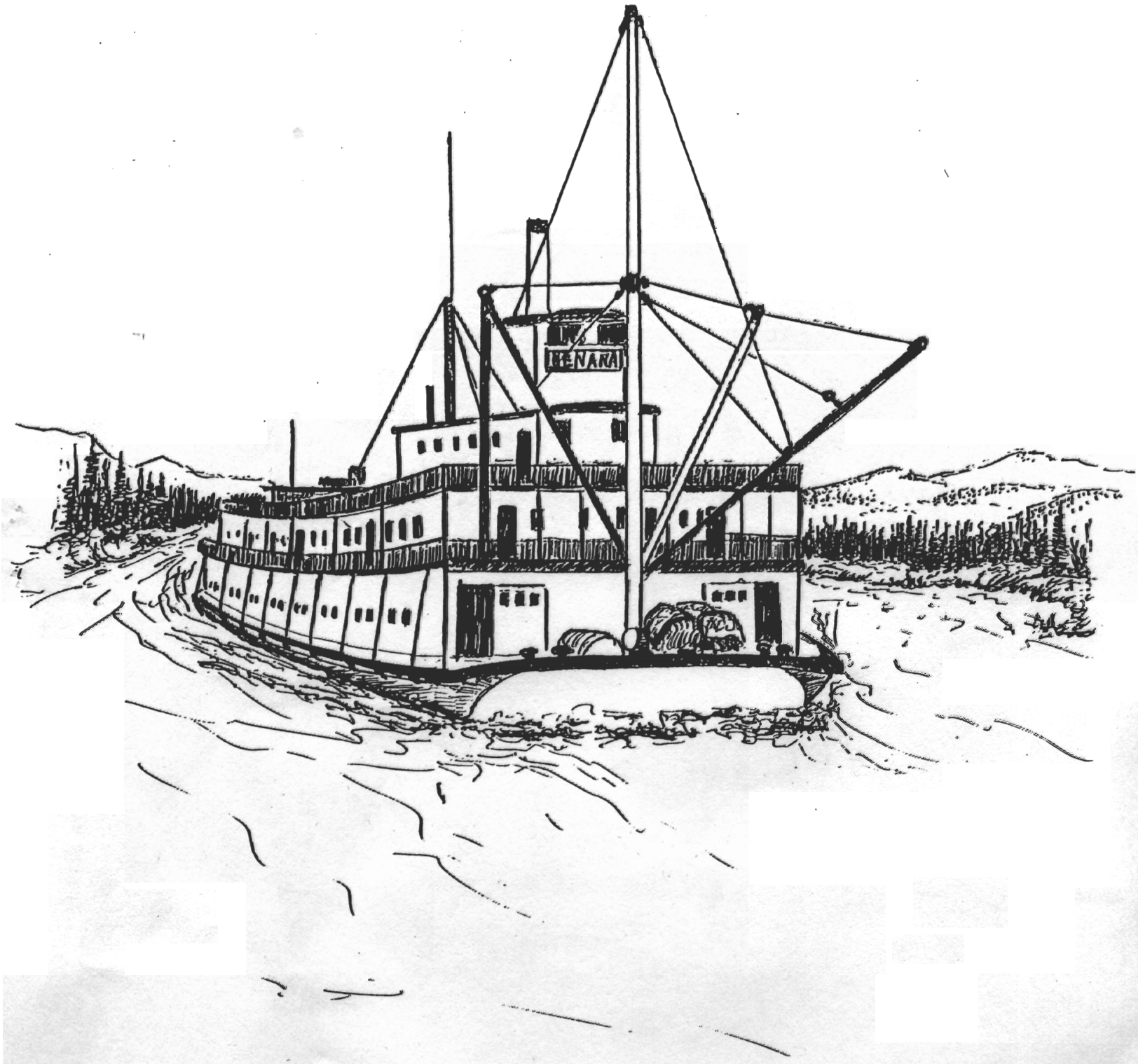
MEMOIRS OF GEORGE L. KEYS

18 years old


NARA

GEORGE L. KEYS HISTORY

os Angeles
1899

My father, Em Keys, went to Alaska in 1896 with the gold stampede. He wound up in the Circle City District, and then, a year later he went on to the Dawson Stampede and landed on Bonanza Creek. Mother's brother, Ben Lesher, was with him. Ben's wife Cadelia was living with us in Los Angeles. Dad sent money to Mother for Cadelia to join her husband in Dawson. But, Mother took the money and bought tickets for all of us to go to Alaska or Dawson City.

Our family consisted of; Mother, Cadelia, Ed Keys, George Keys, and Ralph Keys. Ed was 14 years old, George 8 years, and Ralph was 4 years old.

The stampede was still on and it was hard to get tickets, but we all arrived in 1899. In Skagway, we got on the White Pass Railroad. It was not finished, so we switched to horsedrawn wagons on wooden rails. The rails played out before we got to White Horse City so we walked the rest of the way. The river steamers were nearly all loaded but Mother finally got berths on "Clifford Sifton." We were all in our little state room when the purser came and told Mother the boat had been sold and we would have to hunt another boat. She found another boat. We finally arrived in Dawson City, and Dad met us at the shore on the Yukon. The steamer tied up right at the banks as there wasn't any docks. He had a dog team and a cart for our baggage and took us up to his city home on Duke Street. We stayed a few days in this little cabin, then started for the claim that Dad had on 31 Below Bonanza Creek. Dad had a new cabin. It was 10 miles away and no road, just a trail through the mud, and of course Ralph, being only 4 years old, had to be carried. A man by the name of French John came along and saw Dad carrying Ralph. French John said that he would take Ralph on the horse. That sure was nice of him to do that. But that was the way it was in the early days; people helped one another.

When we arrived at Dad's gold mine, it was real exciting. I learned to pan gold. I could make $12.00 a day but we couldn't buy anything as there was no stores close by, and the gold didn't look like money to us kids, so we lost interest in panning for the gold. Dad had a dog team; Prince, Buster, and Queenie. Queenie had pups. Ralph and I had fun with them. I cleaned out a squirt oil can, tied a rag around the spout and then filled it with milk.

Of course, it had to be canned Eagle Brand milk. Then we would squirt the milk into them. They sure liked that, but Dad got wise to what us kids were doing, so he put a stop to that. Today, I don't see how Mother did all the work and took care of us kids. She also baked bread for sale to the miners. The claim didn't have too much gold, so we all had to work. There was no drinking water in the winter, so I brought the snow in and put it in a big tank behind the stove. That was our drinking and cooking water.

There was no school. We ran wild when we were not working. Dad ~~wore~~ worked this claim out. So we had to move to one on Monte Christo Hill.

Our parents had sent for Mother's Dad. He and I became great friends. He was 73 years old, but the climate was a little too much for him, so he went back to Los Angeles to live with one of his sons, Jake Lesher. Dad's partner was Ben Lesher, and Ben's wife had a baby boy, Albert Lesher. We had never seen a baby before, so we were invited in to see him. He was laying down naked. He sure looked so small and cute. All at once, a fountain of water squirted up. Our Aunt threw a cover over him. Us kids sure got a kick out of that.

There were no schools, so Mother and Dad got a neighbor, Mrs. Kellers, to teach us kids. We sure loved her. Other mothers had their kids going to school with us. Finally, so many children came, that she couldn't handle it any more. One thing I remember very clearly, was that she had a tea party every afternoon. The sugar was in an open sack (100 lbs) as she didn't have any bins. Her tomcat took a leak right on the top, and it went down through the whole sack of sugar. The whole sack was ruined, but she couldn't throw it away as she could not get any more. After that, we didn't like out tea party so much.

Dad and Mother went to the Canadian government to see about getting a school. The Govenor told them that if Dad got a building and a place for the teacher to live in, they could have their school. So Dad did that. We had a school, we didn't like that so much.

onanza Creek
1903

My oldest brother, Edward, was 6 years older than I was. He had a case on our teacher and Ralph and I were jealous of him, so we tried everything we could think of to stop him. He was going to take her for a cutter ride, that

is a horse and sled. We were so mad about that. We sure didn't want him to take her, so we hid his cap, mittens, and coat. He had to call it off and were we happy.

We built an out door shower. Ed was in their having a shower one day. Ralph and I bombarded it with stove wood until it fell to pieces.

I was to a skating party. On the way home, I was going along by myself and came to a fire by the road. It was a big one and I thought I would get warmed up a little. Suddenly, the fire blew up and I had a lot of horse manure on me. I ran home. As Mother was cleaning me up, she said, "I don't think you're worth it." What really happened was this horse was killed, and the owner was burning him up.

There was a log shoot up the hill, where logs came a whizzing down. I always wanted to go up and see where the logs came from, but Dad said, no, that it was too dangerous. So, one Sunday I thought no one would be up there, and it would be a good time to go up and see. I was crawling up on my hands and knees, when a log came a spinning down, and hit me on my head and knocked me out. A miner near by picked me up and took me to his cabin. I soon came to, but never told Dad about it.

e Christo
ill 1903

One summer, on top of King Solomon Hill, I saw a big canvas flume hose that carried water for a mining operation down over the brow of the hill. It looked inviting to run on, so I jumped on and was having a great time, when all at once, it busted. I was scared, I thought at first of running home, but remembered that Mother always said, "If you get into trouble, always tell the truth." So, I went over the hill where all the men were idle on account of no water, and asked for the boss. I told him I busted the hose. He was really mad, and made a grab for me and I thought, why did I ever tell him the truth. He said, no, he wouldn't lick me, because I had come back and told them what happened.

One of our men, Glen was his first name, got scared of our mine and went to work at another mine on top of the hill. It was quite steep and they used a cage to get gravel to the top of the sluice and get gold out. One day, the cage got caught in the shaft and broke. It was repaired, but not very good. When the men got on to go down, the shaft broke away from the hoisting cable, and the three men went down 110 feet. It smashed at the bottom,

killing two of the men. Glen survived. When I heard about it, I went to the cabin to see him, but he was unconscious and groaning. I got scared and ran home. Glen lived. Nobody knew anything about first aid in those days.

A bunch of us kids found a big old row boat that had been used for a settling tank that nobody owned. We worked for days cleaning it out. The sand was about a foot deep. We got it all cleaned out and jacked up, ready to put it on a wagon. Some men that were working the night shift and couldn't sleep, on account of the noise us kids were making. They knocked all the blocking out and down. We were so dissapointed that we gave that project up.

We had a lady cook that quit in the middle of the winter and wanted her pay. So Dad sat up a rocker in the kitchen. He hauled in some rich gravel out of the mine and put it thru the rocker and got more than enough to pay some $350.00. The next day she asked me to take her and the baggage down to the stage. It took me a whole day to do this, she gave me 20 cents.

Ralph and I had some holes in our teeth, so our teacher, Mrs. Keffler, took us up to Grand Forks where there was a dentist. She treated us to lunch, we had braised kidney on toast. Quite a day for two youngsters.

Dad had lumbago. He sent me down to the store for groceries. I had the dog team. On the way back, the dogs got out of control and chased a raven down over the hill. Way off the road, the sled hit a stump and Buster's leg got tangled up in one of the traces and his leg was broken below the hip. I got the sled and dogs back on the road and we had about a mile to go. When I got home, I thought Dad would give me a licken, but he got out of bed and made a couple of splints out of an egg crate, and sure enough, Buster's leg healed and he lived to a ripe old age of about 8 years. Sure loved him.

awson City
1903

On the 4th of July, one of our neighbors across the street had a daughter named Edith Wait. Edith was on our front porch after we had gone to bed. She was holding a giant fire cracker in her hand and it went off. We heard the bang and she screamed. We didn't know until the next day that it blew her hand to pieces. She moved to Fairbanks where her hand was put together and was alright except for some scars. She was a telephone operator for years in Fairbanks.

I had a bicycle when we came to town. I rode it to town. The bike was too big for me but I made a lot of miles with it with my little brother on behind. When we went to Fairbanks, we left it behind. I sure hated to leave it.

One time Mother and Dad went home ahead of us. I told them that Ralph and I would hook a ride on a four horse stage. They said O.K. When the stage came along, we ran behind and climbed into the boot and covered up with a leather cover. Pretty soon I looked out and I saw strange country. We were on the wrong stage, so we jumped off and I said to Ralph, "Instead of going back to get on the Bonanza Road, let's take a short cut across to our road." Well, we ran into swamps, mosquitos, negerheads, and Ralph started to cry. We finally found our road about 8 miles to home. Our parents were sure happy to see us, and so were we to see them. Ralph was about 6 years old.

Bonanza Creek 1903

A pack train of horses were going by, when one of the horses with a pack on his back, went into a mud hole in front of our house and all but disappeared. Mother took exception to the mule skinner for abusing the horse, and told him she would notify the Humane Society. He laughed at her and told her there was no Humane Society. She tied a rope to the horse's leg and hooked it to one of the other horses and pulled him out by his tail.

I remember one time when there was a bad mud hole on the trail by our house. I must have been about 9 years old. I tried to fix it by filling it up with rocks. A man walked by one day and came back the next. He was very pleasant. He wanted to know if filling the hole was my idea. I told him yes. He said he wanted to reward one for doing such a nice thing, and he pulled out a dime and gave it to me. I thanked him and still thought it wasn't much of a reward. Funny how you remember a little thing like that for over 70 years.

There was an old broken down blacksmith forge upon the hill. One of the gears was broken. I tried to get them to mesh together. So, I ran my thumb through the gears and mashed

my thumb real bad. I ran home and Mother patched it up for me. Ralph said, "How did it happed?" I said, "Come with me, and I will show you." Sure enough, I ran the other thumb through the gears again.

1902/1904 The wife of the man that owned one of the claims that we were working on, took a liking to me and offered me a job clearing the screens at a big pumping plant. She laid off the man that was doing the job and I did it for 8 days. I felt bad for taking his job and I didn't have time to play with the rest of the kids. So, I quit and she paid me off with 32 silver dollars. That sure looked big to me. I turned it over to Mother. That was the last I ever saw of that money.

Dad was working upon Monte Christo Hill and Ralph and I carried his lunch to him every day. One day, he asked us to get him a plug of chewing tobacco. Well, we thought we would try to chew some of it. We very carefully cut off a thin slice of one end. We sure didn't like it. When we delivered the plug to him, he noticed it had been cut. He said, "Well, how did it taste?" The taste was horrible, we never again tried chewing tobacco.

Sondimes were our neighbors across Duke street. The women baked bread for sale and their boy peddled it with a little two wheel hand-cart. They saved $6,000.00 in the stampede to Fairbanks in 1904. They bought the steamer Monarch for $6,000.00 and put her in the river and loaded her with passengers and supplies. On the first trip to Fairbanks, they cleared $40,000.00 and the next trip she landed on a sand bar on the Yukon River. They never got her off the sand bar known as Monarch Bar.

1903/1904 We loved our teacher. I had a bike and the teacher had one too. She invited me to go to Dawson City over the weekend. I was thrilled about that. We rode our bikes to town to her brother's place. She farmed me out with an old religious guy, and she was going to take me to Sunday school the next day.

I sure didn't like that idea, so I got on my bike and went home without telling her. Mother and Dad were surprised to see me, but nothing was ever said about my leaving her without telling her. I was going home.

Gold was found in the Fairbanks District. So Dad closed up mining operations, and we were sorry to leave our school and our teacher. The big stampede was on. Men and women were leaving the Yukon in droves. It got too late in the summer so it was a big task. Ralph and I sure hated to leave our shcool and teacher, for we sure loved her. Mother overheard us talking about it. Well, maybe it wouldn't be so bad, we might get a chance to kiss her good bye. What we didn't know was that Mother overheard that, and told the teacher. Dad got two big Peterborough canoes and lashed them together to make a Catamaran. He put a stove by the place where Mother was going to sit so she could cook for us. Ralph was to be in the stern with a big oar to steer, and Dad and I had oars to row. The current in the Yukon averages about 8 miles an hour. We finally got everything in the canoes. The only person to see us start down the river was our school teacher. We were standing on an old sidewalk when she kissed me. I was so dumbfounded, I fell off the sidewalk. Dad never did get through kidding me about that.

Dogs were already in the canoes so we piled into the canoes. Dad had already instructed us what we were to do. It was late, almost 4 pm., we came to a Road House about 6:30. We wanted to stop as we were tired. We landed and stayed there that night. Dad had us up early, half asleep, we pulled away from the shore and were soon caught in the current of the Yukon River. One could hear the gravel on the bottom of the river, a kind of snappy sound. We threw the garbage over one side and picked up the drinking water on the other side. It was kind of muddy, but we didn't mind that, it tasted good. I don't think Dad ever thought how young we were for I was 11½ years old and Ralph was 8 years old. What we thought was going to be a lark, turned out to be a nightmare. I got so tired they could have taken the tent down on top of my bed and I wouldn't even have known it. A

few miles from Circle City, I played out, I just couldn't row any more. A man in a canoe name McGavan came along side, and tied his canoe to ours and took my car. That was about 10 miles from Circle City. We found a deserted cabin and slept there. Next morning as we were going down the river, we met the River Steamer "Leah" coming up the river. He had the engineer shut the engines off, and he drifted back down the river. He wanted to know if we had seen any oil barges tied to the bank up the river. We had, so he said he was going down, and if we wanted to wait at Fort Yukon, he would pick us up. We set up our tent right on the beach at the town of Fort Yukon, right on the Arctic Circle. The dogs at Fort Yukon let up an awful howl when we came ashore. We waited a day and a half for the steamer, "Leah." Captain Blodsoe at the pilot house hollered to us to come down 7 miles to a wood camp and he would pick us up there. Of course, it took us time to take the tent down and load the canoes again. I was rested up so away we went. This was in the Yukon flats, and the river split up and we didn't know which channel to take. We were afraid that we might take the wrong one and miss the boat, but we saw an orange crate floating on the left one so we took that one, and pretty soon we saw the steamer tied to the bank. We pulled along side and they lowered a sling which hoisted us up to the upper deck, dogs, canoes, and all of us.

We were all happy that we wouldn't have to work so hard. We had about 500 miles more to go to Fort Gibbon where we would stop and take another steamer up the Tanana River to Fairbanks, Alaska. We were in Alaska now and were real happy. I was very hungry, for I hadn't eaten much because I had noticed the Chinese cook had two thumbs on one hand, and that took my appetite away. Fort Gibbon was crowded with stampeders wanting to get to Fairbanks. Our canoes were not any good to us now, for, from now on, we had to go up stream against the river current of about 8 miles an hour.

The steamer, "Tanana," came down and landed. We finally got passage on her to Fairbanks. She was overloaded. The only way we could get anything to eat was to bribe the waitors, then it would be a beef sandwich. Mother had a state room and we slept

The Tanana

on a baggage pile. Twenty-five dogs were tied on the bow and I remember they got in a fight one day. One dog which was tied to an anvil, fell over board and of course the anvil took him right down to the bottom of the river. The whole trip was a mess, but we were going to a gold stampede. We landed up the Tanana River at a town called Chena. The Tanana boat couldn't go any further on account she drew too much water. So we took smaller boats to Fairbanks. That sure was a scramble getting the baggage, dogs, canoes, and ourselves to Fairbanks.

The town was crowded and the streets were muddy. One had to wear boots. No hotels or rooms were for rent. If there were any, they were crowded. We finally found some friends that were building a cabin and they let us live in it until we could get located. We bought a house or log cabin over in the town of Grahel and moved into it. Somebody stole one of the canoes, but the Marshal recovered it for Dad. Dad went to Cleary Creek looking for a claim or a lease and found one on 13 Below Cleary Creek. He came back and told us he was going to get a team of horses, and a wagon, and load it with tools, hay, oats, a big tent, and bedding. In fact, we took everything we would need to build a home of logs. We also took one of the dogs, Buster, was his name, and the horses which were named Tom and Ben. We let Mother and Ralph hold down the fort in Grahel. We finally got the wagon loaded and started for Cleary Creek. The first night we made Cleary Summit Roadhouse and, low and behold, the man that owned it was Martin Daniels who used to haul wood for us in the Klondike. He was glad to see us and he said to Dad, "Cleary Hill is icy and dangerous. Be sure and use locks on the hind wheels." We didn't have any chains, but tied ropes to them to stop them from turning. The horses had hold back straps. It was so steep and icy that I got scared and got off and walked behind the wagon. It sure was dangerous, but we got down to the bottom safely. The horses were big and strong. Each weighed about a ton apiece. That was a hair raising experience. We arrived at 13 Below Cleary Creek to start our home. It sure didn't look very inviting. Scrubby spruce trees and niggerheads. We had this tent, but it

was never set up. Dad just made a big lean to. The reason he never set it up, was because we didn't have a stove. The bed was a big bed of spruce boughs and a big bear robe. There were three of us, and Buster, our dog, and the two big horses.

I really didn't know what I was in for. I was to cook and drive the horse to haul the wood and logs for the cabin. Dad made a go-devil. Dad would fall the trees and put them on the go-devil and I would drive the horse while he pulled the go-devil and the logs to camp. Then I unloaded the logs and went back for another load. The foundation was made and the logs notched and our new home was started. Snow was on the ground and it was getting colder. I was learning to cook on an open fire. The trail from Circle City was right by our place. I used to cook big kettles of cornmeal mush, pour it in a big bake pan, and let it cool. Then I would slice and fry it. I would snare rabbits, and that was about the only fresh meat we had. We had potatoes, onions, eggs, and canned milk. Buster was great company. I sure was learning how to be a man, even if I was only 12 years old.

The cabin grew by leaps and bounds. I wedged the logs apart and put moss in between. The moss was about a foot deep. It had to be dug with a grub hoe or broad axe. It was getting into October. Dad took the team and went to Fairbanks for a cookstove, more hay, and oats. I didn't have much food. All the money Dad had left us, he gave to McConnell to get us some food while he was gone. He took the money and gambled it all away. He came back the day before Dad got back. When I told Dad what he had done, Dad fired him, and I was glad.

Now we were ready to go and get Mother and Ralph. We sold the cabin Grahel and had a sled for the dogs named Hans, my dog, and Fritz, Ralph's dog, and of course Buster. That was our team. I got a creak in my neck which was very painful. Mother wanted to wait until I got over it, but Dad said, no, he will get over it. We made about 15 miles the first day. Dad had a friend from the Dawson country by the name of Louie Bona who was mining on Pedro Creek. Ralph and I slept on the floor which had big cracks.

We had to make water in the night. No toilets so we moved over to one of the big cracks.

1ᵡ -1905 We had breakfast with Louie that morning. Hot cakes and all the oatmeal mush we could eat, and we ate a lot for we were hungry all the time. We said good-bye and never saw Louie Bona again. He sure was a fine man. Everyone in the early days was friendly and hospitable.

It was tough going for we were loaded pretty heavy but we got to the top of Cleary Hill. From there on, it was down hill to 13 Below. Cleary was down hill. I have often wondered what Mother thought of the cabin that was going to be our home. Well, Mother never said a word, for she always made the best of every occassion that came along. The first thing that we had to do, was to make an addition on behind for Ralph and I to sleep.

We hired an engineer to run the hoist. His name was Ole Anderson. He slept in his bunk with us. He helped me make my first pair of skiis. I chopped a birch tree and took a piece about 10 feet long, 6 inches in diameter. I split it in the middle and made a nice pair of skiis out of it. Probably, the first pair of skiis made on Cleary Creek. I had a lot of fun with them. But Dad put a stop to that. So, he got a horse named, "Major". He was kind of balky so Ralph and I learned a lot of cuss words.

We had our little coaster sleds made into bob sleds that I could steer with my feet. I used to tie a frozen rabbit on a strong string and tie it to a fishing pole. I would hold that out in front of Hans, my dog, and he would chase the rabbit while pulling the sled though he never caught it. When we went to school, we put the rabbit on top of a small building and Hans would lay there and watch it until school was out.

One day Mother threw a tin lid to Buster thinking he would lick the grease off of it. But no, he swallowed it, and about two weeks later we had to kill Buster. The tin lid cut him all to pieces inside and Dad had to kill him. That was a sad day for the Keys family.

Somebody threw hot water on Fritz and he lost his hair and had to be killed. I was given a little horse but we didn't have any feed for him and he had to be killed. He was cut into quarters and put on the roof and I had to cut him up for dog food. That was pretty tough on me for I loved him. His name was Dinkey. All we had left now was Hans. We sure loved our dogs. They were so much fun. Hans just seemed to know what we wanted done and he did it. It just seemed as though he read our minds.

I was doing pretty good in school. I won the deportment medal and the scholarship medal more than anyone else. That would mean at the end of the school year, I would get the scholarship medal. The teacher said she wouldn't let one boy have both. So at the end of the school year, I got the scholarship medal and Hilmar Nordale got the deportment one. Hilmar was my best friend. The Nordale's had a hotel in Clear City. Then they moved to Fairbanks.

1906 Lower Cleary 13 Below

I was commencing to learn to run the hoist. It had friction. The roof leaked one day and got on the friction and I couldn't hold the bucket. It smashed to the bottom of the shaft and was smashed to pieces. Dad scolded me but I told him that if he had fixed the roof, it wouldn't have happened. So the roof got fixed right. Dad gave Ed, our oldest brother, a course in the International Correspondence School. So, I tried to learn from him. Ed didn't like that but I wanted to learn so I stuck to it, and did learn a lot about engines and boilers from Ed.

One time I didn't open the pet cocks on the steam of the hoist and it pulled a piston head off the piston rod. That meant it had to go to Fairbanks for a new piston rod. It took about three days and that was bad for all the men had to be layed off. I sure learned fast.

In March of that year, Dad needed some money quick. He set up a rocker and had some of the richest pay dirt dumped by the rocker. I was about 14 years old and Ralph was 10. That was awful for Dad to have to work us that way for our ages. We did that for about a month. I finally told Dad that, it was just too much for us. He said to put a sign up, "Man wanted to help shovel gravel." We did and just one man answered. He said

to me, "How would I do?" I looked him over and said, "You look alright." He said that he would be down in the morning. He never showed up, so we asked Ole Anderson why he thought this guy didn't show up. Ole said, "No wonder, he owns the richest claim on the creek." It wasn't long until it commenced to thaw so we didn't rock any more. We could sluice now, that was much faster and not such hard work.

Edward was always going to the states. He went to get married but found his sweetheart in the family way so he came back pretty mad. He gave Mother the little gold watch chain with the girls name in it. He brought some new ideas about machinery.

I wanted to learn to be a blacksmith, and I liked to put the boxing gloves on. We used to take them into the bunkhouse and put them on with some of the men. Our foreman, Leonard Geer, had them on one night and he got mad at the other man that had the gloves on with him. He went after him for real, and cut himself pretty bad on the corner of the bunk. Mother got hold of the gloves and burned them up and that was the last of our wanting to box.

I had a hard time to get the man that was doing the cable splicing to show me how to splice. I used to help him splice our cables and, in-between times, I would practice until I got the knack of splicing. In doing so, I invented the hollow marlin spike. The very same Marlin Spike was patented in 1928 by someone else.

1906 One of the boys at Cleary Creek invented the Cresent wrench, his name was Harry Rothwiler. Its the most universally used tool in the whole world. He got $75.00 for the patent. They were mining not very far from where we lived. I was growing up fast, running the hoist, and firing the boilers with 4 foot wood. We burned a thousand cords of wood. It was hauled in the winter time with teams of horses. I was learning to be a blacksmith. I used to help Peter Herkenrath sharpening picks (150 a day), making rockdrills, thawing drills, and running the hoise. Most

of the time, we fished a lot in the Chatanika river for greyling.

Dad had a friend named P.R. McGuire, he was a sort of a detective. He talked Dad into going on a wild goose prospecting trip over on Nome Creek.

The first time Ralph and I were on one of these trips, we had a dog team, sled, picks, and shovels. Dad wanted me to cook the dog feed, rice and fish, on an open fire. I burned it the first time and the dogs wouldn't eat it. We sunk a lot of holes on Moose Creek and didn't find any gold. It was a good hunting country for caribou and moose, and lots of ptarmigan. We stayed about a month then came back to lower Cleary where we had left Mother. We were sure glad to get into a nice warm bed for a change. Same old thing building boiler houses, setting up boilers and hoists. We either hauled water from a spring or melted snow.

1907 Ralph and I wanted to go moose hunting over on Preacher Creek. Preacher Creek headed right up into the White Mountains. She then emptied into Birch Creek and it emptied into the Yukon River. The first night out we didn't stop at the Roadhouse at Faith Creek because we didn't have any money. We built a big fire in front of an old cabin on Faith Creek and we didn't have sleeping bags. We got pretty cold so we put some rocks in the fire and then put them along side but we got them too hot and they burned holes in our blankets. We finally got to our hunting ground. We were on top of one of the big domes or mountains so we sat down and started looking up toward Preacher Creek with our field glasses and after about 10 minutes looking, we saw two moose laying down on a big snow drift. They were partly covered with snow. We figured out which way the wind was blowing so we went down on the side that the wind was blowing from the moose to us. Then we crawled on our hands and knees until we were as close as we dared. So we got ready to fire, I counted to three and we fired. Mine dropped dead and Ralph hollered, "Shoot George, my gun is frozen!" His bullet went through the mooses jaw and she started to run so I shot and killed her. We cleaned them and took a liver and headed for the

nearest timber. We had a nice surprise; someone had started a small cabin. There was no roof, but we made a bed of spruce boughs and a big fire out in front. We saw some big bear tracks in the snow but they were old so we did not worry about him coming along but we figured he was in his hole by this time. We feasted on moose meat, it was our main diet of course. We didn't have any fresh vegetables or fruit. We had an aurora borealis that was right above us in the mountains. It was beautiful. The whole heavens were aglow, and we sure had a ringside seat. We thought we heard them but we found out years later that what we heard was St. Elmos Fire, static electricity leaving the earth. We decided we should get the moose meat over the divide to Hope Creek and cache it in the trees. But we had to have a horse to do so. We left our most comfortable campsite we ever had. We covered the moose with snow so the wolvering couldn't get at it. They urinate on what they can't eat and then nothing else can eat it. The smell is awful. It was about 8 miles to the Hope Creek cabin. When we got there, there was a man and his dog in the cabin. He was sort of a tramp living off the country. We went down Hope Creek to the Faith Creek Roadhouse. Yes, they would rent us their horse for a few days to get the moose meat over to the Hope Creek cabin where we would build a cache in the trees, and come back for it later. We got the horse over to where the moose was and dragged one moose at a time to the top of the divide. When we got both moose to the top we tied them both together. It looked like a big raft. Then it was all down hill to the Hope Creek cabin. The next day, we built the cache and that was quite a job to put all the meat on top of the cache. We then covered it with spruce boughs to keep the ravens off and had to put sheet iron around the trees so the wolverines could not climb up and destroy the meat. Now we were ready to go home. Faith Creek was frozen over and was glare ice in places. The horse didn't have shoes on so he would fall on the glare ice. Sure was a wonder he didn't break his ribs but we made it down to the roadhouse. I forgot to tell you three of our friends from Fairbanks were in the cabin and they gave a bottle of whiskey to the tramp. When our friends left,

the tramp held the bottle up and told us that he loved whiskey more than anything in the whole world. The bottle slipped out of his hand. It hit a rock in the dirt floor and broke. He got down on his knees and actually cried. We were kind of glad for we did not want a drunk in the cabin with us. It was forty miles from Faith Creek to our home on lower Cleary and we were glad to get back. Mom and Dad and the dogs were glad to see us. The folks were worried about us as there was no way to get word to them. That sure was a wonderful experience. One that I'll never forget.

908-1909-1910

We had to have an eye splice in our hoisting cable every couple months or so. There was only one man on all Cleary Creek that could do so. Of course, I wanted to learn how to do it and I asked him to show me how. It was already done and he said that it was to difficult to teach, but I watched him, and in between times that he came, I would practice. So, in time, I mastered the art of cable splicing. He used a round tapered spike. I got to experiment with an idea that I had, of a spike with a groove in it. The first thing I knew, I had invented the hollow Marline Spike, but I never patented it. I learned, later in life, it was patented in 1928. I was learning to be a blacksmith. Still working for Dad with no pay.

One day, a man came just at noon and asked for work. It was just past our dinner hour but Mother asked him to have lunch. He said that he sure would like something to eat. I remember when Ralph and I saw him coming, we hid the pie. Dad put him to work and he was a good strong man and I liked him. This was about the middle of June. We were all sitting in front of the cookhouse waiting for dinner. This man's name was Joe Beals. He said, "I see by the paper that there is going to be a rock drilling contest in Fairbanks on the 4th of July. If I had a partner I think I could win it." I pricked my ears up and I said, "How would I do?" He looked at me in surprise and he said, "Can you strike with the sledge hammer?" and I said, "Yes." He looked at me and he said, "Now maybe you would make me a good partner." Dad said, "If you two will drill, I will buy the steel and hammers." and he did. I didn't know what I was getting into.

We got the steel and I cut it into 15 different lengths. The first piece that we were going to start with was 12 inches long, and each one of the 14 other pieces were 2 inches longer. We expected to drill about 2 inches a minute. I sharpened the steel and had to walk about three miles to get to where we could find a rock big enough to start the hole, sure was mean getting it started. Ralph was the water tender. He had a little hose attached to a four gallon can of water. Beals changed with me every 30 seconds, then I got up and hammered for 30 seconds. After we were down about 20 inches, the drill bit broke and Beals yelled the bit is broken! I said, "It still is cutting," and sure enough, the next drill started cutting again, so at the end of 15 minutes, we stopped and measured the hole - 27 3/4 inches. We were 5 inches deeper than the other team so we won. They challenged us for a $500.00 side bet to come back on the 12th of July. So, we signed an agreement to do that. I went over to see the manager of the Railroad about getting a special train to come back on the 12th of July. He said $250.00. We went home and sharpened the steel and practiced again. On the 12th of July, we went back to Fairbanks and found that the other team had practiced on the rock and it was full of holes. We objected and had to get a new rock. Then, we beat them again. The dirty crooks called the bet off, but Beals and I won again. Beals started to drink and we don't know what ever happened to him. He never came back to work or even to get a couple weeks pay. I was very sorry, for he showed me how to do the biggest event on the 4th of July. It was a big day for me, I went to the manager of the Railroad to find out how much we owed for the special train to bring all our friends into Fairbanks and he said, "Not a darned cent." He was so glad that we beat them. Sure was one of the high lights of my young life.

1911-1914

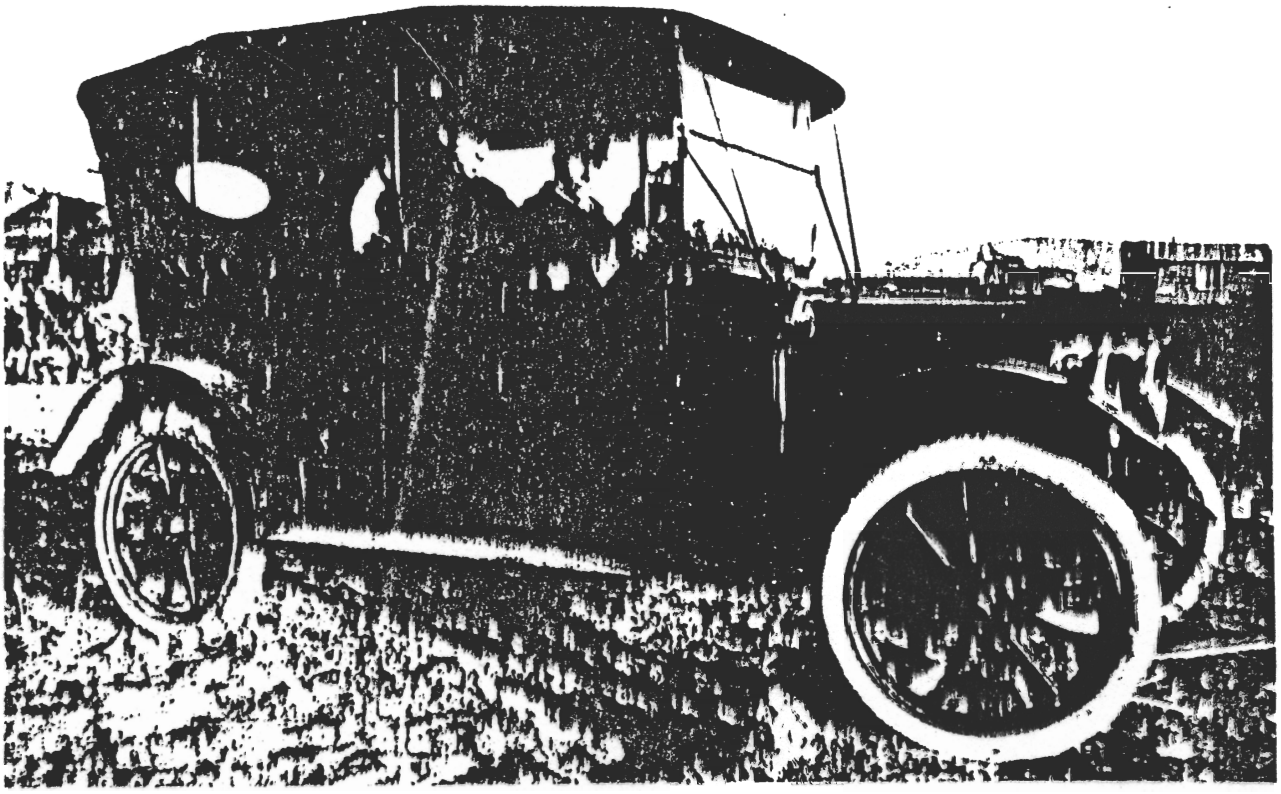
Things were not going very good at the mine. Dad had a partner that wasn't much help to him. He had a big crew and

Ralph Keys, Ed Keys, and Em Keys in 1910

three working shafts and he couldn't make it pay. He just wanted to be a big shot and was going broke. He couldn't pay the bills. Finally, he had to close down owing about $30,000.00. Ralph and I didn't take any pay. We sunk a shaft up on a new part of the pay streak. Water to sluice with was the big problem. What you did get, was very muddy, so we pushed the pay dirt thru the sluice boxes so fast that a lot of the gold was carried thru to the tailing pile, lost to us. When we got the new shaft down to about 120 feet, we took the steam line out. Then we found we had to do some more thawing for the square set at the bottom of the shaft, but didn't brave the steam line so we took some charcoal out of the boiler fire box and took it down to the bottom of the shaft. We put it on the frozen corners. When John Colvin, Dad, and I came back to dig out the thawed ground, there was no smell of gas, but all at once, John lost his voice. We realized at once that, there was gas there, so we jumped in the bucket and got to the top of the shaft. We ran the bucket up and down the shaft until we cleared the gas out. That was a close call.

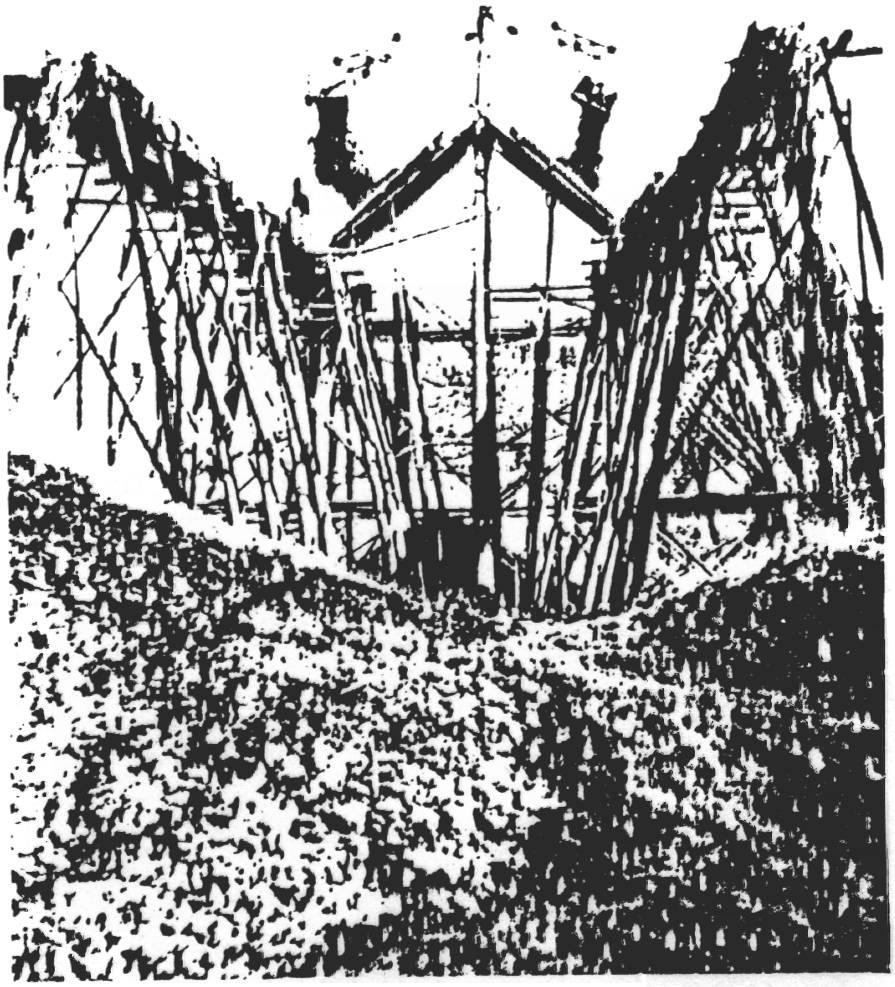
Jimmy Barack of the Samson Hardware Store showed us how to drive a 1914 Maxwell. There was a 1914 Maxwell for sale at the Northern Commercial Co. for $860.00 and Ralph and I bought it. We were mining on the Chatanika Flats at that time. I remember, we had two hoists and Ed was working for us at that time. An eye splice had to be put in and Ed put in a loggers splice. We were using flat strand cable at that time and Dad told him, "No, I won't let the men go down on that splice." The men went down on my splice instead and the first bucket of gravel that was to come up on Ed's, pulled out and the bucket of gravel fell to the bottom. If Dad had let the men go down on Ed's splice, they would have all been killed. That was about the nearest we ever came to having a bad accident.

We had a young lady waiting tables and I thought I was in love with her, but I found out she had a bad reputation. She married and turned out alright. I thought I was in love with a telephone girl, Edith Wait, in Fairbanks and invited her to come



The 1914 Maxwell

Ralph Keys at the wheel



Chatanika Flats 1909

and stay a few days with us. She told Mother she thought I was going to ask her to marry me, and if I did, it wouldn't do me any good, for she wouldn't do that. I was hurt for her to say that, so I took her up and put her on the train. That was the end of that affair. Whenever I called on the telephone she would recognize my voice and would say, "Are you sure that is who you want?"

In 1917, Ralph and I were the first men to enlist from Fairbanks. It was 50 below zero that morning when we were saying good-bye to Mother and Dad on the steet in Fairbanks. Edith Wait showed up to say good-bye and another girl was with her. That is the last time I ever saw her. I sure was having a hard time with my girls. We had a woman cook that had a daughter about my age, that I liked very well. But I never told her that I loved her, even though I had bought a diamond engagement ring and never gave it to her. I was pretty disgusted with myself for not ever telling her I loved her. One time, she even asked me if there wasn't something I wanted to tell her, and I said, "No." Wasn't I dumb?

1915 Our power plant burned. Ralph and I carried water and threw on the hoist to keep it cool. That was a great loss. We never knew how the fire started. We always suspected a man that Dad had ired. He was so mad at us, that he might have been the one who did it. That was one of the events that led up to going broke with $30,000.00 in the red. It took a long time to pay that back.

Gold found in the Livengood District started a stampede, and we joined it. We had a lease on some claims on Myrtle Creek, at the mouth of Lillian Creek, and Ralph and I sunk a hole 180 feet deep in 30 days. Ralph worked on the windlass and I was digging in the shaft. One day, when I went into the tunnel, after Ralph lowered me down the shaft, I noticed a bulge in the end of the tunnel. I stuck the candle stick into it and-BANG-a flash of light and explosion of natural gas blew me out of the tunnel. Ralph said the flame came out the top of the shaft, then it went out. A small pocket of natural gas had ignited when I

pried open the bulge. That was a close one. I had a hole burned in the flesh on my head, but it healed up alright. We had enough gold to make it pay, but Dad got lumbago and decided to give it up. Other miners took over and made it pay. Dad sure used poor judgment.

Ralph and I bought Petes share of the partnership and took a lease on Ester Creek. The ground was given to Dad as he was the boss. We struck water on ground that had been worked out before we got there. Our clean up, that is the gold we were getting out of the ground, wasn't enough to pay the wages and Dad let the owners take gold that was rightfully ours. I got mad at Dad and went down to the owners cabin. The pan of gold was sitting on the table. I told him he had to let us have it. He never said a word and I put the goldpan with the gold under my arm and took it home. Dad was surprised when he saw me with the gold.

I was foreman when one of the men got covered with gravel and by the time I got him dug out, he had a broken hip. I had never had first aid, so I did the best I could. I got him to the top of the shaft and put him in the car, then took him to the hospital. The doctor scolded me for carrying him up the stairs. He said that I should have had first aid training. In fact, I didn't know what first aid was. Well, we went broke on that venture. Ralph and I paid most of the bills. We didn't want anyone to use our shaft so we decided to blast it down. Dad and I put four charges of powder in each corner on top of the square set at the bottom of the shaft but the shaft didn't go down, so Dad and I got in the bucket and put another charge in the corner that didn't go off. That was the scarriest, most dangerous thing we ever did. The shaft went down when that blast went off. That was the last of our mining venture on Ester Creek.

We had a tame bear there, he was in the little town called Ester. He was chained to a cable which was about 100 feet long. He sure was a lot of fun but hard on our shirts. One time, I made a bet with one of the men that I wasn't afraid to go into his den. He bet me a dollar, so we made a bet. I went into

George Keys wrestling with

the bear in Ester City

his hole under the barn. That was a big mistake. That made the bear mad, and it wouldn't let me out. It took four men to hold it, while I crawled out, and the man that I made the bet with wouldn't pay me his dollar. Later, someone gave the bear a little spruce tree to play with and he got tangled up with it. It broke his chain and he got away. We used to see him when we were out blueberry picking, but he lost all interest in us and went back to the wilds. Of course, he was a lot happier.

We closed up our mining operation on Ester Creek. We moved to Vault Creek. Dad made a deal and we moved all our machinery to Vault Creek and took a lease on some claims. Some cabins were there.

When we sunk a shaft to bedrock about 40 feet below the surface, we struck a bed of mammoth and mastodon tusks. We chopped our way thru them, and put them on the waste dump and covered them with gravel. We wondered at the time, why there weren't any bones with the ivory. We wondered if prehistoric mankind had put them there. Now, archeologists believe that mankind was there at that time about 10,000 years ago. Anyway, I wish I had that ivory now as I am making jewelry out of it.

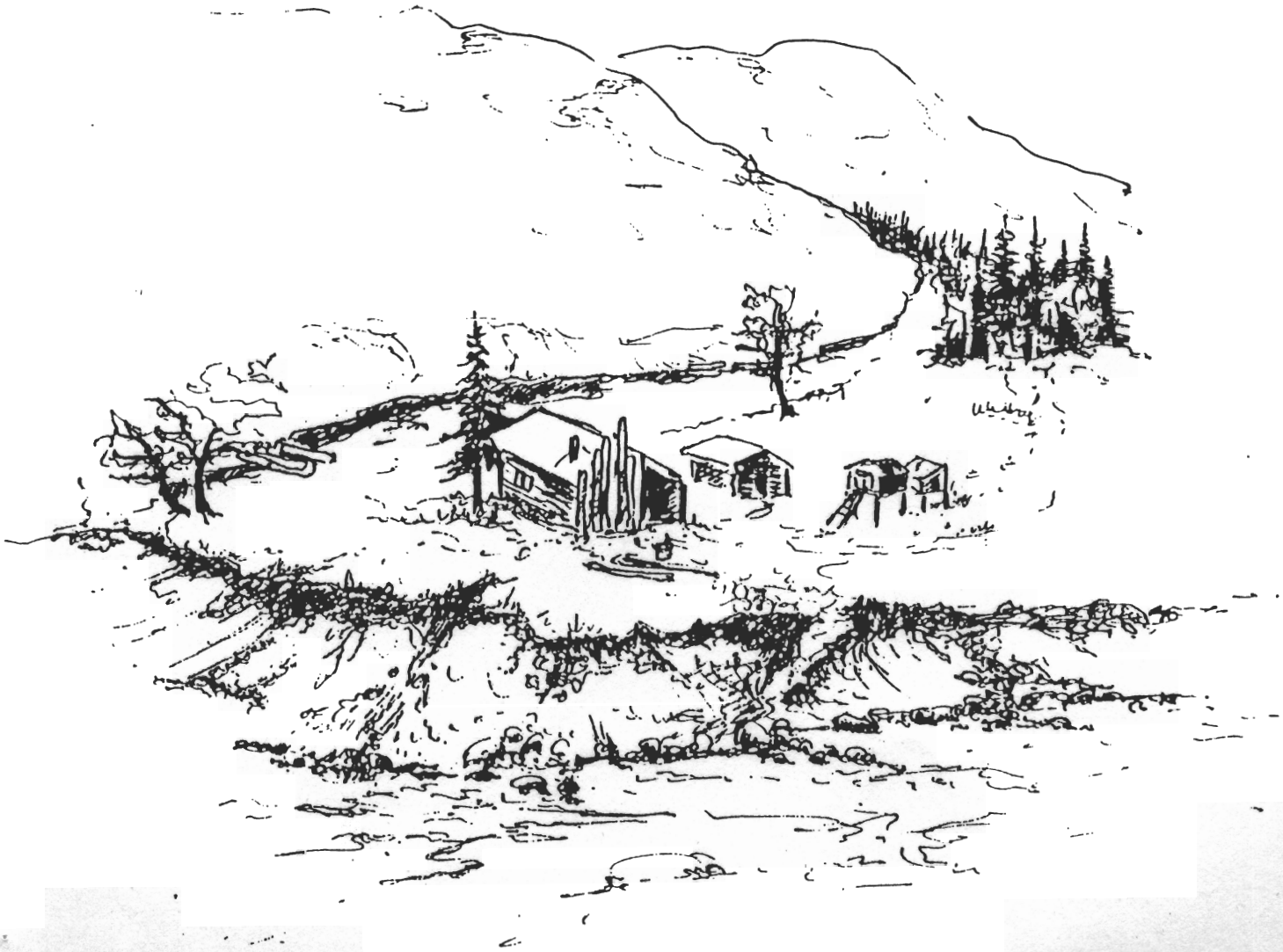
There wasn't much gold and Dad got the big head and didn't tend to business. The Samson Hardware had a mine that was going broke so they hired Dad to take charge of their mine. He wouldn't let us take charge of our mine so we went broke. We had $10,000.00 in gold and we owed the men $12,000.00. We asked the men if they would take that for what we owed them, and they said they would. So that took care of the men. We owed the store $4000.00 and they took the machinery on what we owed them. We made a cleanup and got $500.00 for us. This was July and we moved to Fox City about 10 miles from Fairbanks. The Alaska Railroad was being built by the U.S. Government. We decided we wanted to go up the Nenana River, and over to the head of the Wood River and the head of California Creek. Construction work was up to Mile 43. We knew one of the contractors, Herb Wilson. We stayed with him a few days, and rented a horse from him. We

had been up the Nenana River in 1910 in the winter and by River poling boat in 1910. We were looking for some claims that had enough gold to mine. It rained every day, but we found a trail on top of the ridge high in the mountains that was going the way we wanted to go. The first days of travel put us on the ridge above Eva Creek. We looked down Eva Creek and saw a cluster of cabins and smoke coming out of one of the cabin's smokestack. It was awful steep going. I remember the horses butt was dragging on the mountain side. He didn't seem to mind it when we got to the bottom. We found a trail leading to the cabins. When we got to the cabins, it was raining and we were soaking wet. It was a good size cabin. We knocked at the door and a friendly man came. We were surprised with the friendly greeting. Dad knew one of the men, John Montan. They were very hospitable. We sure were glad to get out of the rain and dry our clothes. These miners were ground sluicing for gold about 10 feet to bedrock. We got a lot of information from them on what to look for, as they knew quite a bit about what we were looking for. So, when it cleared up a little, we were on our way. One of the miners on Moose Creek had his dam washed away. We went on up California Creek on up to Our Creek. We stayed in one of the miners cabin while we did some prospecting for a few days. We found some gold but we thought it was not enough to warrent moving away up there. The cabin we stayed in was over-run with Marmonts. We sure were glad to get out of there. We went down California Creek until we came to 4th of July Creek. A miner owned the whole Creek and was making good money by ground sluicing. He invited us to dinner of ham and beans. My, they tasted good. We left him a newspaper and we were all happy when we got back to Eva Creek. The men were gone. We stayed one night in their cabin, then headed across the divide to Moose Creek where Ed Poggie had half of his dam washed away. He had a nice cabin with a sheet iron roof, and he invited us to stay with him. He was very nice to us, and said he would sell his share for $1000.00. We agreed to the terms, Dad took the horse back, and Ralph and I had the dam working wehn he got back.

Ralph Keys

The cabin on Moose Creek

Em Keys is on the right.



Moose Creek, Keys home - 1917

This was the first time in years, that we didn't have to pay the men that were working for us. This automatic dam that we repaired was working for us. It would fill with water and, when it was full, it would open a gate by itself. A big rush of water would come out and go down the cut where we were washing the gravel and sand, then down the creek, leaving the rocks and boulders for us to throw to one side. The big boulders, we would blast out of the cut. It was about 14 feet down to bedrock where the gold was. When we got down to bedrock. we set up the sluice boxes and shoveled the gravel and sand into the sluice boxes. The gravel would wash away leaving the gold in riffles in the bottom of the boxes. We sure were happy to get away from the burden of hiring men, feeding them, and worst of all trying to get enough money to pay them.

We loved the country, lots of blueberries, cranberries, and fishing for greyling in Moose Creek. We owned 16 claims on Moose and 8 claims on Little Moose Creek. World War I was on, and we were thinking about that. And it was getting pretty cold. We were commencing to get ready to leave. We loved the place so much, but we packed a lunch and left the cabin open but locked the cache. We left sugar, flour, rolled oats, and stuff like that in the cache. We left lots of wood for any travelers who might come that way.

It was about 40 miles to Nenana where we expected to catch a boat to Fairbanks. We hiked over the hills to where the Railroad was under construction, which was about 8 miles. We then followed the right of way down river. At noon, we stopped at a construction camp and asked the timekeeper if we could come into his office to eat our lunch, and he said, "No." Well, we never heard of anything like that in Alaska, so we went in anyway, and had our lunch inside where it was warm. We went on down until dark, and there was a big construction camp. They let us have dinner and bunks for the night. The next day we got to the little town of Nenana. The steamer "Nenana" wasn't due for a couple of days. We were afraid we might miss it if we stayed inside, for it might come in the night. Well,

it did come in the night, so we got on board and she started up the river, bucking the ice, as it was running pretty thick. Captain McCann was the Captain. He was having trouble getting over one of the sandbars, so he asked for someone to row the boat, while he went up and took a look. I said that I would row for him. I didn't know what I was getting into, for it was very hard to row in the freeze-up ice. He tied the boat up for the winter right there, and we had to walk to Fairbanks. Not much of a trail.

We found Mother were we left her at Fox City. Not much of a town, but she was comfortable. She had been worried about us, as she hadn't heard from us because there was no way to get word or mail to her. Ralph and I decided to enlist, so we all got together and cut and hauled in enough wood to last a couple of years. Then we told Mother and Dad that we were going to enlist in the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps. They said alright. Ralph and I didn't have but very little money so we went to see the head man of transportation of the Northern Commercial Co. to see if we could get hlep on paying our way. They gave us half fare to Chitna, which was a big help. We sold the Maxwell car for $400.00. It was getting cold, 50 below zero. We went by automobile for the first 40 miles. Scotty Lyons was at the wheel. We knew him, in fact, he was the one who sold us the 1914 Maxwell. Two girls were there to say good-bye. That was the worst good-bye I ever said. There was a piece in the Fairbanks paper about Mother. They called her 'the Mother that didn't cry.' We thought we probably would never see them again. The War was raging.

We were 10 days on the trail just getting to Chitna. From there, we took the Copper River Northern Railroad. It was still 50 below zero, sure was hard on the horses. We abandoned the car at the Tanana River. We took a 4 horse stage with 4 passengers besides Ralph and I. We had heavy fur robes. One woman, Mrs. Tom Foster, took a liking to us, especially to Ralph. When we got to the Alaska Range at Black Rapids Roadhouse, we changed to single sleds called "double enders." One horse to a sled;

4 sleds with 1 driver with the lead horse, and 1 for the last sled. Ralph and I had a horse and sled to ourselves. The horses knew the trail better than the drivers. When we got on glare ice, the driver jacked up one runner and put a skate on to keep the sled from blowing sideways on the glare ice. It was still very cold. We had parkas with hoods, and the horse behind us would rub his nose on our parkahood to rub the icicles off his nose, and we would have frozen blood on our parkahoods. The Delta River was a wild one in the winter time. We made about 35 miles a day. Meals were $2.00 a piece. It cost $20.00 a day for the Roadhouse bill.

1917 Isabell Pass at Yosts Roadhouse - there was a cable across the river for the wind blew most of the time and at the end of the cable was a bell on a post and the wind would bend the post enough to make the bell ring and that saved many lives.

There was two boys about 8 and 10 years old that the Marshal was taking to the States to be put in an institution, as there Mother and Father in Fairbanks couldn't do anything with them. They were wrecking every roadhouse. They were on the stage just ahead of us. We heard the Marshal say they were just about crazy, and roadhouse people could hardly stand it.

The roadhouse people were wonderful at Sourdough. The roadhouse owner was a wonderful woman. She found out we didn't have much money. She didn't want to charge us, but of course, we paid. We were back to the 4 horse stage. Mrs. Foster was getting friendlier all the time. She sure like Ralph. Copper Center was quite a place. I remember posts on the stairway were all diamond willow posts. A man and his wife entertained us that night with a violin and singing. The highway was along the Copper River when we got to Chitna that was the end of the sled trail. The Copper River Railroad would be our transportation. We stayed at a hotel that night. It was still very cold and the wind was blowing something awful. Next morning, we got on the train, and it cost $32.00 for each of us to ride to Cordova. There we would try to work our way down to Seattle on the

steamship "Alaska." When we crossed the Copper River bridge, the train stopped for some reason right on the bridge. The wind was blowing so strong it shook the train. When we got to Cordova, that was the end of the train ride. We met the superintendent of the Railroad and presented the letter from the N.C. Company. His wife took us to dinner and a show and he said when the boat got in, on its way to Seattle, he would take us on board. We could talk to the chief engineer. The next day I got poisoned and went to the drugstore with a prescription and got some medicine that cured me up right away. When the boat came in to load copper ore, the superintendent took us on board and we met the chief engineer. He said to bring our blankets and we could work our way down to Seattle by doing some work in the engine room. We sure didn't know what we were in for. They put us in the steerage compartment. It was so rotten, I went to the chief engineer and told him. He said we could sleep in the engine room and we could eat with the officers which was an awful lot better. Ralph got seasick crossing the Gulf of Alaska. [redacted] in his stateroom all the way to Seattle. The engineers names were Johnson and Armstrong. They liked us and helped us everyway they could. When we got to Seattle, we were bewildered with the traffic. We had a hard time crossing the streets. We were dumbfounded at the traffic on the first street we came to as we were going to the Frye Hotel an old teamster, who came with us on the boat, said he wouldn't cross the street. We followed an old lady across. We never saw the old teamster again. We sure were scared, but took the bull by the horns and registered for a room somehow. The telephone rang and a man was calling to see if he could come up to interview us and I said sure. I didn't know anything about newspaper reporters, so up he came and asked a lot of questions. The next morning the newspaper boy was hollering, "The U.S. Government takes over all Railroads. Two Keys boys come all the way from Alaska to enlist in the aviation section of the Signal Corps." I promptly bought all he had. About 32 copies. We sure were surprised that we made

the headlines. We mailed 1 copy to Dad and Mother. We then went up to the Draftboard to see if we could enlist and the headman said no. So I told him what the Governor said about letting him know if we got into trouble. He said he didn't think the Governor of Alaska could help us enlist. So I telegraphed him and the next morning the Draftboard telephoned us to come down because the Governor had more pull than he thought, and he would sign us up, (and bring our friends.) We had to take a physical examination. There was 6 or 7 of us going to enlist. The Doctor had us strip behind a screen, and one of the men tipped the screen over. I was very embarrassed as I had never been undressed before a woman. She laughed as we scrambled to get behind the screen again. That was the first examination I ever had and I was scared we wouldn't pass.

The next morning there was a piece in the paper by this Doctor saying that we were the two most physical fit men he had ever examined. We sure were glad that it was over with.

We went down to Montesano and stayed a couple of days with Ed, who was sick. We bought the kids a little wagon. Ed was Chief Engineer in a saw mill. He farmed us out to a boarding house for a couple of days and we paid the bill.

We went back to Seattle and got on the train for San Antonio. We láid over three hours in Portland. At midnight, Mrs. Foster came down and took us to a plush steak dinner. We never saw her after that.

OTHER MEMORIES OF

George L. Keys

FROM VARIOUS YEARS

1904/1905

The way the school got started was; the ladies Aid Society raffled enough pies and cakes to raise $2,300.00 one night. That paid for a teacher for a year. Then somebody made the benches and desks.

In this little school, at Cleary City, in the little old church, our teacher was Jessica Frazer. Some of the students were; George and Ralph Keys, Jimmy Jibs, Hilmar Nordale, Arnold Nordale, Alton Nordale, Howard Krause, Lucile Krause, Loomis Boys, Lorane Kenettle, Leonard Heasock. There were 28 altogether.

We had a wood stove. Most of us carried lunches. Ralph and I carried tea and we made tea on the wood stove. Then the other kids brought cups and they wanted some of our tea. Some of the time in the winter, we had three miles to go. We used to hitch Hans, our dog, to our coaster sled and we had a frozen rabbit on the end of a pole which I held in front of him and he would race after that rabbit. We sure had a lot of fun chasing up and down Cleary Creek with our dog, Hans.

We always went to school, even on the coldest days. That year ended our schooling. We didn't think about it at the time, for we went back to work at the mine as hoisting engineers. We loved our work, and got a lot of good training with machinery and splicing cables. I invented the hollow marlin spike about 1907 on Cleary Creek. It is patented now, but I didn't patent it.

1907 My dog, Hans, our prize dog, was not tied up one day and some stampeders, going by our place, needed another dog and took Hans. We didn't know where he went. One of the wood haulers told us that the stampeders that stole him, killed him up by Kokamo Creek and left him along side of the road. The reason they killed him was because he wouldn't work for them. Ralph and I were very mad. If we could have found these men, we sure would have hurt them.

We, that is Dad and I, wanted to go up the Nenana on a claim
1910 staking trip. It was cold, 50° below zero. We borrowed a dog to make up the team. Sure wasn't much of a team, but it was all we had. We didn't have good sleeping bags and it was 60 miles down the Tanana River to Nenana. When we arrived at the town, it was all lit up. We found a couple of Marshalls with a German count under arrest. He had killed an Indian. He claimed that the Indian was spying on them. They had the dead frozen Indian in the sled, his squaw with 4 or 5 kids were with them. It was still 55° below zero. Next morning, we started up the Nenana River. We had outfited at Jimmy Dukes trading post. He sold us some rotten bacon. The first day we made 18 miles. We saw light in a cabin and made for it. They evidently didn't want any company. They had turned out the lights. We found the cabin, it was very cold but we liked it better than camping. These men were freighting grub up the Nenana River to Valdez Creek. What a life sleeping on the ground 60° below zero. It was awful to even think of the misery the men and horses went through. The next night we camped out and set up the tent and I rustled dry wood, big cottonwood limbs. Sure was very comfortable but when we got to Moose Creek we had a deserted cabin with an old stove in it. But when a cabin is frozen inside and out at 50° below zero it sure is not very comfortable. We staked two associations of claims - 8 claims to the association.

It was around 50° below zero, so it wasn't very comfortable hewing trees so we could write on them. We found a little cabin this side of Hosina Creek the next day. Sure was better than sleeping in a tent at 50° below zero. We made Hosina Creek the next day. There were lots of big coal seams exposed, so we used coal in our little sheet iron stove. The stove was red hot, but it was cold in the tent.

1914 I had a girlfriend, Jean Sutherland, I thought a lot of, but I never could get enough courage to tell her I loved her. I wanted to show off to her one time, so I climbed up on a high flume of ours, and was running along on the top of the sideboards when a piece of rotten bark came off and down I went. It took some meat off under my arm, it hurt something awful, but later I climbed back up and finished showing off. I never told Jean what happened to me.

There was a bad accident at a mine on Dome Creek. The little place called Olness was shocked, in fact, the whole country was mourning. The mine shaft which was in about 160 feet deep collapsed trapping 15 men. The men were in a drift away from the shaft, so they were not hurt but they had no food, no drinking water, no light, and no heat. There seemed no hope for the men, except one man, who was a miner himself, who owned a Keystone drill. His name was Walter Fisher and he was about 40 years old a very strong man. He was contacted right away to see if he could drill a hole 160 feet deep, so food could be sent down to the men. He had his drill brought right away and set over the place where the men were entombed. He started drilling a 6" tube out of sheet iron with a door so it could be loaded with water, food, and blankets. While he was drilling, the machine shop in Fairbanks was making a drill bit that was adjustable for enlarging the drill hole. Also being made, was a cage that would hook to the drill cable. A man could get in the cage, a door would close, and he could be hauled up through this enlarged drill hole. When Walter Fisher had the hole enlarged, he took the big drill bit off and hooked it on to the heavy eye bolt on the cage and lowered it down through the enlarged drill hole, then hauled the men out, one by one, until he had them all out in the sunlight. What a feat this man performed. That sure was a happy bunch of men. We raised enough money to buy him a watch set with a diamond and an inscription engraved telling about rescuing the men from Peter Letender's mine disaster. His sister, Grace Fisher, was a telephone operator in Fairbanks. Walter heard about diamonds in South America. He had not been out of Alaska for a long time, so he went to New York City, where he

stayed at a hotel for a few days and he left his door unlocked. The first night he had all his money and the watch in the middle of the table. A thief came and took everything. Walter was heartbroken, but he left the door open the next night and the thief came back and left the watch and a note saying that he had to return the watch, for he just couldn't steal anything like that.

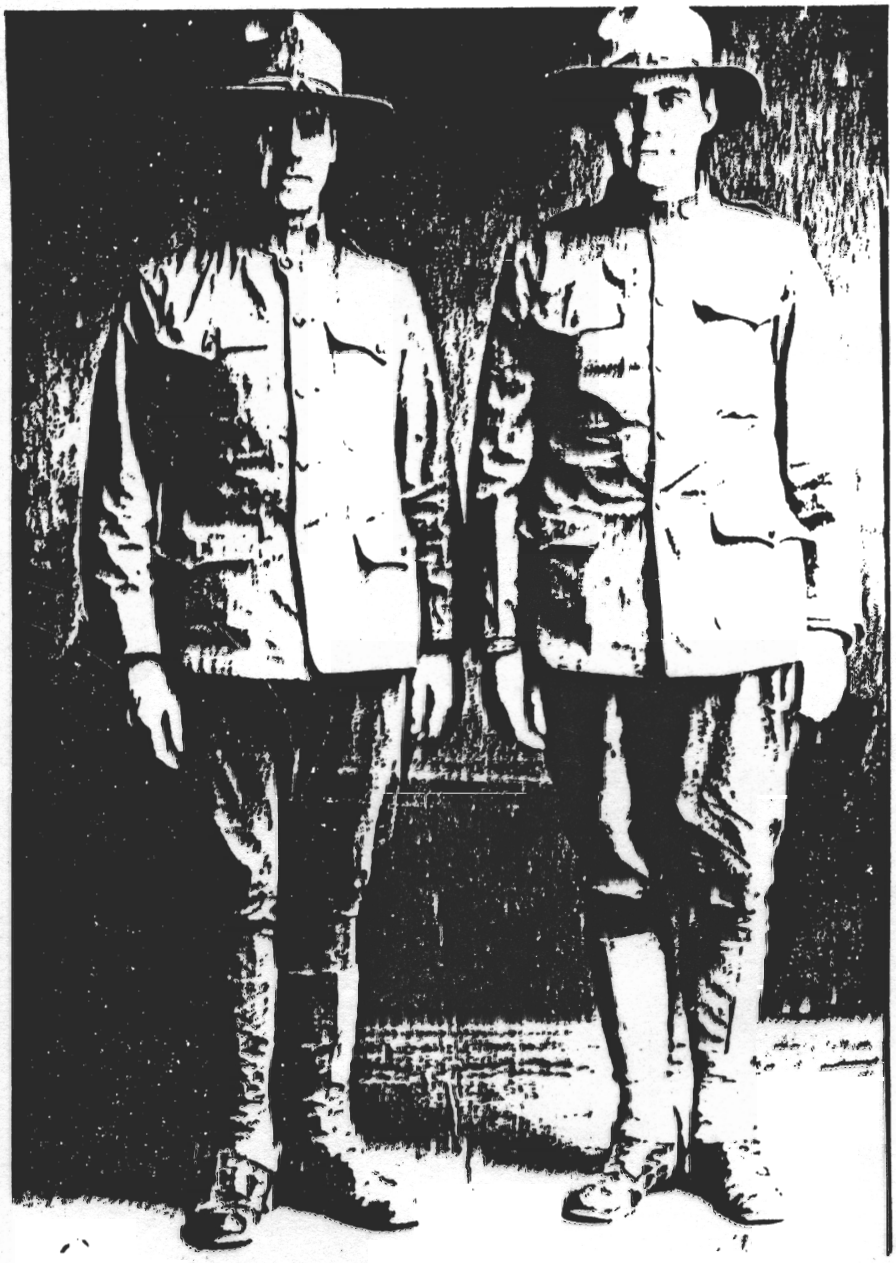
In 1918, my brother Ralph and I enlisted in the Aviation Section Signal Corp. We were laying on the ground at Kelly Field in Texas waiting to be transfered, when Ralph said, "I would give anything just to see a malamute dog." A man jumped up and said, "What do you know about malamute dogs?" Ralph said that he was raised in Alaska. Then this man said, "I was one of the men Walter Fisher dug out of the cave-in at Olness."

1915 We decided we wanted to go to the States for some education. So we took the old Maxwell and loaded it down. It was freezing and snowing. When we came to Saltjacket River, the ice was running and the Ferry wasn't running. We wanted to get across. Others wanted to get across too. One truck, with about 15 passengers wanted to go too. Ralph, Dad, and I took a row boat and went over to where the Ferry was tied to the bank. The ice was running pretty bad but we wanted to get across. We put the jacks against her and pushed her into the river and the current shoved her across. The ferryman was on the other side, he was furious, but we loaded our car and the stage with all the people and got across alright. It was dangerous, if the cable had busted, we would have gone down. The river would have been disastrous. We got across anyway. We broke a spring. I went up to Banner Creek where there was a forge and anvil and welded them together. Then we were on our way again. We got snowbound at Donnelly Road House so we turned around and went back to Fairbanks. Then we went to Livengood and prospected on Lillian Creek. We left Mother with plenty of wood and were gone about 4 months. Then Dad sent Ralph and I back to look for some claims in the promised land, but we found no gold - it was salted.

1917
neau

Before, we got to Juneau, I said to Ralph, "Gee the enlistments are closed. Lets go up and see the Governor about enlistments being closed." Ralph thought that was a kind of a wild idea, but he said, "Sure I'll go along." When the boat docked, we went up to see the Governor. The Secretary wanted to know what we wanted from the Governor. I told him it was personal, so he showed us in, and introduced us. He was very nice to us and told us if we got into any trouble at the Draftboard, to telegraph him at his expense.

Ralph and George Keys
San Antonio 1918



To get these uniforms, George sold the engagement ring which had been for Jean Sutherland, for $60.00.

Lar Vern and George Keys
Moose Creek 1926

There is a typographical error which runs consistently throughout this manuscript. The young woman who typed it from George's notes did not recognize that a period was intended after "E" and "M" of his father's name. Therefore it is typed all the way through as "Em Keys" instead of by initials, "E. M. Keys".