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Charlie Creamer

Neville Abbott Jacobs, narrator and interviewer

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Neville Jacobs said Charlie Creamer is a familiar figure in every Golden Days parade. Old timers recall the fine dairy products delivered to their doorsteps. In 1968 the Creamer dairy finally closed when they were unable to compete with stateside dairy products. Charlie Creamer will talk about the dairy business as well as his life as a boy in Alaska. Creamer was born in 1889 in Weaverville, California. His father was a stage driver in northern California about the time the Juneau gold mines were being developed. Creamer talks about how his father came to Alaska and brought his family. Creamer said his father drove a stage between Redding and Weaverville. His uncle from Colorado was married to his father's sister, Emma. His uncle had heard about Juneau and convinced his father to go up with him. They left the family at home and headed for Juneau. The Dawson stampede started when they were in Juneau. They got six horses from Seattle and ran three teams of horses and ran them between Dyea and Chilkoot Pass. They did this work for about two years and in 1899 the White Pass Railroad was about finished and they sold their stock. He talked about the ship, the Clara Nevada, his uncle and aunt were on that exploded and killed all on board except one. His father carried on the business in Dyea. Creamer talked about Soapy Smith who was just like a Chicago gangster. Smith's gang was on the trail and ran some schemes. Creamer remembers the gang trying to get to Dyea and the people of the town wouldn't let them come in. Creamer's sister needed medical care so the family moved down to Tacoma. His father then returned to Dyea and then on to Dawson. Charlie's father worked with Fred Noyes at his sawmill business. When gold was discovered in the Fairbanks area they set up a saw mill on the banks of the Chena River where the Wendell Street bridge now exists. In 1904 Charlie's father sent for the family.

Creamer said they came up to Skagway and then took the boat to Tanana. Then they came up to Fairbanks. It was about a two week trip. From Skagway they took the railway and then took the boat at Whitehorse down to Dawson. They took a big steamer to Fort Gibbon. They took the steamer Tanana to Fairbanks.

In 1905 several companies were bringing in cattle into Fairbanks and he started herding for them. They used to bring them on the White Pass and then a boat to Circle. One year they took a herd from Valdez. They traveled about nine or ten miles a day. When they got to the Tanana River they went out to meet them. The cook was an Englishman and when crossed the river his horse quit him. The cook grabbed a

tail of one of the steers and it brought him to the shore. From the Tanana River they herded them into Fairbanks. Creamer questioned why they couldn't raise cattle in Alaska. One of the cattle men told him that there would never be cattle raised in Alaska outside of the Aleutians. Creamer said he was right. Downer and Gardner shipped in cattle, sheep and hogs. Cow Miller ran one of the cattle companies. Creamer talked about Jack Dalton. One time he brought in two year old cattle and they didn't do well. Creamer worked with a butcher named Champagne Bill. Creamer talked about Champagne Bill who later married a widow with two children. He talked about the number of animals they butchered. In 1910 a cold storage company started shipping in frozen beef and the cattle drives stopped. Jacobs said Creamer went into business running the bowling lanes for the California Saloon. Creamer enlisted in WWI. He then worked for the Alaska Railroad. He moved into Washington and raised chickens. In 1927 he decided to return to Alaska. Charlie Fowler promised him a job on a ditch. His brother-in-law was running the Hinckley Dairy and decided to retire. They wanted Charlie to take it over. He couldn't get a loan from the bank. He got a loan from a friend. The dairy had 327 acres. There were 12 cows. With his wife they started working. At one time he had 212 head of cattle. When they changed from a territory to a state the farmers had to go. After 40 years in the business he built up a dairy. He doubts there will ever be a dairy in Fairbanks again. His dairy was known for its products. People liked their ice cream which was 12% fat. When Creamer started running his dairy Charlie Slater had 18 head of cattle. Slater wanted to get out of the business and wanted Creamer to buy his cattle. He kept the best cows. Burchard, Mitchell and others had cows and eventually sold to Creamer. Busby came to Creamer with cattle. Creamer went to Bentley and told him to take half the cattle. There were two dairies at one time until Bentley quit. During the winter they kept their cattle in a barn. The cattle kept the barn warm. They had to run a fan in the winter to take out some of the heat. At first he fed them grain, dairy feed and hay. The last ten years he fed them mostly silage. He talked about learning how to run a dairy from his early years.

Creamer's Field had geese come back every year in the spring. People in Fairbanks felt so strongly about the geese in the fields they acquired part of Creamer's land for a game preserve when Creamer sold the dairy. Creamer said when he first got the dairy only about a hundred geese came to the fields. He used to run a manure spreader every day and this attracted the geese. The geese kept increasing. One year he had 12,000 ducks and geese. He said now they put a platform on the road for the people to watch the geese and ducks from the road. He said the geese won't continue to return because the grain was no longer there and the geese would go down to the university farm. Jacobs said besides geese there are other wildlife at the dairy. Creamer said at one time Fish and Wildlife brought in a moose calf. He took one of his gentle cows and squirted milk for the moose calf. The calf did take the cow teat and he was so tall he had to get down on his knees to get milk. After about a week he was getting stronger. One day the cow turned around and smelled the moose calf and started kicking. He had to put the moose calf on a bottle after that. Creamer's daughter became pals with the moose calf and played with him. She was heartbroken when the calf grew up and the Fish and Wildlife took the calf down to Mt. McKinley Park for the tourists to enjoy. Creamer said on Farmer's Loop Road there was a fox that followed him as he swept hay into windrows. The fox ate so many mice that it passed out. Jacobs said Creamer owned his successful dairy for 40 years.