

YUKON ARCHIVES SOUND RECORDINGS TRANSCRIPT

Title: [Interviews with Mrs. Harry McDonnell and Dick Gillespie by Athol Retallack]
Interviewer: Athol Retallack (AR)
Interviewees: Mrs. Harry McDonnell (MHM)
Dick Gillespie (DG)
Date of Interview: 1961
Location: Dawson City, Yukon
Transcriber: Archivist
Time: 0:07:58
Transcript information in square brackets [] provided by Archivist

Abstract

See <http://yukon.minisisinc.com/scripts/mwimain.dll/144/FIL/LIST/SISN%208064?SESSIONSEARCH>.

Transcript

0:00

MHM: ... everybody in Dawson they could pile onto the train was on it. For the first trip. And there was Billy O'Brien, his wife and their first daughter. They were on there. [pause in recording] Everybody was having a good time.

AR: It was all decorated up with flags?

MHM: Yes it had all kinds of flags and bunting. American and Canadian flags.

0:00:33

AR: Grand Forks [Yukon] was a good sized town in those days wasn't it? How many people would you say were there then?

MHM: Oh, I don't really don't know how many but there must have been 4-5,000 people then at the Forks.

AR: Still there hey?

MHM: Yes, they had five hotels there. Two clothing stores. Telephone office. And they had three telephone operators working. There was two butcher shops.

AR: And there's just nothing left there anymore. Just three cabins that's all.

MHM: There's I think there's about three cabins left.

AR: That's all.

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MHM: And the railroad track is the road now.

AR: Oh yes. Now that's right too. Now you went out on that railway didn't you?

MHM: Yes, I took a trip up on the railroad to go over on Dominion Creek. And he got up to the summit and on the summit there was the buses – there was the stages there. You could go down to Dominion or you could go over to Quartz Creek or down Bonanza.

AR: And you mentioned going over those high trestle bridges.

MHM: Yes, the trestles – instead of going into the gullies, why they built bridges right across.

AR: You said they were very high.

MHM: Cut it off – take and make the route shorter you see because it's almost impossible to go into those gullies.

AR: Yeah.

MHM: And the trestle was very high. And the conductor asked me what I was looking at. I said "Well I'm just looking down, see how far if this train was to topple over, how far we'd fall."

0:02:24

AR: [laughs] They carried great cords of wood didn't they?

MHM: Yes, they – all the wood for the thawing when the Guggenheims opened up – the thawing was all done by wood and the train done all the hauling – all that hauling for the wood. The wood come mostly from over on Dominion and Quartz Creek.

AR: And then they hauled supplies for the miners?

MHM: All the miners got their supplies – the creeks all got their supplies from the summit – railroad. They had their station at the summit there and that's where they unloaded everything and then the stages would take it.

AR: Oh yes. Then they had the station right here in the middle of town, didn't they, right down here?

MHM: Yes.

AR: By the Bank of Commerce wasn't it?

MHM: [agrees]

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AR: Oh yes. Do you remember the last few trips of the train?

MHM: No I don't. I was out on the creeks.

AR: Oh yes.

MHM: And I don't remember.

[pause in recording]

0:03:27

AR: And so three small engines were left at Klondike City [Yukon]. For half a century the weeds grew up around the locomotives and when the road to Klondike City became impassible it looked as though the engines would simply disintegrate. However the Dawson City Museum and Historical Society have been making arrangements to have a locomotive set up here as a tourist attraction. It took considerable planning and preparation to get the engines to Dawson. And Dick Gillespie volunteered his time and equipment to bring one of them over from Klondike City.

[pause in recording]

0:04:01

AR: Dick what preparations did you have to make before bringing the engine over from Klondike City to Dawson?

DG: Well two falls ago we went over and jacked it up. Put her on skids and had her all ready to bring across on the ice. It was – it was the only way we could come over to keep under the wires and stuff but last winter the ice wasn't any good. It was - the water had jammed up and the ice was high and there was only about 10 inches of ice and off the water so we had to let it go until this year. I went down and tested the ice oh about a month ago. There was oh anywhere up to four feet – two, two and a half to four feet – and I knew that was lots.

AR: What would be the minimum ice that you would cross the river on?

DG: About – you know I would like to have about two and a half feet anyway.

AR: How much did this little engine and tender weight? I imagine that even though it doesn't look very big it has quite a bit of weight to it.

DG: I had guessed about 30 tons – I understand now that it was 73,000 pounds.

AR: And that includes the little tender I suppose. How long was the actual haul?

DG: Oh about three quarters of a mile I think.

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AR: And where did you cross over?

DG: Just below the power plant – pretty close to the mouth of the Klondike.

AR: What equipment did you use to make this move?

DG: A D6 and a D7 [Caterpillar].

0:05:50

AR: Are you a little uneasy when you are crossing ice? Is it a job you can get along without let's say?

DG: Oh, yes, I am sure am. I've been gone through the ice with Cats before. One time we went through the ice – the Cat hung up on the ice and it stayed there for three days till we got rigged up to pull on it. As soon as we pulled on it, it dropped right down into 14 feet of water.

AR: Would you get much warning in a case like that?

DG: Sometimes, sometimes not. Sometimes you can see water coming up around you. And other times it just drops right through. Especially if the ice is off the water. You have no warning at all.

AR: What precautions do you take in case of this happening Dick?

DG: I test the ice. Make sure the water is right up under the ice. Drill holes through the ice see how thick it is. The water has to come up near the top of the hole to make good ice.

AR: Oh I see. How long did this whole operation take and what else was involved in doing it?

DG: Well I had to test the ice first. And then I went down with the Cat. Fixed up a road to – so the train wouldn't tip or anything. Filled in all the holes with snow and brush. Built a ramp up onto Front Street. With snow and brush that I could pull the train up. I let it freeze. It doesn't take very long to freeze. Maybe overnight. It turned cold so I let the snow freeze for 10 days I guess before it warmed up enough to start the Cats to bring it over.

AR: So that means that off and on then you worked about two weeks on this whole operation. It was a substantial contribution you made to the Museum and Historical Society. And everyone in Dawson certainly appreciates your generosity. Thank-you very much Dick Gillespie. [pause in recording] This is Athol Retallack in Dawson City.

[end of recording]