

YUKON ARCHIVES SOUND RECORDINGS TRANSCRIPT

Title: [Interview with Mrs. Harry McDonnell by Athol Retallack]
Interviewer: Athol Retallack (AR)
Interviewee: Mrs. Harry McDonnell (MHM)
Date of Interview: 1962
Location: Dawson City, Yukon
Transcriber: Archivist
Time: 0:06:33
Transcript information in square brackets [] provided by Archivist

Abstract

See <http://yukon.minisisinc.com/scripts/mwimain.dll/144/FIL/LIST/SISN%208055?SESSIONSEARCH>.

Transcript

0:00

AR: [intro begin] Mrs. Harry McDonnell, who is 84 years old on Valentine's Day, lives in her snug little log home here in Dawson City [Yukon]. Mrs. MacDonnell came to Dawson from Spokane, Washington in September, 1901 with her five month old son and she tells of her trip down river on the steamboat 'Victoria'. [intro end]

AR: Now how many days were you coming down river Mrs. McDonnell?

MHM: Well, I forget how many days it was coming down river, but we were 13 days and a half from Whitehorse [Yukon] to Dawson. We –the river part was alright but when we got to Lake LaBerge the water was very low and every time the "Victorian" moved she was on a sand bar. There was three steamship companies in Dawson at the time and there was a rate war on and you could go to Whitehorse for \$5. So when we came in why all the mine – claim owners they were coming back. They had spent the summer outside and they were coming back and they were all having a high old time. And after we left Lake LaBerge why the river part was alright but the ice was following us in and when we came through Five Fingers there was a boat going up – I don't remember the name of the boat – but it took when we came through Five Fingers there and the boat going up it took the railing off all of one side of the boat. And we were all frightened to death. So after we got through there why they all celebrated. And we came to Dawson and that was the first house we rented it was a little one room cabin and there was a kind of a wood shed, it was supposed to be the kitchen, it was a packing box there, a big packing box, it had a Yukon stove. I had never seen one before. I did not know how I was going to cook on that. But they, the cabin part itself the only homemade –the only outside furniture was in it was the bed springs and they were set on little blocks and a looking glass.

0:02:48

AR: And that was all the furniture that you had?

MHM: Our chairs they were cream boxes or apple boxes with cretorn [ph] on and your cupboards were your supposed to be a dresser was orange cases and that had cretorn [ph] on. And we had to pay \$65 a

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month for that. Well the place was very cold so we bought a lot and had a house built on it. Three little, three room cottage on Sixth at King. And that cost us to take and build that and furnish it it cost us a little over \$6,000. Well we couldn't couldn't after I come in here we couldn't leave again on the count of the boats the river was full of ice and there was only two boats running and they advised us not to go so we were going to go out over the ice but the warm stowage, the first one that went out, it went over Wounded Moose and went over the summit down the coast and the family that was in there they come pretty near being murdered to death. So we had to stay in that's how we bought a home and I went out in the spring in July and when I went out the first day July the celebration was. And that was the first draft beer they had in Dawson. And my husband he worked for John A. [Johnnie?] Murray [Murry?] in the wholesale liquor house. And the Murray's they lived upstairs over the saloon and I was up there watching the sports. They had horse races. Tug-of-wars. Right down on the main street. And I think everybody from the creeks was in Dawson. The town was just packed and selling that first draft beer and they were just packing that saloon just like sardines.

0:05:14

AR: And then you mentioned that you didn't have very many conveniences when you first came here.

MHM: No there were no conveniences at all. You had to buy your water. That was 25 cents a cola can full and the water man wasn't very particular how he emptied that water. Half of it would be on the floor. And then I did washing. I hung my baby's diapers outside on the line. And they were froze. I took and I folded them up when I came in put them on the kitchen table to take the thaw out. They were in two pieces.

AR: Oh they cracked.

MHM: Yes they cracked. I couldn't cut them any straighter. I had an awful time.

AR: But you feel that life is quite easy now in this day and age Mrs. McDonnell?

MHM: I think that life is wonderful now to what it was in the early days.

AR: In your nice little cottage that you have.

MHM: The cottage is a wonderful and they have everything up to date and lots of people they wonder how in the world that we can live like this. I have told a lot of the tourists well they should have been in here when I came in.

AR: [laughs] Well thank you very much.

[end of recording]