



ANTON MONEY and his bride mush through a fierce Arctic blizzard down the Finlayson River.

# Sourdoughs settle down, swap tales

*"Half dazed, half crazed in the winter wild, with its grim heart-breaking woes,  
And the ruthless strife for a grip on life that only the sourdough knows..."*

—Robert Service

By Hillary Hauser  
News-Press Staff Writer

## Sourdough.

Most people in the Lower Forty-Eight think it's a type of bread, but Alaskans know that a sourdough is a person who has survived a northern winter. A sourdough has seen the ice of the Yukon River go out during its explosive spring break-up — but for some, the title is reserved for those gold prospectors who stampeded into the Klondike and Alaskan gold rushes at the turn of the century.

Santa Barbara has long been a landing pad for sourdoughs, and at one time there were an estimated 200 of them living here. The International Sourdough Reunion (which began in 1914 in Portland, Ore.) had a Santa Barbara chapter that was plenty lively in its day, but eventually died out because descendants of sourdoughs were not qualified to join.

However, this organization was replaced by The Alaskans, a club which accepts as members descendants of sourdoughs, or children of those who have lived in Alaska for any length of time, and this organization is still going strong.

Fred Hand, 72, first president of The Alaskans when it began in Santa Barbara in 1958, said recently that the organization today has 4,300 members in chapters all over the United States, Canada and the

Yukon. Hand, who lived in Anchorage from 1939 to 1953, has spent considerable amounts of time recording the stories of sourdoughs because he feels the tales are important for posterity.

If there is one thing sourdoughs like to do, it's swap stories: men with hundreds of pounds of supplies on their backs climbing the icy steps of the Chilkoot Pass; stampedeers shooting the rapids and barely escaping death as rafts broke up over the falls; miners losing fingers, ears and noses to frostbite; dog teams making 100 mile runs to save lives; and fabulous gold strikes in the frozen tundra that turned men into millionaires overnight.

Hand indicated that advancing age is always a problem in getting accurate accounts.

"One guy, Archie, was 97," Hand recalled. "His wife was 92, sharp as a tack. Most of the interview Archie would go off in a 'Welllllllllll...', and she would say, 'Now Archie, don't you remember?' and she'd tell the story. She lived in Skagway. I asked her if she would go up there again. 'Certainly not,' she said, 'that's no place for kids.'"

Another problem with sourdough stories, said Hand, is the tendency of the teller toward embellishment, and he talked about one old-timer who "gets carried away with experiences he hasn't had."

Embellished or no, the tales make interesting reading, and many Santa Barbara sourdoughs have had their stories published in national magazines and books.

Anton Money, 82, is a sourdough living in Hope Ranch who has written the book "This Was the North," (Crown Publishers), about his life in Alas-

ka. Money, was 22 years old when he left a proper, privileged English life for the wilds of the Yukon in 1923.

Money made one of his strikes in a bend of the Finlayson River, near Frances Lake in the Yukon.

"We were camped, waiting for Indians," Money recalled. "It took three weeks to get in, so it was nice to sit down. While we were waiting, we went up the canyon three miles into the Finlayson River until we couldn't go any further, to have a look. It was narrow — big boulders on either side. I was walking on bedrock in just over an inch of water and something just flashed in my eye. I thought it was a piece of bedrock and walked on. Then my mind caught up and I walked backward, taking the exact steps I'd taken forward. There it was. I could see it, a nugget as big as the fingernail of my little finger. I shouted 'GOLD!' then got a pick from the boat and started to dig."

Money said his partner left after the first year ("he was cynical") but that he built a cabin in the canyon and, with only the caribou for company, he "dug like mad" for the next two years.

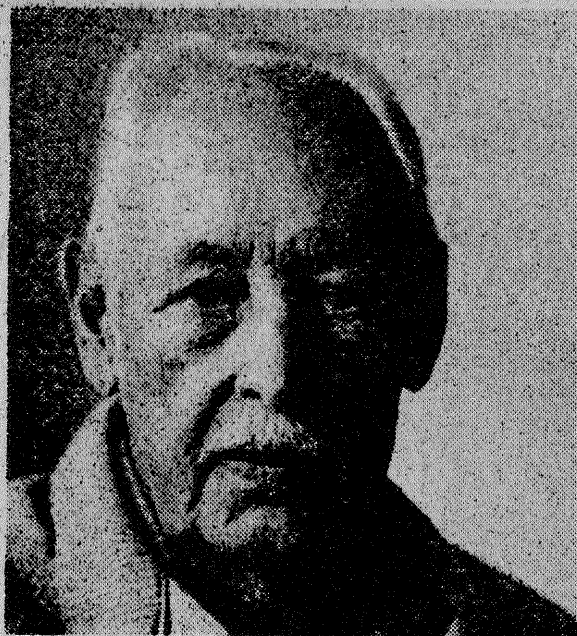
"I was damned busy — no time to think about being alone," said Money. "I had a whipsaw, made sluice boxes. In the winters, cut lumber, built cabins. Some people built fires and thawed the ground to dig, but I worked with lumber."

In 1926, he went to Vancouver to have his gold assayed, and while on the trip met 17-year-old Joyce Curtis. After a three-day courtship they were married, and together they returned to his staked claim

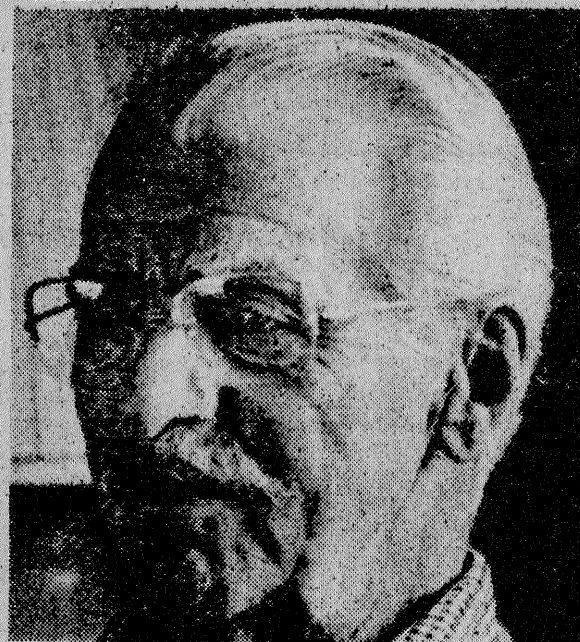
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**BUCK LANDRU**  
Writing a book



**ANTON MONEY**  
Just reminiscing



**GOLD PAN** in hand, Anton Money takes out the precious metal from Gold Pan Creek during the spring of 1925, 25 miles east of Dease Lake in Northern British Columbia.

# Sourdough stories get even better with age

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on the Finlayson. By 1930, Money had taken out \$17,000 worth of gold.

"It was a fortune," said Money.

Money and his bride took a trip to England with the \$17,000, at a time when a day's wages were \$4.

"I thought I could buy England with that money," he said. "My wife and I walked down the street in London and if I'd see something in the window, or if she'd see some trinket, I'd say, 'Wrap it up, how much is it?' in that order. It was the beginning of the depression, but we had gold."

Money struck gold on other rivers in the North, too, including Money Creek, which was named after him. In 1928 he was named Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society for his explorations and discoveries in the southeastern Yukon Territory.

In 1947 he came to Santa Barbara, to work for the university, but he soon discovered that he missed the North too much to stay. He returned to Alaska and built a highway lodge along the Alcan Highway half way to Whitehorse, which he ran for 12 years. In 1964 he returned to Santa Barbara, this time for good.

Today, Money looks out over the Goleta Valley mountains and often thinks about Alaska. In his den, along with the Reader's Digest condensed version of his book, he keeps the collar of Rogue — the dog that saved his life — and the gold pan that brought him luck. He says he owes his good constitution to the years he spent in the North.

"Although I don't leap up like I used to, I am still healthy," said Money, "because driving dog teams for 40 years helped."

Buck Landru, a sourdough who lives in Fairbanks and vacations here occasionally, sat in his hotel room in Santa Barbara and remembered a story that was told to him by the famed dog racer Leonard Seppala. The story was about how some Eskimos held a big potluck in a room-sized tent to impress the white men who had stampeded into Nome in 1901.

"Well," said Landru, "in the middle of the dancing and carrying-on, the miners decided they would show those Eskimos some of their own tricks. They walked up to the table and one pulled out his glass eye, another put his wooden leg on the table, and another took out his false teeth. The Eskimos immediately stampeded, slashing the tent with their knives to get out. Didn't even wait to get out the door."

Landru prospected in "the Territory" for three years, from 1936-1941, but he and his wife were mainly involved in breeding and racing dogs in Fairbanks.

"Originally the dogs of Nome were malamutes," said Landru. "But there was a lot of experimental breeding to develop faster dogs. Scotty Allan was the fastest until Seppala came along with his Siberians. They were small dogs, no uniformity as far as color, but they had feet of iron and unlimited stamina. Seppala was unbeatable."

Two years ago, Dodd Mead published Landru's book, "Blue Parka Man," about a swindler who between 1905-1908 preyed on miners coming into town with their pokes.

Landru is now working on his second book, this one based on diaries given to him by an old-timer who lived on the Kuskokwim. Landru was transcribing the diaries while in Santa Barbara, but is doing most of the writing at his cabin in Circle Hot Springs, 25 miles south of the village of Circle on the Yukon River. He has spent many winters in Santa Barbara, but always goes back to Alaska the moment of spring break-up.

"Nothing compares with those summers," said Landru. "We have about 22 hours of daylight . . . and the Northern Lights — they never grow old. A lot of people say there's no sound, but there is. A glowing in the heavens, changing colors, then a rippling, crackling and snapping like as of a whip. There is nothing like it."

Rowena Taylor, a local travel agent, opened up a scrapbook of her mother's last trip to Alaska and pointed out a photograph of the book-autographing party held for her mother in Dawson. Ella Lung Martinsen had become an Alaskan celebrity for her two books, "Black Sand and Gold" and "Trail to North Star Gold" — both based on the lives of Mrs. Taylor's grandparents, Edward and Velma Lung.

Ed Lung had hiked over the treacherous Chilkoot Pass to Dawson during the Klondike gold rush of 1898, and his wife had "come into the country" a year later, to live with her husband in the wilds of Dominion Creek. The two books were written from the Lungs' wilderness journals, which they edited during their twilight years in Santa Barbara.

"Oh, they had the dancehall girls and they had their riotous living when they came into town from their claims," Velma Lung wrote in her diary. "but they came cap in hand, these great, rough men, to our little cabin to eat my cake and to touch the baby's cheek so gently with their hard fingers."

The baby was Mrs. Taylor's mother, the first white child born in Dominion Creek. As Mrs. Taylor thumbed through the scrapbook, she pointed out Robert Service's cabin, where the works of the Yukon's poet-laureate are now read every afternoon during the summer; Diamond Tooth Gertie's gambling hall; the old Flora Dora Hotel in Dawson; and Discovery, where the first claim was staked during the Klondike rush of 1898.

Of special significance to Mrs. Taylor is the picture of her mother visiting the place of her birth on Dominion Creek . . .

It is now summer in Alaska and it is not difficult to appreciate the majestic snow-capped mountains, the fields of brightly colored wildflowers, the glimmering lakes. But to be in Alaska when the mercury drops to 80 below, say the sourdoughs, is the only way one can begin to understand what Alaska is all about.

It is also the sort of thing that makes Anton Money look out over the Goleta Valley and miss the mountains, that causes Buck Landru go back to his cabin in Circle instead of staying in Santa Barbara, and it is why Rowena Taylor remembers with deep emotion the stories of her grandparents, who lived a rare adventure that she can only dream of.