

Cleora Bachner Erickson  
70+ years in Alaska--  
Livengood Stampede  
1 tape

H76-15

Interview by N. Jacobs  
Fairbanks Pioneer Home  
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Tape opens with personal conversation between interviewer and Mrs. Erickson recalling previous acquaintance in Anchorage; establishes that Mrs. Erickson was widowed and remarried Mr. Erickson, and that Mrs. Erickson is the mother of well known Fairbanksan, Jess Bachner, of Bachner's Air Service.

Conversation turns then to Cleora's life in Alaska. She came to Alaska at age four, in 1906. Her father's name was Casady and he ran machinery for mines. Casady came from North Dakota, went to Canada, where he met and married Cleora's mother. The Casady's lived in Canada for 3-4 years then moved to Alaska. Casady came ahead, to Engineer Creek, then Cleora and her mother came up by boat to the Chena River and docked at the N.C.Co. docks. That winter they lived in Slagterville at the edge of the slough.

Cleora recalls that the most fascinating part of Fairbanks to the children was a big drive of livestock: cattle drives from Valdez, herds of sheep, pigs, all driven to town and pouring down Chushman Street then across the bridge and up to Birch Hill. Kids would go out and feed the animals where they were penned at Birch Hill.

There was no cold storage, so the cattle were kept in pens until they were butchered for the market.

Cleora's father abandoned her mother, so her mother worked at any job, waiting tables, etc., until she remarried a Danish man, Jack Nilsson. (sp? Neilson?) In 1915 she made the Livengood Stampede.

Cleora describes going down the Tanana to the Tolovana River. The riverboat hit a snag and sunk, and the women slept on the barge on oak sacks, while the men pitched a tent on the banks of the river.

The Teddy H., piloted by Captain Finger, rescued them and took the passengers on down river. Cleora recalls that Captain Finger swore longer and louder than anyone she had ever heard. She also describes some of the problems the women had because of lack of toilet facilities.

Teddy H left the group on the Tolovana, at a spot dubbed Logjam because of the logs piled up on a big bend in the river.

There was a tram over the logs and carts on wooden rails pulled by horses. People piled the freight along the banks of the river, sacks of beans, groceries, all supplies. Big rains came, the river rose some twenty feet, and then started to recede. Cleora's family and party arrived as the river waters were going down, revealing bags of beans bursting and sprouting, swollen rice, a few dead horses, "the biggest mess imaginable."

The Nilsson party went up the West Fork of the Tolovana and were met by pack horses. Nilsson had built a cabin on a creek--"My Tess" or "My Kiss"?--later on Cleora spoke of Hess Creek--and they made a new life on the Creek and at Livengood. That winter Cleora came into Fairbanks and lived with Clara and Jess Rust to go to school.

Cleora tells about pioneer life in a mining camp: Her mother papered the cabin walls with pages from magazines. When she was bored, Cleora would stand on a milk keg to read the magazine's stories - even if they were upside down.

If pages were missing she made up stories to fit the missing parts. She spent many hours standing on the wooden keg.

To pass the time Cleora hunted rabbits for dog food, picked berries, and staked some claims and panned some gold. She couldn't pan much around the mine at Livengood though, mostly that was at Ester, when they lived on Ester Creek.

Conversation continues on about life at Livengood and a few incidents from this period of her life.

George Bachner was one of several men who would come and play cards in the evening at the Nilsson cabin. A tragedy occurred at George's mine--his partner died when gas entered their shaft and it was impossible to rescue the partner. George was badly shaken by the incident, so Jack took him and the family to a nearby region to prospect. Eventually, George and Cleora were married--when she was about sixteen.

Cleora tells about an unusual coincidence. Thirty years later, in Seattle, at a banquet, they sat next to a man who said he had had a nephew who went to Alaska, long ago. He had always wondered what happened to his nephew. It turned out that his nephew had been George's partner.

Cleora made her first flight with Noel Wien. Her children were frightened--Jess sat next to her in the back seat very rigid, but her two year old girl wanted to climb out of the airplane. Finally, Cleora put her down between her legs and clamped her knees around her neck to keep her in the airplane.

Last half-inch of tape: From Livengood to Fairbanks, the Bachner's build a two-story house on Eighth Avenue where the children grew up. Jess died in the 1960's. They had known

Arne Erickson for many years--Arne came to Alaska in 1909-- and after Jess died Cleora and Arne decided to "pool their old age."

Erickson had a stroke in March, 1974, leaving him speechless and in a wheel chair; he was present during the interview and appeared to understand all that was going on. In an attempt to help he occasionally moved about the room in his wheel chair, which motorized, creates some background noise.

Cleora suffers from Parkinson's disease and is on medication which causes a hesitancy in speech, but her mind is clear and the most interesting interview reveals this.

Series: Tanana Yukon Historical Society