

IDITAROD TRAIL INTERVIEW - PETE CURRAN, JR.

August 4, 1980
Nome, Alaska

Interviewer:

Tom Beck - Bureau of Land Management

AUGUST 4, 1980 - PETE CURRAN

INTRODUCTION

INTERVIEWER: This is an Iditarod National Historic Trail interview with Pete Curran, Jr., of Nome, Alaska. The interview is conducted at Pete's apartment in the senior citizen housing in Nome on August 4th, 1980. The interview is conducted for the Bureau of Land Management by Tom Beck.

Pete was born in 1905. His father, originally from Pennsylvania, was a winter mail carrier from Golovin to Unalakleet. His mother was a Native woman from the Fish River Tribe near Council. The family moved around a great deal during those early years, moving from the Norton Bay communities, from Bluff to Old Mission to Golovin and finally to Solomon in the 1920s. Pete's father ran the roadhouse at Solomon for many years.

At age 19, Pete, Jr., took over as the mail carrier for his father. He made the three-day trip from Nome to Golovin once a week from November to May for 14 years. Pete ran the ferry during the summers at Sullivan from 1925 until approximately 1959. Pete later ran the safety ferry until his retirement in 1972.

(Off record at Log No. 0130)

(On record at Log No. 0170)

INTERVIEW

Q So when did your father first start that roadhouse down there?

A When did he buy it? He bought it in '39, I guess.

Q Was it?

A Yeah. It was '39. You see, they're all -- railroad side was on the other side there, other side of the river they called Dickson. And some elderly people had a roadhouse there, a roadhouse and a store.

Q At Dickson?

A Yeah, at Dickson. And he bought that in 19- -- when did he buy that? 1924, I guess. It was either '24 or '25, somewhere in there.

Q Do you remember who had that at Dickson, what their names?

A Huh?

Q Do you remember what their names were at Dickson there, who he bought it from?

A Shaughnessy's, their name was. An old couple. They retired and went out, and he bought the place. And it's a place, you have to have rubber boots all the time. There's sloughs and rivers and stuff like that to cross. And it's in the flat there, and any high water comes along, and it gets in the building.

Q Yeah.

A It gets up to a couple of feet in the house (laugh), and you got to put everything on top the shelves and off the floor.

Q Did he move the building, then, from Dickson up to.....

A Huh?

Q Did he move the building from Dickson to.....

A No. It was always there. But this Teamster, Billy Row was his name, he had a bunch of horses, 20 or 30 head of horses. He was a contractor out there at that time. No catch on that (indiscernible).

Q Yeah.

A But he (indiscernible) south in the country for the miners, and whenever there was moving to be done, he moves them. And what he did was he moved this building across from Dickson.

Q That was before your father got there?

A Huh?

Q Before your father arrived?

A Yeah. Way before. He moved it from over there over to what they call Jerusalem now, what they call that place, Jerusalem. He moved it over there and used it for a horse barn. And he had another building -- he moved another building on the other side of it, and it burned down, I guess. Established before my time, and it burned down.

Q He moved it from Dickson to Jerusalem?

A Yeah. Yeah.

Q Where is Jerusalem now?

A Jerusalem is where it is now.

Q Yeah, where is that?

A And they call it Solomon.

Q Oh, Solomon.

A Yeah.

Q Uh-huh (affirmative).

A Yeah. Well, the whole thing is Solomon.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A And I heard that old early days, I guess, Solomon was originated down there by the -- down towards the mouth of the -- there's a outlet of a lagoon down there and Solomon River comes out.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A They come out pretty close together. But now, they're together now.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A And the town was down there. And the 1913 storm took the whole thing out. They told me there were seven saloons there at one -- at that time.

Q In Solomon.

A Yeah (laugh). There was a lots of people running around in those days, you know. Council was struck, and Solomon was struck.

Q Yeah.

A Nome was peted (sic) out (inaudible). And he decided to move there and got a carpenter and fixed it up. You know, fixed it all up.

Q What was your dad doing before that?

A He was driving a mail team, wintertime. You know, mail -- carrying mail. Then later on, he got the contract from here on down to Unalakleet. And then when he moved to Solomon in '24, fall of '24, we moved there from Golovin, after he

bought this place. Then I got on; I got on the mail team. I was only 18 or 19 years old. So I got on the mail, and I was on there for 14 years.

Q Were you?

A Till the planes took over.

Q Where did you run from? Solomon?

A Well, from here to Golovin and back, once a week. Takes me three days down and three days back, and I'd lay over one day, start all over again until -- we'd start in -- what? -- 20th of November and then till first week of May, I guess.

Q How big a team did you have?

A Oh, I'd generally drive 21, 23 dogs.

Q Mmmm.

A I got enough dogs in there to pull me up the hill. (Laugh) I didn't want to walk. Well, I used these seppala hounds, they call them.

Q Oh.

A Seppala hounds, they call them. They're just a core harness and just up to here. And we'd leave them right on the dog call. We'd -- well, I'll never take them off.

Q Oh, really? Yeah.

A Well, geez, it was a lot of trouble hitching up 21, 23 dogs. 'Cause you have to harness them every morning, and when you get in, you'd take them off. That's too much work.

Q Yeah.

A Oh, they get used to it.

Q How much -- what kind of load did you carry there?

A When I first started, we had a 500-pound limit. And when I first got on there, the postal department was pretty strict. You have to be on time, regardless weather or the trail or anything. You've got to be on time, and you've got to make connection with this team that comes from Unalakleet (indiscernible). He had two teams there. It takes him two weeks to make the round trips.

Q Who was that?

A That was Meesha Charles (ph) and Peter Eluk (ph). And later on, Peter Eluk, he quit and he had this Willy Takak on. We're the only survivors on that mail team -- mail run -- me and this Willy Takak. He's in Shaktoolik.

Q Oh, is he?

A We're the only survivors; all the rest of them are gone.

Q So they used to run from Unalakleet up to.....

A Golovin, yeah.

QGolovin. Then you'd connect in Golovin.

A Yeah. And then later on, they raised the limit up to 600 pounds. And then the mail -- in the spring there's a -- towards spring there's what they call excess mail, came into Unalakleet. And we have to carry about seven, eight hundred pounds at a time, mail. One time I had 1,000 pounds. But I generally have two sleds, you know, driving one sled (inaudible). But then they -- there's a lot of teams of people running back and forth. The trail is in pretty fair shape. Sometimes you get hard going on it.

Q What kind of shape was the roadhouse in when your father bought it?

A Huh?
 Q What kind of shape was the roadhouse in when your father bought it?
 A Over there?
 Q Yeah.
 A It was pretty good shape.
 Q Was it?
 A Mm hmm (affirmative). Course, them days, they never had any insulation of any kind on there. It was all shiplap, built out of shiplap, siding's (inaudible).

(Jet airplane noise)

A And after he bought it, we put tar paper outside all around to keep the wind out, drafts. But he got couple tank stoves, lots of wood, keep the place warm.
 Q Where'd you get your wood from?
 A Down the beach. Lots of wood on it. And when we moved over to -- after he got that place fixed up, moved over there, and got -- he got a truck, and in the fall when the beach blows up, go down the beach and haul wood to it.
 Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
 A Get a couple of cords at a time, and he gets away with maybe 30 cords of wood a year. You know? Keep the place warm.
 Q So did he have a store downstairs and then people slept upstairs?
 A Yeah. Uh-huh (affirmative). Sleeping quarters upstairs, store there, kitchen (inaudible).
 Q How much did he charge? Do you know, for.....
 A Huh?
 Q How much did he charge for a room and meals?
 A Well, a dollar, I guess. A dollar a meal and dollar a bed, something like that.
 Q Who did the cooking?
 A My sister was cooking when we first got down there. There was a lot of people traveling them days, you know. Walk and no -- they all walk, no planes, no cars. Everybody walked.
 Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
 A My sister was cooking there, I don't know how long, and then she got married, and then my mother died, and he got married again, then she started cooking.
 Q What was the building used for at Dickson?
 A Huh?
 Q What was the building used for at Dickson before it was moved over?
 A Gee, I don't know. It was a store when he bought it, a store and a lodging place, roadhouse they called it.
 Q Yeah.
 A And he had a store too.
 Q Who did he buy it from?
 A Shaughnessy. His name is Shaughnessy.
 Q Shaughnessy.
 A Old -- a couple of old folks.
 Q Mm hmm (affirmative). And they're the ones that moved it over? They had the.....

A Huh?

Q They're the ones that had it moved over, then, from Dickson?

A No. My old man did.

Q Oh.

A We lived there for -- let's see -- '24, '25, then he moved over in '39. If you can figure that out, you'll be all right (laugh).

Q Okay.

A It's about 19 years?

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A Huh? Nineteen or twenty, there somewhere like that, he moved over there.

Q Did the Shaughnessys build it, the building?

A I don't know. I don't -- he might have, because all the rest of the buildings there was railroad buildings.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative). Were they connected with the railroad at all, Shaughnessys?

A Huh?

Q Were they connected with the railroad at all?

A I don't know. Gee, I was only a kid then. We lived down around Bluff and Golovin and Elim. And, of course, my old man was working at Bluff at that time, a ditch man or something.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A Clear out of it.

Q Yeah.

A And we moved down to Old Mission, stayed there, and over to Elim and stayed there after the storm, and then we moved back to Golovin. And, while they was in Golovin, they -- he bought this place and moved back -- moved over to Solomon.

Q What was in Solomon? Was there a school there at all?

A Yeah. Later on, the Natives started coming, moving in, after he got to Golovin. In fact, he was selling groceries a little cheaper than Nome.

Q Really.

A So they started coming, and they started up the school, and even people -- people from there goes down there and buy a lot of groceries.

Q People from Nome went down.

A People from Nome, yeah, 'cause he was cheaper than these Nome stores. And the miners up the river, you know, old-timers up there, come down to grub for the winter. And some people from Council, they ordered groceries, stuff like that.

Q And who were some of the families that came into Solomon? Do you remember who they were, some of the.....

A Yeah, well, there's Natives, practically Natives, and, oh, they wanted -- there's Ben, they call him, Ben, and Pete Leeluk, Tom Tukayato (ph), Andrew, and (indiscernible), and Komakkok (ph), and McCafferty, but -- Henry, David Henry. Oh, there was quite a few.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A About 30 families here at that time. And then there's -- when that wall broke out, people started moving out because there was a lot of work in town here, then they started

moving out (indiscernible). And later on, there was hardly anybody left down there, and they had to shut the school down.

Q When did they shut it down?

A I don't know when they shut that school down. Must be around '50, I guess. Somewhere around in 1950. Somewhere around there. Oh, it was maybe later than that. And this Lee, Lee's -- Lee Brothers, they had a couple of dredges up in there, too, at that time. Mining.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A And there was full of hydraulic in that, I think, around -- another dredge over in Kotz and them all the time sniping around.

Q So you started running, then, the mail when you were around 18?

A Let's see. I was born in 1905, and I got on the mail in the fall of '24. Nineteen?

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A Yeah, I was 19, 19 years old.

Q I want you to take a look at this map and see if you can tell me the -- remember the routes you went here.

A Well, let's see. This is Nome here.

Q And there's Solomon, right here.

A Yeah.

Q And this is.....

A Topkok.

Q Right.

A (Indiscernible.)

Q Which way -- did you go along the.....

A We followed the coast all the way down.....

Q To Solomon, hmm?

Aall the way to Solomon and all the way -- well, we -- sometimes we'd have to go before the ice sets in here.

Q Over the hill there at Topkok?

Abefore we go over the mountain to Bluff. And then we'd go down the coast to Chiukak. Is there Chiukak there?

Q Yeah, here.

A Oh, here's Chiukak, yeah. And there's a pass there, you see.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A See, and there's the trail right there. That'll go right over. It's not -- it's just a little summit there, and there's a quick once-up on that little hill and then a little quick close-out. Well, actually, there's the old -- there's the trail, is there (indiscernible).

Q Was that.....

A Yeah.

Q Did you go around at all? Like were you at White Mountain?

A Not very much. Well, once in a great while, I'd go around the horn. Sometimes I'd take a notion to drive over to -- where in the heck is White Mountain though?

Q Here. Right here.

A Gee, and what's Council Landing? Oh, that's in the mouth of Fish Wheeler, huh? Sometimes I'd go over there and then come down.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A Just -- you know, just for the hell of it. When the ice age set in Golovin Bay here in the fall, sometimes it don't -- it's not set when I started off; it was November 20th (inaudible).
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A That's where some of them.
Q Do you remember who ran some of these roadhouses in here? Do you remember the Cape Nome Roadhouse? Was that -- was there somebody there?
A Yeah. Oh, Cap Shriner was his name.
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A He was running a coffee joint and a roadhouse. And then Charlie Dalquist at Safety. Where in the hell is Safety? About here.
Q Charlie?
A Charlie Dalquist.
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A Yeah. And then in Bluff is Meegan (ph). Meegan. In Golovin is Dexter, Joe Dexter, who runs that.
Q Where there -- how about at Topkok here? This shows a roadhouse there.
A No. There is no -- there is sometimes some old people lived there, wintered there one time. But they got a shelter cabin there, you see. They call it a shelter cabin.
Q There was nobody running the roadhouse there that you remember?
A No. No, not when I was here. And there's a shelter cabin down here, too.
Q At.....
A At Chiukak.
Q Chiukak.
A Shelter cabin, they called them. And there's an old-timer living at Spruce Creek. Here's Spruce Creek there. Yeah, Spruce Creek. Old-timer living there. Winters there in there.
Q Where, right in Taylor Lagoon there?
A Yeah, and right here, a little at the side of it, right here, there's Spruce -- this must be Spruce Creek there.
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A That's where he lives. I used to stop there and have a little coffee.
Q When was that? Do you remember?
A Knute Drange (ph). Knute Drange (ph). He come in, in the country with my old man, I think.
Q Oh, did he?
A Yeah.
Q Did he let you stay there and.....
A Yeah, he stayed there in the winter. He had mining claims up the creek here. He'd go to Nome in the summer and longshore then come back down; he stayed there. And finally, finally later on, he got people interested in it, and they moved the dredge from Solomon on down there. They dredged, and they -- I don't know what he got, 10 percent probably is what he got. But he made good.

Q Yeah.

A Took off, went outside.

Q Did he?

A And he came in -- he came back once, once or twice, I guess, and he finally died out there. I guess he bought a -- he must have bought a little place out there in the Seattle area someplace, stayed out there.

Q Where'd your father run? What -- before you came to Solomon, what run did he have in the mail run?

A He was running between Golovin and Unalakleet. He was driving for -- what's his name? What was his name? It's not Joe Hanson, but gee, I can't think of his name. But them days, they were all running twice a week.

Q Mmmm.

A Twice a week mail in town here at that time, when he was on it. They had -- I don't know -- maybe four teams from Golovin to Unalakleet.

Q How long did it take him to get there? Do you know how long the trip was?

A It takes me five days to go down and five days back. And they lay over -- maybe four days to Unalakleet, or two days and then they lay over. I don't know. Maybe. I didn't pay much attention to him because I was just a kid then.

Q Yeah.

A But uptown -- what was his name? Gee, I can't think of his name. But later on, Eric Johnson got the contract, and he drove for him. And later on, he got the contract, himself.

Q Your dad?

A Yeah. From -- then he drove from Golovin to Nome. Yeah, maybe four years. Every four years, I think they got a contract.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative). So he came up.....

A I guess he was the last man that had the contract on that run.

Q Hmmm.

A I don't know how long, maybe eight years. I don't know.

Q Did he come along the coast here then?

A Yeah.

Q All the way up to Nome?

A Mm hmm (affirmative).

Q When did he stop doing that pretty much, the Nome run? When was he.....

A Huh?

Q When did he have the Nome run?

A When -- let's see. It was around 1920, I guess. Maybe before that, I don't know. Somewhere around 1920 he got that run, till I got on in '24. He might be -- I forgot now. He might be driving before that. I think it was 1920.

(Off record at Log No. 2900)
 (Tape Change - Tape No. 1 of 2, Side B)
 (On record at Log No. 0050)

INTRODUCTION (CONTINUED)

INTERVIEWER: The interview is conducted at Pete's home in the senior citizen housing in Nome on August 4th, 1980. The interview was conducted for the Bureau of Land Management by Tom Beck. This is the first tape in that interview, Tape No. 80-07.

(Off record at Log No. 0081)

(On record at Log No. 0317)

INTERVIEW (CONTINUED)

- Q Dave Scott has it. BLM had this map.
A Oh. Oh. Oh.
Q But we're not really sure when it was put out.
A Yeah, but they've got that trail marked, marked all the way down.
Q Is that pretty accurate, do you think?
A Yeah, it's accurate there, as far as the mail train is concerned. I don't know what this is over here.
Q Right, I think that's a mining district or something.
A Oh. Oh. Oh. And you have -- and that mail came up this way and up that a way, then cool off, and to -- I don't know -- all the way up the coast here.
Q Talking to Mamie the other day, and she was saying that they used to run horses, had the horse teams used to do some of the mail runs up maybe to White Mountain or something, to Solomon?
A In the summer, yeah. Summertime, Charlie Dalquist -- Mamie?
Q Yeah.
A That's her father.
Q Oh, her father.
A Yeah.
Q Charlie Dalquist.
A Yeah. She's right over here.
Q Yeah.
A She was married to -- what's his name? Maloney. That's Charlie Dalquist's -- she was only a little girl when I was there, a little tot when I was running at that time. He had a -- she had a brother, an older brother, a little older brother, and he died. That's Charlie Dalquist's daughter, Mamie Dalquist, she used to be.
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A He had horses, a couple of horses.
Q What about -- how did they get the mail in the summer?
A Huh?
Q How did they get the mail in the summer from Solomon to.....
A With him, in the summer. Sometimes in a boat. I don't know. There's people have contracts all the way from -- well, you know, maybe St. Michaels, all along the coast up to Kotzebue. Then my wife died, and I got married to Molly. Her name's Molly. And she was married to this Ivanoff, Henry Ivanoff. I guess he's the last -- supposed to be the last one that had that run. I think. I'm not sure.
Q Which one was that?

A That Henry Ivanoff. He had a -- they had a -- not a -- it's a schooner, I guess, not -- it's one-masted, so I don't know what you call that. Schooners?

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A A boat, anyhow. He got caught in a storm at -- around the Shishmaref area there, got caught in a storm, and I guess the boat broke to pieces, and they all drowned.

Q Is that right?

A Yeah, Henry and -- I don't know how many people lived.

Q That was your wife's father?

A Huh?

Q It was your wife's father?

A No, her first husband.

Q Oh, her first husband.

A Yeah. That's a long time ago.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A She's at Koyuk now kicking back. And there was another boat before that, Sudden, they called it. And he was carrying mail, too, between here and Kotzebue, I think.

Q Hmm.

A And that caught -- he got caught in a storm up around that area, too, and they all drowned. Must be kind of a bad place up there, I don't know.

Q Yeah. I think it's pretty.....

A It might be shallow, too. I don't know, maybe shallow quite a ways up there.

Q How did your dad get supplies for the roadhouse? Did he.....

A Huh?

Q How did he get supplies for the roadhouse? Did he go up to Nome to get them?

A Did he what?

Q How did he get the food and supplies.....

A Oh, he ordered.

Qfor the store and roadhouse.

A He ordered.

Q Ordered?

A He ordered from outside, yeah.

Q And the boat'd bring it up then?

A It's -- that boat, Victoria, they call it, used to come up here all the time. Victoria. Sometimes it'd stop at -- stopped at Solomon there once or twice and unloaded. Then later on, they started unloading here, and then he had them small schooners all the way down. Sometimes a barge would take it down.

Q Where was your father from? Where did he -- where was he born?

A (Laugh) Oh, I don't know. He fibbed so goddamned much, I don't believe him, but he's from Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania, I think.

Q Do you know when he came up here?

A Well, he said he ran away from home when he was 12 or 13 years old. I guess they were a big family out there. Well, it's kind of hard times, them days up there.

Q Yeah.

A But sometimes you had to -- I see some of these old-timers, used to chop wood to make a living, you know. Chopped free for their board, meals.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A Chopped wood to beat hell. Yeah, he ran away and started working. He's -- he finally learned how to dynamite. What do you call that? What do you call that trade, dynamiting?

Q Well, there's a couple of different terms.

A Blasting. Blasting.

Q Yeah, blaster.

A Blaster or something like that. He started -- he learned that and started working in, you know, caves, blasting caves like that. And he said that he was chumming around with some guy outside, and this guy, he broke his leg and he had no money because he was broke. So he put him in the hospital. He had a little money, I guess. Put him in the hospital and took off; he never seen him any more. He never run into him any more.

One day, when this Hammond -- they call this mining outfit here, this company, they called it Hammond in them days, Hammond. When they were starting up.....

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

Abuilding dredges and stuff. I don't know; it was something they needed in Solomon, and they went down to look in Solomon. Seppala took this guy down.

Q Leonard?

A The superintendent.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A A big shot there at Hammond Company. He took him -- he took -- Seppala took him down there. They were talking away, and he was laying in the couch, you know. He's got a couch in the store there where he'd go in and lay down and take a rest, you know. And he was laying there and talking away. The old man took a good look (indiscernible) watch, and, well, they said, 'Hey, Bill, you ever been to here,' in such and such a place? He got right up. 'Yeah. Oh, yeah.' It was that goddamned fellow that he put in the hospital.

Q Isn't that something?

A Yes. What was his name? Did -- what was his name now? He was a big shot here, superintendent of that.....

Q Hammond?

Amining, when they were starting up the dredges. Well, he asked the old man if he had a son. 'Yeah, I got a son.' I was on the mail at that time, working around on the mail. 'Yeah.' 'Okay. Send him right up, and I'll put him to work.' My old man said -- and I didn't know, you know. Well, he never told me about it a long, long time. And he said, 'No, he's on the mail.' (Laugh) I go to that good job all the time.

Q So you used to live in Bluff, then, for a while, too?

A We did, yeah.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A Yeah, there was mining going on then, down there at that time. And my old man was a ditch walker; he was working on the ditch, and we stayed there. I don't know; it was

summer, I guess. Later on, we -- my sisters got old enough to go to school, and so we moved to Old Mission, they called it. It's below Golovin, where the mission was, mission home.

Q Oh.

A A little below Golovin in this.....

Q Down in here somewhere.

A Mm hmm (affirmative). Here's Golovin there, and it's down in here, right here. Right -- here's the island. Right here, at Old Mission they call it. They've got a mission there, and school, and gee, it turned out to be a big (indiscernible), lots of people there at that time.

Q Was Golovin -- did Golovin have a lot of people then, too?

A Yeah. Not as much as Old Mission down there, 'cause there's no school in Golovin in them days. Yeah, the school was down there at Mission. They have a home too, Mission Home.

Q So did you move from Bluff, then, down to Old Mission?

A We did.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A Yeah, we go down there. My sister had to go to school.

Q When was that? Do you remember?

A It's 1909 or '8, '10, somewhere in there. Maybe before that.

Q You were pretty small then.

A Yeah. I wasn't even old enough to go. Oh, I went to school there after -- later on. And then that big storm we had in 1913, and it kind of scared the people out, you know. Ost, old man Ost, he's still living, that old man Ost. He's down at Marshall, I guess, down the Yukon. He's still living there; geez, he must be pretty old. Must be in the 90s, I guess.

Q What did he do there?

A He was a preacher there, and running that Mission Home at times. And the 1913 storm, after that, that kind of raised hell around there, you see. So he decided to move to Elim. So he moved to Elim and made a church there and another home, and then those people started moving in again. Then in 1914, I guess, they moved over there.

Q To Elim?

A Into Elim, yeah. And we got out of it in 1920, I guess; we moved to Golovin.

Q Who -- was there a roadhouse over there in Elim?

A At Elim?

Q Yeah.

A Ooktoduk (ph). Old Ooktoduk (ph). And then my -- well, after he got out of there, and my step-uncle -- he was adopted by my grandma -- he started it. He started the roadhouse.

Q What was his name?

A Tom Tukkeyato (ph). (Indiscernible.) I just took his son over to the field, and he took off to Anchorage. Then that time after the planes took over, in the '30s I guess, the last end of '30s, the planes started carrying the mail from Fairbanks here. Then they started a local run between here and Unalakleet.

Q Local mail run?

A Yeah. And my old man got that contract, local run he called it, you know. The other one, the mail for (indiscernible) along the coast. And I was going once a week -- well, every two weeks, and I was running to Isaac's Point. And this -- when I talk about that other survivor, Takak, he run from there to Unalakleet.

Q So you ran up to Isaac's Point, and he ran.....

A I ran as far as Isaac's Point, and he ran between Unalakleet and Isaac's Point, you see. It's the local contract.

Q What was his name again?

A Willy Takak. Willy T-a-k-a-k. He's in (indiscernible) and still going.

Q Yeah, I've got another.....

A And my wife was raised there. Her parents run the roadhouse at Isaac's Point.

Q Her parents had a roadhouse?

A Nichuks, yeah. Nichuks. Naw, shoot. They were at roadhouse -- they run the roadhouse there at that time when I was running. And my wife was -- I don't know. She was born and raised there, I guess, back in.....

(Pause)

A Now she's back there picking berries in the (indiscernible - laugh). She got -- she called me up this morning and got -- she said she got a barrel or more of berries. She's got another one to work on. Oh, that's (indiscernible)?

Q Yep.

A Mmm (indiscernible).

Q Remember that Portage.....

A There's.....

Q This says there's a Portage Roadhouse.

A Oh, yeah. There's -- no. I don't know. There's old couple living there. We go through here. Let's see.

Q And they called this the Walla Walla?

A The Walla Walla, yeah. We go down to -- the name of it Metenta (ph) Creek. Here's Metenta (ph) Creek. And we'd go over the hill and follow the hills over to above Walla Walla and then go down the coast. Oh, here's Walla Walla, yeah.

Q Yeah.

A Yeah, it's still there.

Q And then you go up to Elim.

A And Elim, yeah. And then I'd go over, clean over to Isaac's Point. And this fellow, he'd cut across the bay to Bonanza. Where's Bonanza at?

Q I think over here at -- in Ongoluk?

A Oh. Oh, they've got it marked, yeah.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A To Bonanza and then down the coast to Shaktoolik someplace.

Q Shaktoolik and then down in there.

A That's right.

Q Which way did they go? They went over here to Bonanza?

A Yeah.

Q Or did they ever come straight down to Shaktoolik?

A No, no, no. What's this here?

Q Well, that's two different trails, I guess. One of them

went over to Bonanza there at.....

A Oh, no, that's the main one.

QOngoluk, and the other one went down to Shaktoolik.

A This is the main trail.

Q The main trail is the one to Bonanza.

A And the other one goes through here? That I know of.

Q Hmmm.

A It's (indiscernible) open here. Out there, it's open water. Along that shore, the anchored ice is sometimes not too far out. And over here sometimes, in here, there's open water in there, and they have to turn in, go around.

Q So this -- from Isaac's Point down to Shaktoolik, this trail would have been pretty much in open water then, huh?

A Yeah, in the middle of the bay, yeah.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A Except in the middle, of course, the shore was -- shore is ice. But then down here, generally right in here, it's -- the ice don't set there too good. It goes out to the shore all the time. They go down to the Foothills, from Shaktoolik down to Foothills, and then you go with them mountains there.

Q Is there a roadhouse at Foothills?

A At Foothills?

Q Yeah.

A Yeah. Used to be a roadhouse there. There was a roadhouse there called Shaktoolik. They'd go behind, behind Sha- -- Shaktoolik is -- I think they used to have village interior there, and then they moved to the coast later on. They cut across from Bonanza way back of Shaktoolik them days.

Q Was there a village there at Bonanza, or just a.....

A A what?

Q A village. Was there a village at Ongoluk there? At Bonanza? Was there a village at Bonanza?

A Village?

Q Yeah.

A No. No, there's only about a couple of families living there. There's a roadhouse in.....

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

Aone maybe out of Meegan. No, there's maybe a couple of families. That's all. And then Isaac's Point, that's -- only people that lived there is Nichuk (ph), Nichuk family. And Shaktoolik is a village. I don't know where they were. They were up the river, I guess, at one time, village. Then they moved down the coast. They all was a village then. And there's nothing, no villages, unless you get to Unalakleet again. And this first village we'd strike here was Solomon, and there's nothing along the coast till you get to Golovin, and there's a village there. We old-timers sticking around in Bluff here and there, you know, living here and there, and they all come -- in the mail days, they'd come. (Indiscernible - laugh), the old guys like old (indiscernible) would get their mail and then go over.

Q Was it a big day when you came with the mail?

A Yeah (laugh). Gee, I learned quite a bit, you know, on that mail, from people talking, you know. I learned -- it was

very educational, you know. People come there, and they'd -- certainly, in Solomon, too, them old-timers, they'd come down, up the river there, and then they stayed over one night and talking away. Quite interesting doing that.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A Stop, talk.

Q Enjoy -- did you enjoy running the mail?

A Huh?

Q Did you enjoy it, running the mail?

A Yeah. I got used to it, you know, and yeah, I enjoyed it. But when I quit, I didn't know what to do, you know.

Q Did you ever have any problems with the cold winters or anything?

A Well, no. Sometimes you'd get into a pretty good storm, and I'd generally make it all right. But one time in Bluff, it was a certainly storm. It was blowing real hard down there, and it was high water, and I didn't know whether to go. I finally made up my mind, and I took off. This Golovin Bay is just terrible place, you know, on the water. It gets on top of the ice down there. It's flat in the back there in the head of the bay, and the ice don't lift up; froze right down to the bottom, you know, water did, seeping through all around the edge, even in -- over here in -- where is that damned thing?

Q Golovin?

A Yeah. Here it is, Six-Mile Point, we'd get off; we'd get on the ice here, you see. But this here is all shallow, shallow water, and the ice just seeps right through. We'd go along the edge here, and then we'd get on the ice at Six-Mile Point, they call that. It's deep water in there. And sometimes we'd have problems. Heading into Golovin there'd be water on the edges of it, you know. But over in here in the Point, it's pretty deep. Anyway, I still have quite a time, problems, getting straight to the (indiscernible).

One time on Nokonaluk (ph), it was pretty stormy and a suddenly wind was blowing like heck. I don't know; I didn't leave right away, but I left anyhow. So when I got -- when I went into the -- got into that portage in here, there's a little hill, a little raise there you can drop into quick.

Q Between.....

A Yeah.

QChiukak and Six-Mile Point.

A I met this white guy; he had five dogs. And he told me, 'You can't get on the ice over here. There's too much water,' he said. I said -- it was short days in December at this time. Well, I said, 'I can go down here and get on the ice and put shore.' Well, he was going back to (indiscernible) cabin. And instead of going back, he followed me. He turned around and started following me. He had five dogs. Five dogs. And I didn't want to leave him, you know. I'd go a little ways, and I'd start to wait, I'd wait, wait. It's short days. I'd wait for him, and when he catch up with me and I'd start going, and wait for him. And finally, I tied him up behind my sled. It was getting kind

of dark.

Well, I had a wild female. And, I don't know, some dogs you -- get loose, you can't catch him. I had one like that on the team. And son of a gun, she got loose. She got loose just before we got to that point.

Q Six-Mile Point?

A Couldn't catch the son of a gun. Yeah. And when I got on the ice, I looked for the stakes; I found the stakes. And this female was loose. And, you know, when it gets dark, you look up in the sky, and the clouds, it'd be dark above the water, you know. And I tied, you know, where the water is. When I got down there, I looked up, and it was dark, dark clouds all over. All I have to do is keep that to my right, you know, ocean.

Q It'd be darker over the water at that time?

A Well, no. When you can't see, you know, when it got -- the water, above the water, the clouds are black. And crossing here -- the sea is out here.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A I figured the sea is on my right, right (indiscernible). So I started off. And these damned dogs, she started leading, and the dogs followed her. Going along there, going along there.....

(End of Tape No. 1 at Log No. 4000)

(Tape Change - Tape No. 2 of 2, Side A)

(On record)

Ajust wet.

Q The sealskin parka kept you pretty warm then, huh?

A Oh, geez, they're wind-proof. They'll keep you warm. Oh, I stayed there. And, 'Look,' he said -- he's got a tent for a stopover, and he said in the sled, we could put that -- we tipped the sleigh over and put that over and sleep inside. Okay. Yeah, he had traps, and he was going to Yukon. He was going over there and trap. He had everything in that sled. I still had these dogs tied up to the sled. Well, I don't know, skinny old dogs.

Q So did you make it then?

A Well, he was laying there, laying there. All of a sudden, he said, 'There's water, water coming in.' And I stood right up. And when I stood up, there was water where I was laying. He said well my team's lucky -- he said that I was lucky that they were strung out in the right direction. So I just tipped the sled up, took off a little ways. I looked back; one of his dogs was dead (laugh).

Q Hmmm.

A Mine got tangled up, and one of his dogs was heading that way. All the -- everything he had was under water. I tried to go out there to -- my boots was too short. I didn't want to get wet, so I left it. We stayed there till daylight, and I took off. I didn't know where in the hell I was going. I let the dogs go, him behind, dragging him with me, and he starts shivering. Going along there, going along, going along. Here I hit the trail, staked trail, that White

Mountain trail.

Q Oh.

A To Golovin. I caught on that, got to Golovin. When we got there, first thing he said, 'Where's the fire? Where's the fire? Where's the fire?' I told him, 'Go right in that roadhouse in there.'

Q How did they mark the trail?

A Huh?

Q How did they mark the trail? How did they mark it?

A How'd they mark it?

Q Yeah.

A With those M trees. Trees. You know, short trees, young trees?

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A They'd take the branches off and leave a little on top. Sure as hell made real good stakes. And then some used willows, too. But most of it is staked with young trees.

Q They put a little flag on it or anything?

A No, they just leave that bush on top, you know. (Inaudible side comment.)

Q What'd they do in the -- on the -- across the ice, the same thing or.....

A Huh?

Q Did they do that across the ice?

A Yeah, on the -- mostly on ice. But this -- on the ground, in summer, they stake it with beechwood. You know. And permanent stakes. But in the fall when the ice sets in, then, they stake it with these young trees to cross the bay, and over in Norton Bay across towards Elim there, and across Golovin Bay. All the rest of it is -- they do that in the summer. You know, pick the stakes up in the summertime. They'd use beechwood, anything they could get a hold of.

Q Did they use tripods at all?

A No, just a single, you know, stand of them.

Q What kind of things did you wear on your feet? What kind of footwear did you wear when you ran the mail?

A Me? Reindeer boots, then later on, I had dog, dog boots, dogleg. Geez, a real good thing.

Q Doglegging?

A Dogs' legging, yeah. Reindeer is generally, you know, and the fur always wears out here and there. Dog leggings, dog mitts, they're real warm. Dog legs.

Q Did you have a little harness to keep those on with, the mitts?

A Yeah. Mm hmm (affirmative).

Q Hooked in the back?

A And they have these waterproof boots, too. You have to have them when it's wet, made out of sealskin, some without fur and some with fur.

Q Where would you get those? Who made those?

A Huh?

Q Who made those for you?

A Oh, my mother used to make them. And an old Native woman makes boots. That's all they had in them days, you know. But now they've got those shoe-packs; don't need no more

boots.

Q I hear, though, if it's real cold, the shoe-packs don't work too well.

A Well, yeah. Some -- like me, I got cold feet anyway. I never could keep my feet warm much, especially in (indiscernible). But see, some people, they're -- they got these insulated -- what do you call that stuff? There all right? No. But felt.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A Felt stuff.

Q When did your dad stop running the roadhouse there?

A When did he stop?

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A Oh, he had it -- well, they lived there, and after the people -- during the war, everybody moved out and hardly anyb- -- oh, there's people stopped once in a while. He was still running it when he died. There's no place to go, I guess.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A He went out one time. Oh, he got pretty old, up in the 90s. He worked pretty hard when he was a kid. He was short, you know (laugh).

Q From Pennsylvania, huh?

A Pennsylvania, yeah. That's where he came -- he was part Irish. Oh, he was Irish (indiscernible). I mean, there's all breeds there, isn't there, Pennsylvania?

Q Old what?

A All breeds.

Q Oh, yeah.

A Swedish and Irish and Scot, so on and so forth.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative). Where'd he meet your mother? Do you know?

A Huh?

Q Where'd he meet your mother? Where did he meet your mother, your father?

A I don't know. Maybe -- I don't know. Maybe -- I don't know. I -- I couldn't say. Gee, I have no idea. Never asked. Could be around Bluff area maybe; I don't know.

Q Was that where your mother's family was from?

A She's from what they call Fish River Tribe.

Q Sure.

A You know, Fish River, there's a tribe up there that they call the Fish River Tribe. That whole village there, you know -- you haven't been to Council?

Q Here's.....

A They call that Milford. Fish River main -- Fish River, it had some -- where is that Council?

Q Let's see here.

A In the Golovin Bay area.

Q Here's Council.

A (Indiscernible.) Oh, here.

Q Right.

A Here's that Fish River. That's the main river.

Q Oh. Okay.

A That's the main river. This is the fork. Council.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A They were down here, in here, in Old Village. The Fish River Tribe, they called it. That's where she originated from. Like Sweden. Where you come from? Sweden? (Laugh.)
Q My family was German.
A I mean, your parents must have come from someplace.
Q Yeah, it was Germany.
A Huh?
Q Germany.
A Oh, Germany.
Q Yeah.
A Oh. That's (indiscernible).
Q Mm hmm (affirmative). Mm hmm (affirmative).
A You come from Germany.
Q Yeah.
A Your folks originated from there.
Q Yeah.
A And then my mother originated from that Fish River Tribe -- Germany like (laugh) Safety.
Q Huh. Yeah.
A That tribe started there early ways, early. There's a tribe down here at Rocky Point and over in -- what is it? -- Darby, huh? Cape Darby, or Cape Denver, what do you call that? Cape Darby?
Q Cape Darby, yeah.
A There you go. Big tribe there, and there was a big tribe here in the Rocky Point. And then there's one big tribe at Cape Nome, one at the Fish River, and up in Igloo, there's another tribe.
Q Mary's Igloo?
A No, she's (indiscernible). Yeah. There's another tribe there, tribe. Maybe one at Cape Wales, I guess.
Q And who ran the -- maybe you told me, but who ran the roadhouse at Cape Nome there?
A Cap Shriner, they called him.
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A Cap Shriner. That belonged to ano- -- when I was on the mail there, it belonged to the Methodist Church. It's still standing now; you'll see it down there.
Q Mm hmm (affirmative).
A Belonged to a Methodist Church. They -- in the summer they have a children's home, I guess.
Q Oh.
A Over there. And then they take them down to Cape Nome in the summertime.
Q Were there any other roadhouses along here between Cape Nome and Nome.
A No. No. There's some old-timer living at Kake and one at Hastings and one at Golden Gate.
Q Anybody at Lee Creek there?
A Huh?
Q You remember it. There's a Lee Creek. Do you remember anything there, Lee Creek and Hastings? Somebody living there at Lee Creek?
A I don't know what -- Lee Creek. I don't know. It must be a

branch off of Hastings; huh?

Q Right.

A Huh?

Q Yeah.

A That's up, way up, I guess. But there's a -- what's his name used to live there. He -- just can't think of his name. He used to be -- later on, he become a deputy marshal.

Q Hmmm.

A Gee, I couldn't think of his name. He lives there. And this other guy, a little below Hastings. Yeah, we're a little below Hastings -- Bernarski (ph) used to live there.

Q You mean over here? Hastings?

A Hastings. But it's a little below there he used to live, Bernarski (ph).

Q Bernarski (ph)?

A Bernarski (ph), I think his name was. And this other guy at Golden Gate, I don't know his name; he's Italian, I think. He used to live there. And then Kake, Abrahamson lived there. He used to -- you know, in the fall, the Road Commission, they had hired him to see how this road is around the Cape when I started on the mail, whether it was go-able or not, or go around the ice or on the road. He used to meet me and tell me, 'It's okay.'

Q What was his name?

A Abrahamson.

Q Abra?

A Abrahamson, Abra-ham-son.

Q Was his -- Abra was his first name?

A I wouldn't know. That's his last name, Abrahamson.

Q Oh. Oh, I see.

A The whole name.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative). Hmm. So he let you know, then, whether you could.....

A Yeah, if it was go-able around the Cape or not, and if not, then go around like that.

Q Is there anything here at Fort Davis?

A Fort Davis, no. I don't know. Not at that time. But used to be an old Army; old Army settlement here a long time, I guess. But now there's lots of people there now, I see. A lot of people camp there.

Q What'd you do after you stopped running the mail?

A Huh?

Q What'd you do after you quit running the mail?

A Oh, I didn't do nothing in the winter, but summertime I run the ferry down there. Ferry.

Q Oh, the Port Safety ferry?

A No. The Bonanza.

Q Oh.

A There was a ferry there. When did they put that bridge in?

Q I'm not sure now. Which.....

A 1959 or '60? Just before -- no. My old man died when they were building that bridge. Must have been '59. I was on that ferry since '25, I guess, '25.

(Telephone ringing)

(Off record at Log No. 1763)

(On record at Log No. 1771)

Q You were running the ferry there at.....

A Oh.

Qat Solomon?

A I got on that ferry in 19- -- somewhere around 1925, I guess. And I ran that ferry till '59, I guess, when they put that bridge in.

Q Where was that, right.....

A Yeah. And then after they put the bridge in, they got me on the trucks. And later on -- I don't know what year that was -- they put me on the ferry at Safety. And the -- oh, yeah, when the State took over, when the State took over -- when was that, 1959?

Q Something like that.

A I managed to have -- of course, I had, oh, a little over 20 years. I was on that maybe 30 years down there, I think, but just seasonal work. And I had enough to retire with from the government. So I was lucky; I got the retirement from the government when the State took over, and I worked there till '72, I guess. Yeah. I was on the road, and then in the end of it, they put me in the Safety ferry. And this retirement, it used to come up down there at Juneau, but they always kill it for seasonal workers, you know. But it finally passed, but you have to work, let's see, either three or five years for seasonal workers to get it. And when I quit, I was a couple years short, so I just got all that money back that I put in for a retirement.

Q So how long were you on the ferry then? A long time, huh?

A I had about 40 years, I guess. It was pretty close to it then. And that old man of mine, he'd be on that, too. I was doing the work; he was getting the money. When I was -- you know. And I'd -- you know, and then I got after that Road Commissioner. I told him, 'Yeah, (indiscernible) pay me.' He said, 'Oh, man (indiscernible).' And I managed to -- I had 20 years. I lost 14 years on that. My old man took the money; I lost 14 years. I had 34 years in it and lost 14. I tried to get it, but it was on his name on it.

Q Yeah.

A And after I got into -- when the State took over, I started paying into social security. So I was lucky enough to get retirement and social security then when I retired. My legs got pretty bad, and I decided to quit. In '72, I think, something like that, I retired.

Q What kind of ferry did they have down there when you first started with the ferry?

A What kind of ferry?

Q Yeah.

A They just had a small, small ferry, a wooden ferry. Had enough for a couple of horses and wagon. No cars them days; not many cars. And then one day, you know, I had tied up on the cable, and a big storm -- it was just a small ferry. A

big storm come along, and when the tide started running out, it tipped it over, broke loose and went out to sea and got on the shore down there. Oh, I was shook up. I really finally got it back, and next year, they built another one, a bigger one. And then later on, they got these -- what are those? -- these iron -- they got one at Safety.

Q Oh, the iron-hulled?

A Did you ever see it?

Q Yeah.

A Yeah, all iron.

Q Mm hmm (affirmative).

A They got one of them, and the Bonanza, they -- all iron -- and it's still sitting down there at sea. Must be got a hole in it because it don't wash away (laugh).

Q Yeah.

A All rusted, I guess, underneath.

Q Hmmm.

A And this one at Safety, they put a new bottom in it one winter here. Got pretty thin (indiscernible). Underneath, all rusted. They took it over there and (indiscernible), and they put a new bottom in it all winter, that winter of that year. Oh, it's in pretty good shape down there (indiscernible).

Q Some of the old trains are still down there at Dickson. Some of the old loc- -- trains are down there at Dickson.....

A Oh, yeah.

Qthe cars.

A They're still standing. All rusted away. I don't know how long they've been sitting there, but for years and years. Yeah.

(Off record at Log No. 2592)

(On record at Log No. 2599)

INTERVIEWER: This is an Iditarod National Historic Trail interview with Pete Curran, Jr., of Nome, Alaska. The interview was conducted at Pete's home on August 4th, 1980. The interview was conducted for BLM by Tom Beck. This is the second tape in the interview. The first tape is No. 80-07.

(Off record at Log No. 2667)

(Interview concluded)