Mm hmm (affirmative).

Q Are there any other people that might help with roadhouses on the other side of Solomon?

A Well, now, Pete would know. Pete could really help you that way. He could tell you about the roadhouses.

Q Topkok, huh?

A He had an uncle named Sullivan who ran a roadhouse at a place called Forks, which is on the fork of the Solomon River, somewhere up in here.

Q And it would probably be up in here.

A Uh-huh (affirmative). Yeah.

Q 'Cause this is the east fork.

A Says here.....

Q Here's the east fork here.

A Yeah. That's where I believe it would have been, right there, Sullivan's. But anybody that's lived here since 1900 could probably tell you that. I've never specialized at all on the Iditarod Trail, so what I have gotten has been incidental to my other reading. And my real research was done for that thesis. That's how I got a reputation for knowing more than I do.

Q And that was on the history of the education here?

A Mm hmm (affirmative). But I put it in a setting of the local history and the movements of history that resulted in the founding of Nome so that anybody reading it would understand the situation. And the rest of it involved the

school and the local personalities who ran the school and affected it in some way, pro or con, and the students and the teachers. So I could -- I'll just show you the copy, and then you don't have to read it. I never require people to read the stuff I show them. They'd go crazy. But this is useful because in my notes I made a list of every student I could possibly find, in records and out of them, who had gone to the school. And people have come up and asked me if I had any information on their ancestors who were up here, and I've found them, especially if they went to school.

But there's Carrie McClain when she was 18 years old in 1913, and just.....

Q This was down at the University of Alaska?

A Mm hmm (affirmative).

Q Okay.

A This abstract tells in general how it got there. And over here, most of the people that I recognized here as helping me are dead. There's old George Waldhelm, Al Reed, the old man. Bob Baldwin is here, though, and he was born here in 1914, and he's the manager of the gold mining company. So -- Alaska Gold. And he's a good, solid citizen.

And here's another one, Fred Bachman, who graduated in 1940 from the school. And Fred's mother was the principal of the school in 1918. Her name was Helen Carlyle eventually. Her first husband was Mr. Bachman; he died. Old Mrs. Carlyle came over the Chilkoot Pass in 1898, and she was just a girl. She died up in her 90s just a short time ago.

And there's Pete Walsh. Jane Scott's ancestors came here in the Gold Rush, right -- they were right there early. And Jane is here; Jane Perkins is her name now. Her husband's a -- was a former mayor and city manager, and they named Perkins Square or Center down there after him.

Then another who was born here, and his dad was a gold miner, was Bill Olrich, and he is the secretary of the Pioneers here, and he lives here.

Q What -- how -- is it an active club now, the Pioneers?

A Yes. Yeah.

Q They meet like every month, once a month, or something?

A Once a month, except in the summer. They're all scattered and they don't meet. And I belong to the Pioneers. It's an interesting group of people.

Q Yeah, I'll bet.

A You know, the Native people that are old and have been here a long time, like Pete Curran, and there are others too, could tell you something, I'm sure. But I'd say Pete Larson's the one to see on that score.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A I have learned a lot from Pete. One day I was talking to him and he started talking about his father and the reindeer herding and all that, and it was -- there was quite a lot of content in it.

Q Oh, I'll bet. Oh, it's interesting to listen to those old-timers.

A Mm hmm (affirmative). Yeah, sure. Well, let's see.
Q We can get a copy of this from the University, I would assume. They have a copy of it?
A The University has -- of Alaska in Fairbanks has the original and one copy, and they also have it on microfilm.
Q Oh, okay.
A The University -- well, Alaska Pacific University in Anchorage has a copy of this.
Q Oh, okay.
A But I started right out with the Russian discovery and then led up to it quickly.
Q When did -- how long have you been in.....
A Eighteen years.
Q Eighteen?

(Off record at Log No. 3765)
(Tape Change - Tape No. 1 of 1, Side B)
(On record)

Q When was that?
A That was between '35 and '40. In '39 I left Skagway, and I didn't go back again.
Q Bob's done a lot of work down there.
A Have you?
Q Yeah, I lived there a year and a half.
A Oh, you did? Well, good.
Q Fun town. I had a good time.
A Mm hmm (affirmative).
Q I worked there, mainly on (indiscernible) structures, the old buildings down there.
A Oh, I see. Oh, yeah. Believe you me, there were a lot of interesting old buildings back in 1935. And, of course, half of them have been destroyed, but it's amazing how many still are there.
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A I found in one of those buildings an old rusty typewriter, one of these old, real old-fashioned ones, you know, from the turn of the century. Everything was outside, and I think -- let's see. Those things hit the -- I believe they hit the paper this way. I'm not.....
Q Backward?
A Well, that'd been backwards, wouldn't it? Something, it was a key factor.
(Simultaneous speech)
A (Laugh) I don't know. It was quite unusual. Didn't work, so I just left it there; it was a pile of junk. I helped dismantle one of the docks with -- for old Martin Itchin (ph).
Q Oh, you knew Martin Itchin (ph)?
A Yeah, I knew Martin Itchin (ph). In fact, he told me -- I was starting to walk over the pass, and he said, 'Where are you going?' And I said, 'I'm going over to the Yukon River and then down the river to Fairbanks.' I thought I'd get a boat and, you know, just.....
Q Follow the river.

Aprobably get drowned (laugh).

Q And what'd he say to you?

A Well, he said, 'Don't you do it.' He said, 'You would just go up there and the Mounties won't let you across.' He said, 'Do you have \$150?' I told him no, I didn't. He said, 'Well, you can't even get into Canada without \$150 on you.' That was true, too. They didn't want any parasites or bums. And I was neither of those; I'd have made my way, I'm sure. He -- I said -- I was 21 years old and I'd never been away from home, and I was a Depression kid, and I was kind of pretty innocent, and I said, 'Well, what can I do?' He said, 'Well, you go back to the house on the dock, and my wife will rent you a place to stay.'

And I went down there; she rented me a one-room shack that was slightly smaller than that kitchen for \$5 a month. It had raspberry jam on the shelf and blankets, quilts, everything you could think of, but it was just a summer shack, you know, right on -- right over the water. And she said, 'If there's anything you need, why, let me know.' And so I started right there. The next day I had a job.

Q They helped you out then.

A Oh, yeah. Sure. Old Martin was very -- and his wife were both very generous people.

Q You ride a street car?

A Yes. Yeah, the one that -- oh, the old bear'd salute you, you know. You'd pull a string and the old bear would salute you like that.

Q Yeah, Martin Itchin (ph) built that, quote/unquote, "street car" out of an old Ford (indiscernible), and it had mechanical puppets and -- I don't know -- smoke coming out of the ears of bears or something.

A He went down to see Mae West in 1934, and he had postcards of him with his great handlebar mustaches, you know, and Mae West, you know, playing up to him, and it was really funny. But Hollywood really liked him.

Q Huh. So you went up to Skagway then?

A Well, I went off and on to college in the winter, see, and spent my summers in Skagway working for the railroad. And then when I left CPS, I got married to Lucy, and she came down from Ketchikan in '38, and we were married in 1940. And then we went to Sitka, and I worked on the naval air station there for four years. And from there, we went out to Chenega Island and taught for four years. That was -- we were in the BIA for eight years. We went to Juneau and worked there for a while for the BIA, and then started teaching school in the city schools in '53. And I taught -- we lived there nine years, and during that time, I got interested in the education association politics, and I ended up as Executive Secretary of the State Association. I was the first one.

But two years of that, I didn't care much for -- it seemed to me like a broken record. Every year, I'd go back and ask for more money. Same old program and everything, and I was never very good for asking people for money. But I did it as a duty. I knew we were paid so miserably

poorly. Teachers then were making about \$3,800 a year, and they weren't paid in the summer. And so you had to go out and mow lawns and do other things like that to keep your soul and body together. And now teachers don't have to do that.

And I was instrumental in that, but I got so fed up with it that I got a job in Nenana as the Superintendent of Schools, and went up there. And I decided I didn't like administration either. The school board seemed to me to be so unreasonable. So I went over to Fairbanks and worked for two years, and then a friend of mine was the Superintendent here, and I got a job in the high school. I taught 11 years here.

Q And when did you arrive?

A In '62. Yeah. But I had a good tenure here, and it was quite different. I thought the weather here would be terrible and all that, and some of it is, but usually it's quite a moderate climate. It doesn't get nearly as cold here as it does in Fairbanks. Over there I saw it down to 65 below zero for a whole week. My car wouldn't start until it warmed up to 50 below, and then it would. The cars -- tires disintegrated, especially synthetic rubber, they was just powder in that low temperature.

Q Did you ever get interested in the dog sledding or.....

A I had -- oh, in the BIA, we were out on the Lower Kuskokwim a couple of years, and I had a dog team -- three dogs, but they were enormous dogs. Enormous. They used half-wild dogs out there, and they were dangerous, too. In fact, when a dog team was coming, they'd warn, they'd yell, 'Dog team,' and the kids would scatter. Yeah, I've actually sewed people's legs up where they were bitten terribly by dogs. I got a bad one right through -- I made the mistake first trying to break up a dog fight with my dogs because one of them was from a different litter than the other two. And they got in this vicious fight; I got in too close, and one of them snapped right through my thumb there. Man, that ached clear up into here for several days. I learned something.

Q Where were you?

A At Quinhagak. Quinhagak. Lower Kuskokwim.

Q What type of dogs were they?

A They were just the old Malamutes, just a plain old Alaskan Husky.

Q But they were big, weren't they?

A Oh, enormous.

Q You used to use big dogs.

A Enormous dogs. They were work dogs entirely, that's all.

Q What could -- how much could they pull?

A Well, I asked one of the Native boys, Evon Moore. I had a sled that was about eight feet long, and I said, 'Evon, how many dogs would I need to pull this sled with me on it and 800 pounds of National Guard gear?' They had just organized it, and I had been appointed as a Second Lieutenant. So he says, 'Just one, Mr. Poling. Just one.' That's what he said. So I bought three. I thought that's enough.

There was an old miner down there by Platinum, and in all his years as a miner, he had three dogs, and that's all he needed. So why have more?

Q How much did they cost?

A They cost me -- I think I bought all of them for about \$95, the three of them, but I paid \$60 for the leader, \$25 for another one. Let's see, \$60, \$85 -- and maybe \$15 for the other one. But that's what they cost me. And I fed them kipnuk, which is stink fish. You know, we'd dig down into the permafrost about four feet and line it with long grass, quite heavily line it, and then put these great big red salmon in there. They were king salmon. And fill it up, and then put a nice mat of fresh green grass over it, then you'd put a top covering of boards over it, and then you would cover it up in a mound about a foot and a half thick of dirt. And all this was to keep the flies out because if the flies laid eggs in there, the larvae would turn that into just a churning mass of corruption.

Otherwise, the -- it was good food, not only for the dogs -- it had -- it was rich in riboflavin and vitamin B complexes. And the old folks that were toothless could eat it. You know, they stunk to high heaven, but they could eat it and it was good food -- if you can stand the smell. One Eskimo said -- one little kid who lived with her grandmother, who at that kipnuk, came to school, and she stunk so bad, and Lucy was pregnant, and she just about threw up all over the floor. So I told one of the leading men, Adolph Johnson, have this -- tell this little girl to eat something else. And he says, 'Well, Mr. Poling, we just eat what we got.' And I said, 'Adolph, I understand that, but,' I said, 'we're going to start a breakfast program, and she can come to school and eat breakfast here.' So that's what we did. This was to get them out of bed and get to school on time. And it worked.

So after that, we didn't have any problem with it. But Adolph was intelligent, highly intelligent. And he said to me, he said, 'You know, white people eat this limburger cheese, and that doesn't smell very good either' (laugh).

Well, I probably have told you about all the facts I know, if I've told you any facts. But the literature is rich in this, and you just get books by the old missionaries that have traveled that, and by others, and I think you'll get a good history, that you can piece it together.

Q Do you know where this is available, this.....

Interviewer: I think I've seen it at the University of Alaska.
Is that right?

A It should be.

Q Yeah.

A It surely would be there. And if you check the private libraries -- now, who is it that's quite a history buff down in Anchorage? His daughter makes tapes on historical things. Let's see. He's a public relations man. He wrote a history of Alaska during the statehood thing. Well, he

has a big library, and he'd have it. I'm sure his library is a lot -- it's her -- Lucy, who is the man who has the big library, and his daughter was here and talked with us? Hilscher, that's it. It's Hilscher.

Mrs. Poling: Oh, in Anchorage.

Mr. Poling: Yes.

A H-i-l-s-c-h-e-r.

Mrs. Poling: Herb Hilscher.

A Herb Hilscher, yeah. And you can find him probably down in that new -- comparatively new bank on the corner of -- what is it? -- D and -- 5th and D or somewhere down there by -- just by the bus -- down by the bus stop.

Q Would he have copies of the Aurora, or are those just up here? That school yearbook.

A He probably wouldn't have that 'cause it's a special type of collection, but I've got them.

Q How long did they publish those?

A They published -- Wickersham's Bibliography says that they published it between 1904, and I know that for sure, but he says through 1932 or something like that. But it was pretty sporadic from 1916 on. I don't think it was published in the same form. Let's see. Wickersham's Bibliography is really a great one. It goes all the way up to 1926 or '7, so in there, you can -- are you familiar with this?

Q Yes. (Inaudible comment.)

A There's a fellow down in Juneau -- in fact, he might be in Anchorage now. Let's see. What's his name?

Q Bob DeArmoun?

A Yes. Yeah, Bob, he knows everything, it seems. I went to school with a man who might have been his best friend. His name is Herb Arkson (ph). Herb had had polio and is crippled, but he was just as smart as Bob DeArmoun, and those guys were real close. So I'm particularly aware of Bob DeArmoun because Herb used to talk about him when we were talking at the college.

Q Have you done any -- or do you have any information about the Nome Candle Trail? Talking with Leo the other day, I guess he's interested in reviving that. It's a (indiscernible).

A Mm hmm (affirmative). Well, no, I don't. I used to think that -- before I learned better -- that it was a circular trail, but it wasn't. They just went to Candle and then they came back the same way, didn't they?

Q Yeah. That's my information, too.

A In -- Ernest Gruening wrote a -- or made an anthology of Alaska books and stories, and there's a story there by Rex Beech about a really disastrous trip that a man made from Candle down to Nome over that trail. And he -- I believe, though, that he didn't go to Golovin. I think he went over to Pilgrim or around -- the Cougarahken (ph) then was coming down this way. A big storm came up, and he lost

so many parts of his body from freezing that he lived and died in agony after several days in the hospital.

And this was in -- written in answer to a columnist who said that it was a lot of baloney about the sufferings and the hardships of the gold miners, they didn't have it bad up there in Alaska. He just wrote that story as a personal -- from personal knowledge about how it was when it was at worst. But in this new book by Father Renner about -- Father LaFortune tells about a priest who was going across, got lost out there, and froze to death. So it was quite a common thing.

And then Mamie Maloney's mother, just on a five-mile walk, getting caught in a storm, and it was real -- it was murder. And they didn't have all the medical aids that we have today. If it happened to them, why, they were just gone.

Q We certainly appreciate your taking the time to talk to us and everything.

A It interests me because I learn something this way, from you people. So it's a selfish interest, enlightened, I hope.

Q It's all everybody sharing.....

A Yeah, right. I just traded the bathtub that Amundson undoubtedly bathed in. I suppose he wanted to clean up after he got here. He lived with Ralph Lohman after that trip from Spitsburg to Teller. And I -- we took that big bathtub out yesterday and had a shower stall put in because we had to do that. Lucy broke her hip and she couldn't get in an out of that bathtub. It's five and a half feet long and 30 inches wide, and, you know, real deep. But I -- there's another -- there's a kid here, an old student of mine, who is a history buff, and he had a 1905 diary of reindeer herders at Igloo. I had one in 1913 of the herders at Noatak. So he gave me the 1905 Igloo diary for the old bathtub.

Q Huh. That's terrific.

A Yeah. And they -- even that early, the missionaries and the schools had made a literate minority among the Natives so they could read and write like this, keep records in camp.

Q Sounds great.

A And sometimes they -- some were real good, and some were not. Like one guy said, he'd been out all day hunting Robert, and he'd shot Robert yesterday, and I thought (laugh), 'What is this, shooting Robert?' Another one write a few days later and said they'd -- he'd been out again shooting rabbits (laugh).

Q Hmm. It wasn't Robert after all.

A It wasn't Robert.

Q Are there any records of the old roadhouses, any old.....

A Well, you know, there's -- the old roadhouses?

Q Yeah. Any -- you know.....

Q Public records or.....

Qledgers or business records, diaries.

Mrs. Poling: Stories, like Alaska Magazine? Have you gone through that?

Interviewer: No, not as close.

A I think the Department of the Interior put one out that's a pretty good one on roadhouses.

Q Oh, yeah, that's.....

Mrs. Poling: Oh, yes, "Historic Roadhouses."

Interviewer: Yeah, that's -- we've got that one.

Interviewer: Yeah, we've seen that. Mm hmm (affirmative).

Q We were just curious if there was anything like this, those diaries.

A Well, undoubtedly, somewhere, somebody has them because as Jim Wolf said, when he was here talking with Norm Ballatin (ph) about writing a history of Nome, and he said he had found almost instantly that the subject is bottomless. It just goes off into infinity, the sources and the things that happened up here.

Q It never ends.

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