

KENNECOTT KIDS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH

JAMES B. BEANS, SR.

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Interview Conducted By

Logan Hovis

National Park Service

Alaska Regional Office

Anchorage, Alaska

(tape 1, side 1)

Hovis: Good morning Mr. Beans..

Beans: What's that?

Hovis: Good morning.

Beans: Good morning.

Hovis: The tape recorder is running so everything you say will be recorded on the tape and available to other people who might be interested in using it.

Beans: I know.

Hovis: Would you tell me your full name please?

Beans: James B. Beans.

Hovis: And you live? Where is your current residence?

Beans: What?

Hovis: Where do you live now?

Beans: My mind is a little haywire. I can't think of the word when I want it. Mobile home.

Hovis: Okay.

Beans: In a mobile home park up in the high desert east of Los Angeles.

Hovis: I understand you are 94 years old.

Beans: What?

Hovis: You are 94 years old?

Beans: I was born October 30, 1895 in Colorado. No, at (?) City, Kansas.

Hovis: You worked at Kennecott in the 1920s?

Beans: Oh, it was - I don't know, when did I leave, Jim, was it in '26? [Jim is James B. Beans, Jr.]

Beans, Jr.: No, you left in '27. I was born in '26.

Beans: I was here three years.

Hovis: What did you do when you were here?

Beans: Well, I worked in the leaching plant mostly.

Hovis: What did you do while you worked in the leach plant?

Beans: Well, I can't think of the name of the thing they were doing in there, but the last year I was shift boss.

Hovis: What did you do as a shift boss?

Beans: Well, they had four or five men working under me there in the leaching plant and the manager would come down every morning to see that everything was running all right.

Hovis: What would you do on an average day when you were at work?

Beans: Well, worked eight hours, three shifts a day, an eight hour day. The only time the leaching plant shut down as I remember, was Christmas. The rest of the time we were (?). In order for the shift boss to get a vacation, we had to work - well, we worked eight hours a day, we would work 16 hours, two of us and one other fellow would be off, see. So, every summer we took a two week vacation by working double shifts that way.

Hovis: Would be some very long days, wouldn't it.

Beans: Yeah. It was a nice vacation.

Hovis: Where would you go on your vacations?

Beans: Well, I had two of them and we went over to the island, we called it. The mountain over here that splits the glacier.

Hovis: Donaho Peak?

Beans: I don't remember the name of it. But we went over there and spent a week. We would kind of share an old cabin in there and we had a tent of our own. We spent the week there.

Hovis: Who would go with you?

Beans: My wife, children.

Hovis: Were you married when you came to Kennecott?

Beans: Yes.

Hovis: Where did you and your wife live here in the camp?

Beans: Before we came here?

Hovis: In the camp.

Beans: In the camp?

Hovis: Yes.

Beans: Well, we got a kind of tent house. It was (?) once and then they made a house out of it and it's right up there on the hill. I haven't found it yet because it's all overgrowth in there. Somebody said the foundation is still there, the tent had been taken down on the house.

Hovis: How big was the tent or the house?

Beans: Oh, about as big as this room and they just roll larger. One (?) was kind of divided off for a bedroom and we had a kitchen to one side and the bedroom had the big fire stove in it, about the size of a barrel. We used to keep it burning pretty well.

Hovis: Was it comfortable?

Beans: Huh?

Hovis: Was it a comfortable place to live?

Beans: Any place is comfortable if you make it that way. Used to shoot rabbits and my wife would tan the hides and you'd make it a big fur robe for over the bed. Jimmy there, he had, what do you call it, alongside the bed or along over the one side and she made him a robe. My daughter, she made her clothes for her. I got a lot of pictures. He's got them, he can show them to you.

Hovis: Okay.

Beans: Yeah, we had a pretty good time. We got out and hiked around. There's another valley over here, we went over there one day and next morning I was

coming out and we met a fellow on the road. At first he thought he had found some (?) who went wild and went over there. He had seen the fire, our fire place, and he was coming down to see if it wasn't him. He wanted to know if I had been bothered and I told him no. He found this other house over there and he had been in it, just to look it over. He was a miner, must have been a miner sitting over there.

Hovis: This would have been over in McCarthy Creek?

Beans: What?

Hovis: McCarthy Creek, the next valley over?

Beans: I don't know what's over there. We went back up to the (?) and away over that way.

Hovis: Was it usual for shift bosses to have their families here?

Beans: What?

Hovis: Did most of the shift bosses have their wives and family here?

Beans: Well, it's been 60 years ago and I can't tell you much about it. They were good fellows, I know that. That's about all I remember about them. We didn't have too much intercourse here. We kind of kept to ourselves. We had a picture show, if I remember right, once a week and a dance about once a month. It's all gone away now, but they was all down there below the shack. The yard men - go through the yard and then you go up (?) they spent most of their (?) keeping that skating rink open so we could skate. They used to have games there and we skated. He's got some pictures of my wife and me skating out there. And I had a pair of skis. The road run up to our house, back up the hill here where the woods - and went up in September and brought it down for us in the winter so we would have it in the winter. I used to go to the top and try to get down. It was about half a (?) long, and I never made the (?) without going over. I had a spill or two. That was on my skis.

Hovis: Did you work seven days a week? And you still found time to go skiing?

Beans: Yeah, we had to work, we only worked eight hours, and then we had the rest of the day to kill. And we figured we had to find something amusing, you know, (?) a friend down skating or something like that.

Hovis: Who would you go skating with, people who worked in the mill or with (?)?

Beans: Yeah, it was all mill, there was nobody from the mines here. In fact, the guys in the mines, they used to let them come down on the cables and then someone got hurt coming down and they wouldn't let them ride the cables down anymore and they spent their off time up there.

Hovis: How did he get hurt riding the cable down?

Beans: I don't know. I don't remember. I just remember there was an accident that they kept anybody from the mine coming down on the cable after that. He got tangled up some way, I don't remember just how.

Hovis: Did you ever go up to the mines?

Beans: Never but once. (?) boss of the mine up there, I went up there. I walked up there and the boss took me down in the mine and showed me around. I been around - my father worked at the coal order - he was - in Kansas, the coal mines. And he looked after the mills. They only had - the mills, you know the kind of cars they had and he would (?) did all kind of work, took care of the mill. When they wanted a car pulled out of a tip over, why, he would go up across there and pull the car out of the tip over. Coal mining is altogether different from here though. In the coals mines you take a shaft down to the bay. The bay is about a 30 degree angle like that and then they've got a tunnel under and car tunnels up all along and put (?). The miner would shovel the coal into this bay and the coal would roll down to the place at the bottom where they would load the cars. And this one they were running up here was altogether different. They showed me - brought up - they have a turn on the cars like they do in the coal mine but instead of running a tunnel or that they just cave it all in. The little while I went up there it must have been 50 or 60 feet high and that much across and the miners would mine the

side and they closed all old areas. Ore was all rolled down to the bottom where they would load it and haul it out. So they had to haul it up to the shaft and the shaft would take it up and dump it in the car and it came down the cable, the car that came down the hill. It's about three miles I think up there, the cable was from the main mine to the pail head.

Hovis: Have you worked in the mines all your life?

Beans: Oh, I've done everything. The last 20 years of my work I worked in a cement plant. I was working in a plant in Richmond, northern Richmond, and they went on strike. I had worked there about six months and I never got much involved in it but my father was. He was working at this coal mine, there were mostly (?) that worked there. They were all strong union men and they called a - he didn't belong to the union. He was the only man that didn't belong and they called a strike because Dad couldn't join the union. And after about three or four days the manager of the mine told him to go ahead and join. But during that time, my uncle run the country store right across from the school yard and I'd go up and (?) until the school bell rang because as soon as I got on the yard, all the people in there would begin to call, "scab, scab" and so I got (?). In fact, I worked at several places where they'd break a strike. (?) I'd work at loading ships (inaudible) they threw rocks at us and everything else (?) loading the ships.

Hovis: Was there ever any trouble with the union here at Kennecott when you were here?

Beans: Well, I don't know (?) I don't think they had a union here. I don't remember anything about a union anyway.

Hovis: Was this a good place to work?

Beans: Very good place at the mill here. They treated us wonderfully well. But the people in the mine didn't get down here as easy and in the winter they was all penned up up there. They would come out of the mine and stayed at the bunkhouse, it was almost like being in prison. Somebody told me that part of the bunkhouse was over the glacier up there, I don't know.

Hovis: It is.

Beans: I know that every spring why there would be 50 or 60 of them that quit and then they'd send these - they'd hire men in Los Angeles and all down there and send a bunch of them up. There was about 40 of them come up in our bunch. I was working in a coal mine down there then and I was tired of that. The coal mine down there worked in the winter and in the summer, why, it was kind of a hit or miss job. In the summer I'd get a job (?) roads or something like that. But it was getting near spring and I was getting tired of the coal mine and you got to have a job right along. I got to talking to one of the men, he told me he had hired out to come up here to Alaska. (?) and came up before he got here. There was about 40 in the bunch I came in.

Hovis: Did Kennecott have a hiring hall down in Los Angeles?

Beans: Well, not a hiring hall. They had this office (?). I went in and signed up to come up here. I started out as a laborer. I only worked half a day as a laborer. The boss - he run their - I don't remember too much about it but they had some kind of a power plant - you drug this stuff out, waste stuff that they didn't want to get it out of the way and dumped it all over where the glacier is. And I run that for a while.

Beans, Jr.: Dad, you came up from Seattle, not from Los Angeles.

Beans: Oh, yeah. I've been telling you about Los Angeles, but it was really Seattle. That's where (?). My memory is kind of - after 90 years, why, it comes and it goes. I can't even give my home address every once in a while. I have to wait and fool around with it. It doesn't come to mind.

Hovis: Does walking around Kennecott jog your memory? Does it bring back any special memories or anything particularly interesting to you?

Beans: About wore me out. I'm living in the high desert now. In the winter it's all cold and we have all kinds of wind and snow and everything and I live in the house and the only walk I had that winter was down to the mail box and back. They have a

bunch of mail boxes up in the middle of the - what do I want to say?

Beans, Jr.: The mobile home court.

Beans: Oh, the mobile home court, yeah. There are about 50 houses there. I bought one and I've lived there by myself for two years and a half. And so my physical health is pretty badly shot right now. I took this trip down to McCarthy and it pretty near wore me out.

Hovis: When you worked here, did you ever go down to McCarthy?

Beans: The three years I was here I was never in McCarthy.

Hovis: Amazing. You would buy everything through the company store that you needed?

Beans: Everything. Any furniture you wanted, they'd sell you and when you left they'd buy back at 20 percent discount. Didn't need much furniture in that little house. Our groceries and everything like that we bought there.

Hovis: Did you do a lot in your little house to make it comfortable, did you build anything there?

Beans: No, we didn't do anything. It was comfortable. We had kind of a (?) as long as we kept a stove.

Hovis: Did Kennecott provide the fire wood for you?

Beans: Well, it provided. I expect they charged us for it. I can't tell you that, I don't remember about that. But we had to haul the wood (?). They brought it down in the summer and I think we paid for it all right, they charged us a fair rate. In the three years I was here I saved about \$3,000. My wife was away from home with her folks and (?). I planned to quit and go back down to the states and we were six months planning our trip and by the time we planned the trip I lost interest and wanted to stay, but she wanted to go home, so we went (?).

Hovis: Your wife had two children while you lived here. Is that correct?

Beans: Well, see, Jimmy was born here and Neona was about three years and a half, four years old I reckon when we left. Isn't that about right, Jim?

Beans, Jr.: Well, Neona was born in Seattle, six months before Mom came up here. And we left when I was six months old, so she was two years old when we left. We left in July of '27 and you got up here about the same time in '25.

Hovis: Did your wife come with you and your daughter when you first came up, or did they follow later?

Beans: No, they came about a month and a half later. I came up here in May and (?) well, I don't know, it was about a month and a half. I rented this (?), it was the only house left and I managed to get in it and she came up here.

Hovis: You said you managed to save approximately \$3,000. Did the company act as a bank for you, or did you have that just as cash hidden in the...?

Beans: Well, I don't remember too much. Our savings we sent to a savings bank in Seattle. The company didn't (?) or anything like that. They were very good. They had a card room here somewhere. There was always a card game going. The only hard part was you had to go down there to lose your money. As I remember, the first three or four days after pay day, why, everybody was in there gambling.
(inaudible)

Hovis: Were you a good card player?

Beans: What?

Hovis: Were you a good card player?

Beans: No, I lost a little too but not too much.

Hovis: Was your son born in the hospital here or in the house?

Beans: He was born in the hospital. They had a nice hospital here for their employees. They had good doctors and good nurses and everything there. They treated us fine as far as treatment goes.

Hovis: That was free of charge?

Beans: Pardon?

Hovis: Did you have to pay for using the hospital?

Beans: Oh, I know we must have. I don't remember. It was nothing unreasonable, I mean, they only charged reasonable rates. They treated us good.

Hovis: Did you enjoy working in the leach plant?

Beans: As much as anything. I'm kind of a hit and miss man. I've done about everything. Well, see, on the mines, machines. When I left here, I went to visit her folks and lived at, what was it. It was two miles out of Dallas. And I got the idea then of - around here, when I was here, every spring, there used to be a bunch of prospectors and they would buy their stuff and pack it in to where they was prospecting. It would take them a month to pack all the groceries and things in with them see. So they had to pack it ways and come back and get it and it would take them a month because their food and all the stuff they needed to prospect to get into their prospect place. And when I got down there, I then, of course, got interested in planes and I got the idea of buying a plane and coming up here and getting a (?) passenger plane see. And there are lakes all over this country and take these prospectors to some lake a little closer to the (?). So I borrowed a plane and learned to fly and took my brother-in-law and he took his lessons too and he'd fly, that was in Dallas, Texas.

Hovis: Did you bring your plane back up here?

Beans: No, we never got here. I run out of money and I had to make some money to go ahead with it so I bought a car from my father, if I remember right, and started out - oh, where was it, out - I worked about six months at a mine. I hadn't been out there but two or three weeks and before we left we took the plane to store it in a big garage there and my brother he got the idea of - he wasn't used to flying so he went back and put the plane together and went out and took this trip and coming back he wrecked the plane. Fell about a hundred feet and tore his plane all up and broke his nose and was in the hospital for a week or two. So that was my idea of bringing the plane up here.

Hovis: Did you continue flying after that in other planes?

Beans: No, that was the amount of my flying. I went on to Los Angeles and got a job out there, out of (?) for a while. I got acquainted with this fellow that was running a school for welders and I had my brother send the engine out - this was a war plane, a Canadian plane - and I had him send the engine out and I traded the engine to the welding man for a course in welding. And I spent about a month or so to become a welder in his shop and weld, see. And then I got a job with East Tool Company, welding tool bins. They were the height of that door over there. I worked for East Tool for a year in Los Angeles. Then the oil business became a haywire and we had 45 welders working there and in six months the only welder left was the foreman. He was (?). So that ended my welding there and I got a job welding for a - oh, what was the name of it - a company that, oh, I don't know. They make all this kind of rock. They install the rock all around the buildings and do things like that. I worked there about a year.

Hovis: When you worked at Kennecott, do you remember many Japanese people here?

Beans: Japanese? I don't think there was a Japanese in the place. I don't remember any.

Hovis: I am just curious, because down in the graveyard there are two Japanese people buried.

Beans: I don't remember any.

Hovis: Anything about Kennecott that really stands out in your mind that you would like to say?

Beans: Well, not except that I enjoyed it a lot. I liked everybody and things of that sort. A very nice - the only enjoyment that you had was hiking and things like that and skating. They had a tennis court too. We used to play tennis. The tennis court was up there (?) some where. I don't know, things like that. (?) and all that sort of stuff (?). There's a big jack rabbit here and we'd go out before the snows and boy, there would be rabbits everywhere. They all turn white, see. They turn white like the pelican does, or the - what kind of a bird is it that...

Hovis: The ptarmigan?

Beans: Huh?

Hovis: Ptarmigan?

Beans: Ptarmigan, yeah. And we used to hunt them. I hunted a bear a time or two but I was always kind of leery whether I found one or not. I never did happen to find one. On a vacation over at the island you could see where a big white bear had rubbed on the tree. You know, they get up and rub the tree to clean their fur or something. I was always trying to find one of those but I was half afraid to find one.

Hovis: What was it like walking across the glacier ice to get to the island?

Beans: Well, it wasn't too bad. It had a kind of a trail you had to stake a rope along (?). The first day my wife come up here, I always said I'd show her the glacier. The glacier then was about, oh, I don't know, a hundred feet high right there, a regular - it was just a stream down there, see. And then this glacier up there and we climbed up on top of it and I was showing her around and I didn't know much about glaciers and I was walking ahead of her and all the stuff beneath me all gave way at once and I started falling. I threw my hands out and I broke into...

(tape 1, side 2)

Beans: I probably would if the men (?) very long.

Hovis: You know, you would have been dead.

Beans: What?

Hovis: When you left there, where did you go?

Beans: Well, I was telling you we went to visit her folks in Dallas. And then from there on, I already told you what happened.

Hovis: Did you ever think you might come back to Kennecott to work again?

Beans: Oh, not especially, no. I was always too busy just making a living.

Hovis: Was it good money here?

Beans: What?

Hovis: Did you get paid more here than in other jobs in the lower 48?

Beans: Well, I don't really remember. I don't know. I know that in three years I saved about \$3,000 and then I was set back in the (?) and I'm not sure (?).

Hovis: Unless there is anything else you'd like to say, I thank you very much. Is there anything that you might like to jog his memory?

Beans, Jr.: No, he's talked about most of the stuff that we talked to (?) about.

Hovis: Thank you very much Mr. Beans. I appreciate your time. Thank you.

(end of interview)