

Rachel Puckett

Dad looked for any work he could find to make a living. He joined the longshoreman union and worked on the docks when there was work, a sporadic thing at the time because the demand for shipping in primitive Alaska was not great. There were few people in the interior and their needs could be satisfied with infrequent ships. He found a job part-time at the Alaska Shop where he worked for Rachel Puckett. She was a big-hearted woman who took him under her wing.



Rachel was married to a man, Dick something. I never knew him because he died before we went to Seward. Her second husband was a highway patrolman, about the only one in the area. Rachel knew Jim's plans and knew that Marie was waiting for the money for her fare. So she started either withholding money from his check from the Alaska Shop, or made him give her part of his pay. She held this money in a savings account for him, until there was enough to pay for her fare at which point it was wired to her. Then Marie, with her sister Mabel as chaperone, bought fares and went to Seward about a year later according to mom.

George Puckett was a highway patrolman who also served as a game warden. That's an odd mixing of jurisdictions and I may not remember accurately what his duties were. But I remember his dark blue uniform, the title and the fact that he was involved in investigating poachers. Given the limited enforcement resources of the territory, it wouldn't be surprising if agencies shared duties. He was Rachel's second husband and was a quiet man. When I knew him in the '50's, he treated me well, the only measure I had for evaluating adults.

Alaska Shop

The Alaska Shop is difficult to classify, but it was representative of businesses that spring up in small communities. Out of the needs of the public, and the desire and necessity to make as much money as possible, a business that started out as a drugstore with a soda fountain might add a small menu and become both a drugstore and small restaurant. Books might be added, mementos might be added and so on. Through a process of accretion the original single objective was elaborated until there was a mixture of dry goods, medicinals, food, books and that is what the Alaska shop was. I don't think Rachel owned it and don't know who did. Under her management it was as successful as a business could be in a town of a thousand people. One of the more unusual things that was done under the auspices of the store was to hire an Eskimo who carved walrus ivory. I saw photographs of him at work, sitting cross-legged on the floor. I didn't pay much attention to the kind of tools he used except for one. His drill.

It was a traditional bow drill -I have learned since- that has used in pre-technological cultures around the world to create holes or to start fires. The drill consists of three parts: the bow itself that looks just like a bow used for shooting arrows except that this string hangs loosely, a shaft like the shaft of an arrow, and a wooden, bone or ivory mouthpiece. The shaft was the size of an arrow and by holding it against the bow string and twisting it in a particular way, it was held securely in the string. The lower end of the shaft held some sort of drill bit. The user placed the specially shaped block between his teeth and fitted it over the upper end of the rod. Then he placed the drill bit on the other end of the shaft onto the piece needing a hole. By leaning over the shaft and pressing down on it with the mouthpiece held between his teeth, he could press the bit against the ivory and

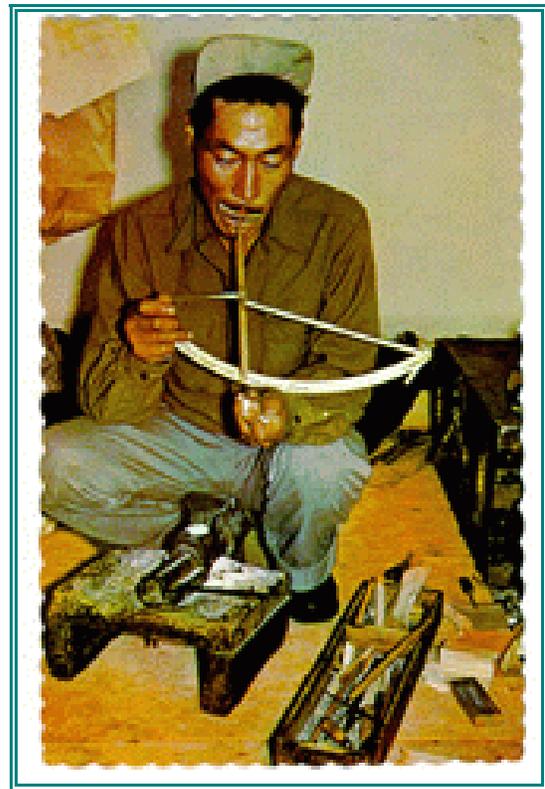


Figure 2

Eskimo Bow Drill

<http://www.thepostcard.com/walt/state/ak/ak236.j>

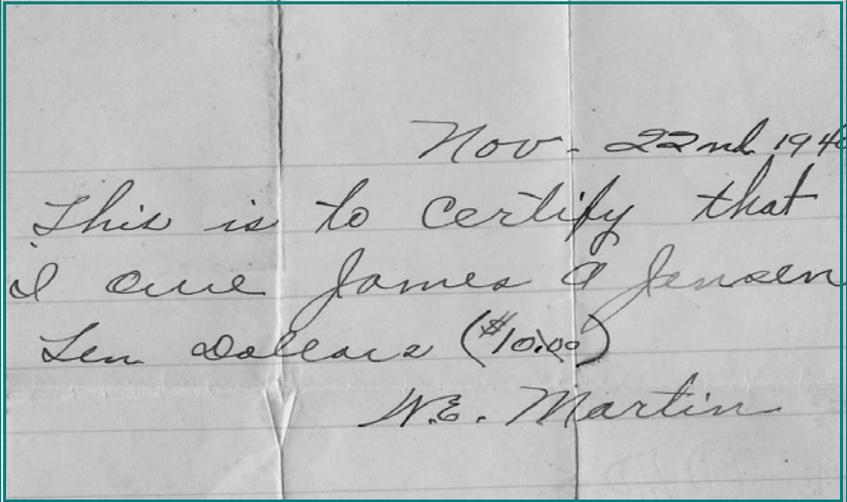
drill a hole in it. The way he made the drill bit spin, was to pull and push the bow back and forth. As the bow went back and forth, its string that was tightly wrapped around the drill shaft caused the shaft to spin one way and then the other. He'd cut holes to open a space in a 3-dimensional carving, or he would drill holes to make a cribbage board. Dad learned how to carve ivory from this man and made jewelry for mom.

Dad's artist side dominated his life. He and Rachel agreed that he would do charcoal drawings of huskies that she would have made into postcards for sale in the Shop. When I went to the Shop myself in the '50's, I saw them in the racks of postcards, signed in his flourishy "J.A. Jensen". They probably didn't net much, but they suited dad's interests and kept him occupied.

I found two stories in dad's writings that fit in this chapter. This one is about digging razor clams in Ninilchik which you can find it on the map above. I went there to dig clams as well and they were enormous.

The 1940 IOU

Amongst dad's miscellanea was an IOU from 1940. It was neatly folded in a celluloid sleeve along with his draft board registration and Alaska Driver's License. I suspect he tried to figure out how to take this thing with him just in case he saw this guy again. After all, ten dollars is ten dollars.



Nov. 22nd 1940
This is to certify that
I owe James A. Jensen
Ten dollars (\$10.00)
W.E. Martin

Alaska Railroad, Department of the Interior

After getting settled down in the hotel, dad applied for work with the Alaska Railroad (ARR). In those days the ARR controlled the docks as well as the railroad. The government had taken them over in the 1920's because private ownership wasn't working out well. The ARR even owned the stern wheelers on the Yukon. On August 14, 1940, dad was hired on. He was Employee No. 21,211 which gives you a sense of how much turnover there was.

A.R.R. NO. 122

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
THE ALASKA RAILROAD

EMPLOYEE Jensen, James A. No. 21211

SIGNATURE James A. Jensen

WITNESS O. M. Fredericks

PLACE AND DATE Seward 8-14-40

Seattle P.O.—5-7-36—10M

Dad's notes are a bit unclear about dates. I can't figure out the specific dates for many things in his life but don't worry about it because it doesn't matter. We do have the events themselves and the general order in which they occurred. In terms of his working in Seward first, then going to Anchorage and then returning to Seward, it seems that's the right sequence of events. He gives particulars that make it so, but his dates are contradictory or overlap.

In any event, his employment -whatever it was- with the ARR, was short-

Form No. 1218 DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
THE ALASKA RAILROAD

} Notice of Separation }
} or Furlough }

Identification No. 21211

Seward--July 12, 1941
(Place and Date)

James A. Jensen
(Name of Employee)

You are hereby notified that your

1	{ Permanent }
2	{ Indefinite }
3	{ Temporary }

 appointment will be terminated
you will be furloughed
(Strike out inapplicable terms)

as Longshoreman at a rate of pay of \$ 1.50 per { hour } effective
(Designation) { month }

July 12th, 1941, because of At own request
(Reason for separation or furlough)

O. F. OHLSON,
General Manager.

NOTE:—This appointment is
subject to review by
the General Manager.

By St Elliott
Timekeeper
(Title)

Original to employee
Seattle P.O.—3-25-38—10M-trip.

lived. He was "furloughed" on July 13, 1941, two months after he got married. That must have been a shock. Notice the reason for separation: "At own request." So he actually terminated his employment. Why would he do that? My guess is that he hired on with the contractors who were constructing Fort Raymond. The construction started in June 1941, so it makes sense. There wasn't anything else going on in Seward so he must have worked in construction.

Rowing to Lowell Point

I don't know how far it is from Seward down the bay to Lowell Point beach but it is probably two miles or more. Dad and a couple of guys he worked with apparently decided they would borrow someone's boat and go down to some scenic rocks they'd heard about, at Tonsina. The rub was that the boat didn't have an outboard. In fact, outboard motors were basically something that hadn't happened yet, so these guys had to row that boat with oars. If you've ever rowed, you understand that it is hard work and requires skill to keep a boat going straight. In any event, these guys picked a nice day and made the trip as shown in these photos. I made this story up.

