

[The Lure of Gold]

Dup.

FORM A

Folklore Circumstances of Interview

Washington

Nat Honig

Seattle, Washington

December, 1938

"The Lure of Gold", etc.

1. Dr. Kristian Falkenberg, 426 Republic Bldg., Seattle, Wn.
2. December 16, 1938
3. 426 Republic Bldg.
4. Honig
5. None
6. Optometrist's office. Folklore FORM B Personal History of Informant

Washington

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Library of Congress

Seattle, Washington

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“The Lure of Gold”, etc.

1. Norwegian
2. Unobtainable
3. Unobtainable
4. Chicago, 1893-1896; Alaska, 1897-1905; Chicago, 1905; Seattle, 1905 to date.
5. Unobtained.
6. Prospector in Alaska, optometrist
7. Optometrist
8. Chieftain, Alaska-Yukon Pioneers; Past Arctic Chief, Camp Rampart No. 15, Arctic Brotherhood of Alaska; President Norwegian Commercial Club; Treasurer, Washington State Fraternal Congress.
9. Distinguished of bearing, but rough-hewn type; speaks with slow, but slight Norwegian accent.
10. Dr. Falkenberg is one of five survivors of those who took the “back-door” route (the Edmonton Trail) into Alaska dozing the 1898 gold rush. The trip took 22 months from Chicago to Dawson — it now can be covered by air travel in the same number of hours.

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It is hard to believe what we would go through for the lure of gold, but the hardships many of the prospectors went through to reach Alaska in the days of the gold rushes show what men would do for a chance at a lucky strike.

I know because I am one of the three known survivors of the ones who came to Alaska the hard way-by the Edmonton trail. I will tell it as it happened.

One warm Sunday morning in 1897 I opened up the Chicago Tribune (I lived in Chicago then) and read about the rich gold strike at Dawson. A friend, a young fellow named Dietrich, came along riding on a bicycle. He said "I sure would strike out for Dawson if it wasn't for my right hand being crippled. "That put the first idea in my head.

A friend of Dietrich named [Mohn?] already was fired with the idea of striking out for Alaska, and said he had arranged to go with another Norwegian named John [Sejersted?]. He invited me to go along with them.

We bought an outfit of 500 pounds of bacon, 500-pounds of hardtack, coffee, tea, dried fruit, etc. We bought eight thoroughbred Scotch collie dogs from Robert Lincoln, Abe's oldest son. While the dogs were high grade, yet it proved we were perfect Chechakos, to take that kind of dogs, which were not used to the cold climate, as we later found out.

We planned to go by way of Skagway and Chilcoot pass, but heard of the terrific snow slide at Dyer, so we changed our plans and decided on the Edmonton-Athabasca-MacKenzie River route.

We left Chicago September 15. We built a boat at Edmonton, and hauled it and our supplies by wagon from there to Athabasca landing, where we arrived October 1. We loaded our boat and started down the river that night.

Not being used to river travel, we got stuck on most of the sandbars in that crooked river. That evening we camped on the river bank and crawled into our sleeping bags. We were

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surprised next morning to find two inches of snow in 2 our sleeping bags. We started down the river again, hitting the sand bars as before. We probably would have had to stay there if the noble hearted Indian river pilot Alex Kennedy had not come along with a large raft and hauled us off the last bar. He piloted us 125 miles to Pelican River, where we camped that winter, hunting, trapping and prospecting.

Prospecting was kind of disappointing, as we expected to find gold on top of the ground. The fact is, we were worried about the price of gold dropping before we got to Dawson. That winter our nearest neighbor was forty miles away.

Shortly after the river froze up Mohn returned home and Sejersted and I remained. The two of us left Pelican River May 28, 1898. From Grand Forks on the Athabasca River we went to Fort McMurray, a distance of 87 miles. There were twelve rapids, some very rough and swift, but we were lucky to have Alex Kennedy as our pilot.

We sailed across Lesser Slave Lake to Slave River, into Great Slave Lake to Fort Resolution, across Great Slave Lake (120 miles) to Fort Providence and down the MacKenzie River to Fort Simpson; where Mr. [Camsel?] was factor for the Hudson Bay Company. On June 28 we started up Liard River, pulling our boat against that swift current. Our toughest spots on that river were Hell's Gate and Devil's Portage.

Sejersted and I had a good outfit but we separated on September 15. I took in John Green, an old Chicago sailor, as my new partner. He had lost his entire outfit when his boat capsized in the river.

We camped at Fort Halkett on October 9, 1898. I spent nearly every day that winter hunting from daybreak to nearly dark. Green didn't feel strong enough to go through to Dawson but decided on going by way of the Stikine River and Wrangell. I put 315 pounds in a hand sled and on March 15, 1899 started off alone; arriving at Dease River Post four days later - a distance of 96 miles. 3 There I joined three Scotchmen - George Anderson, Forbes, and Johnson. We left on March 26 for [Polly?] Banks. George and I pulled 500

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pounds each on a hand sled, traveling ten miles each day. We built a boat at Polly Banks, arriving at Dawson July 8, 1899.

After twenty-two months the only thing I had left in the way of clothing was what I stood in — an old felt hat, flannel shirt, woolen socks, and Indian sash for a belt, and Indian moccasins. I must have been quite a sight, for Mr. Burke, reporter for the “Klondike Nugget”, was bound to take my picture.

Twenty-two months travel to find gold— so I know what man will go through for the lure of gold. Today the only two survivors of those who took the Edmonton trail, besides myself, are John S. Mackay, past president of the Yukoners of Vancouver, British Columbia, and Dr. Ralph S. Quimby, an optometrist.

To give you an idea of the ways of the prospectors, take the case of Joe Kaminsky. In March, 1903, no gold had yet been found around Fairbanks. Joe Kaminsky washed out twelve dollars on Gold Stream. No one could believe Joe had washed out the gold there, but I was sure of it, for Joe paid me twelve dollars to go over to the blacksmith's shop and make a plain ring from that particular twelve dollars worth of gold dust. It was worth the money for him to have the souvenir of the first gold washed out in the Fairbanks district.

In Fairbanks I met a prospector's wife who wore a locket containing coarse gold, which her husband had found above Emma Creek.