Interview by Dianne Wiesner of Albert Schulz on December 4, 1980

DW Did you have permission to trap on Bruce Gardines land in the Big Hole?

AS We had no...he invited us there...for a Thanksgiving dinner. That's how that happened.

DW You met him down there.

AS Oh, yes. We trapped in the Big Hole and got 105 beaver in less than 30 days.

DW This was in 1960?

AS 1961 or '62.

DW Who was your partner?

AS Ralph Hootnan from Billings. He was a good trapper.

DW Earlier today you were telling me about a man...man named Dan.

AS Dan Fletcher.

DW Dan Fletcher and Mr. Dunn.

AS Well, that was Dan Fletcher, that would be from Canada.

DW You were just a boy then, weren't you?

AS I was, well, I was about 15 years old or close to it. He'd set the traps. Well, he had about a bunch of cattle there. Well, these hard winters and they lost them. He lost his cattle. Anyhow Dan he...no, Harry Dunn was the brother that got sick and he died and they went to get the doctor and they went to Rosebud to the doctor. When they found him, was east of Rosebud twelve miles in the morning. He froze his nose and his ears and the tips of his thumbs came off. When he took his shoes off, they come off at the ankle. The whole feet come off, they froze them. So they had to put stubs on there and then he could walk on the stubs and he set the traps.

DW He was still going after all of that?

AS Yes.
DW Well now, was this Dan Fletcher's brother?

AS No, it was Harry Dunn's brother.

DW What was Harry Dunn's brother's name?

AS I never did find out what his name was. They, them three stayed together.

DW Did they all work the same ranch up there?

AS Yes. It was the Colonization Company bought it afterwards. It was two miles from us.

DW Was it a ranch or a wheat farm?

AS No, it was a cattle ranch. It was all free range. There wasn't anybody else around there.

DW How did you know these men?

AS Well, they just were our neighbors. We lived two miles from them. That's where Dan Fletcher trapped together. Because there was no scent on his shoes, he would set the traps and the next day I would go and take the 22 and shoot Mr. Coyote in the head and then take them home that night and skin them. The next day he would go set some more traps and I would go back the next day and take the coyotes out of the trap. If I set a trap, I would have more scent on it then if he'd set the trap because if he set the trap, there would be something in it.

DW Well now, why would you be leaving more scent than he would Albert?

AS Because he didn't have no scent on his shoes because he didn't have no feet. Because he froze his feet off.

DW So this was Harry Dunn's brother that was setting the traps?

AS No, that was Dan Fletcher. Dan Fletcher was the one that set the traps.

DW Was he the one that froze his feet?

AS He was the one that froze his feet.

DW Those three guys worked that ranch together. Did you know how to trap before you met them?

AS Not very much, no. Then Dan disappeared that next spring. I don't know if he drowned in some place when the high
water come up or where he went, I don't know. He was just gone.

DW So you only got to trap that one season?

AS About three seasons, I think.

DW Why were they trapping the coyote?

AS Well, just to get some more money, I guess.

DW What were they making?

AS I caught a big coyote up there, he had a mane like a horse. I got $4 for that hide, but the meat too, I got $23. That was in 1916.

DW That was pretty good money then?

AS Yep, it was pretty good.

DW Did you ever do any of the trap setting?

AS Oh, I trapped them big white weasel in Canada. I got $7.20 a piece for them. One winter I caught 192 white weasels.

DW When you were about 15 or what?

AS 15 or 16. Oh they would jump five or six feet to the jump. You would get around thirty out of a den, if you could find a den. Set the trap right in where they go in and out. If you could catch one, you would catch a whole bunch of them. They are easy to catch.

DW What were you telling me earlier about trapping coyotes compared to trapping coyotes today?

AS Well, you could set down a trap them days most any place. You could catch a coyote because they didn't know what a trap was. Now a days they are trap wise, you can't catch a coyote as easy as you could.

DW You had to cover the trap, but you didn't have to worry about your scent, is that kind of what you mean?

AS Most then it was just set a trap, most places put a little scent down and before it started to snow, you wouldn't have to cover it with snow on it. Then just put a couple of sticks under it, and then set your trap and then it would snow under in an hour. The next morning you would have a coyote.

DW How many coyotes did you catch? Do you remember?
Oh, some days not very many, if I caught them. If Dan was along, we would catch quite two or three some nights and maybe five or six some nights, and some nights not any.

How long a line did you run when on your pony?

Oh, about no more than 15 or 20 miles in a circle.

You would just check a section of it each day?

Yes.

Was this on their ranch? Of course, it was open like you said.

There was no ranches in those days. It was all free range.

Anybody around there doing much trapping then?

No. Just Dan.

Well, what did Harry Dunn do?

Well, he had a bunch of cattle, you see. Dan and Harry Dunn and his brother, they had a bunch of cattle. There was a chinook wind that come up and there was about four feet of snow and it melted about half of it. That was on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The next Monday morning it would be cold. It would be 50 degrees below zero and there would be about two feet of ice on the ground. The cattle would starve to death.

So those were Harry's cattle?

Well, they belonged to the three of them.

Did Harry do any trapping with Dan?

Harry Dunn and his brother didn't, no.

Then you learned quite a bit of your trapping from Dan?

Mostly and my dad.

Oh, your dad trapped too?

Some in Minnesota, yes.

He didn't do any trapping in Canada?

No. He would take a rifle and shoot a coyote now and then.
DW Where would you be located, where is Rosebud near? Or
where were you in Canada?

AS Well, we were east of Calgary 50 miles, and then
afterwards there was a town come in by the name of Rocky Ford.
We lived north of Rocky Ford about six miles and about two miles
on the Rosebud river. Rosebud, the town of Rosebud was down about
east of that about ten or fifteen miles, about something like that.
Rosebud river, when it got up, it was much water in it as the
Bitterroot. That was in the spring. It would go up, otherwise
it was just a little spring.

DW What were you telling me earlier about the lights in the sky?
Something about the lights in the sky? You could tell that it
was going to be a Chinook?

AS Oh, well, a Chinook would come from the horizon up there.
The foot of the horizon and goes to the south, the more Chinook
you would have. There would be just a little horizon like when
the sun goes down about a half. Well, then you would have half a
Chinook wind and if there be about four feet of snow, then there
would be two feet of snow when it was over. Monday morning it
would be froze and it would be icy, ice in place of the snow.
Your cattle or horses would starve to death.

DW Was this something you could see coming? You could see
the Chinook coming?

AS Yes, you could see the Chinook. There would be a light
horizon when the sun goes down.

DW You would be looking in the west?

AS In the west.

DW As the sun would set, and it is real flat, as the sun was
sinking what would you see?

AS You would see a light streak along the west slope.

DW You can't see that sort of thing over here in the
mountains can you?

AS Well, they have Chinook wind here too, but not like there.

DW They're coming but you can't see that light streak
because of the mountains.

AS That's right.
DW When you moved up to Canada, you met Dan Fletcher, who was a neighbor. Did you know very much about him from going over and visiting and trapping with him?

AS Well, no we just got acquainted.

DW Was he from Canada?

AS Yes, he lived there.

DW How old a man was he when you met him?

AS Oh, he must have been about 40. Something like that.

DW Had he trapped all his life?

AS Yes, I think he did. I don't think that Harry Dunn and his brother done any trapping.

DW Was Dan a bachelor?

AS Oh, yes. They all three were.

DW Do you know where in Canada Dan Fletcher was from?

AS Well, when I met him, he was there from Rocky Ford on the ranch. I never did find out where he was born.

DW Did he have any brothers and sisters in the area?

AS I don't know about that. I know he used to take the bridle off his old pony, a buckskin pony and turn him loose and he would go real slow to a coyote and all at once the pony would give a jump or two and would rope him.

DW What do you mean, Dan would rope the coyote?

AS Rope the coyote.

DW What would you do, run up and take the trap off his foot?

AS There wouldn't be no trap on it.

DW You mean just come creeping up on a live coyote?

AS He'd rope them with a lariat, yes.

DW There wasn't any bounty on coyotes up there, was there?

AS No, just the price of fur. We used to sell them to the Hudson Bay Fur Company... at Calgary.
DW How many months during the winter season would you trap them?
AS Well, anytime there was snow on the ground, we would trap.
DW That could be quite a long season then?
AS Yes, as long as the furs were good.
DW What did you consider the main months when the fur was good? Is it a little different than here in Montana?
AS Well, I suppose about November the furs would be good until April. There was a lot of coyotes in those days too.
DW Did Dan ever talk about trapping in the earlier days or other places that he had trapped?
AS No, no, just there on the river.
DW On the Rosebud?
AS Yes.
DW How many years had they owned that ranch together over there?
AS Well, I don't know how many years they owned it before, because I was just a kid. Then the Colonization Company bought it after he disappeared. I think they were just camping there, because everything was prearranged there.
DW They might not have even owned the house?
AS They didn't have a house. They just had a little shack.
DW Where did they sell their cattle?
AS They froze to death.
DW They only had it for the one year?
AS Well, they was just there and it was all and they didn't have no feed.
DW I thought maybe they had run cattle there for ten years or so.
AS They had before that. Then after that Chinook, well, they starved to death.
DW You did trap with them for years there, three years there?
AS    Right at it.

DW    During those three years did they have cattle each of those years and then that last year they lost them?

AS    Well, they had some there. About all Dan had was his saddle horse, left his buckskin.

DW    So they stayed on there to trap another winter?

AS    No, Dan disappeared after in the spring.

DW    The same year that the cattle died?

AS    Yes.

DW    When did you live in Canada and trap there? In 1912, '13, and '14?

AS    Yes. We left Canada in 1919. I know I went to Calgary, it was the 7th of November, I was supposed to go to the army, which I did. Then the 11th of November, they told me to go home.

DW    The war was over?

AS    Yes, so it was the 11th of November. I had to go to Calgary for the war the 7th of November. I had to go for the war, that was my birthday. The 11th of November, they sent me home. That's when the war was over, I think. That was in 1918. Then the next year we left Canada. In 1919 we went to Colorado east of Denver.

DW    When did you finally make it to Montana?

AS    In the year of 1937.

DW    It was in the thirties?

AS    Yes.

DW    Before we move into the time that you spent trapping in Montana, can you think of anything else about trapping in Canada? That interests me even though it is not in Montana because it was quite early. A lot of or if you had met any of the other trappers, they would have been older men who would have been trapping in say the 1870's or 80's possibly. Was this Mr. Gray a trapper?

AS    No. Oh yes, Gray was a trapper but he went to north of Edmonton.
DW  Is that where he lived?

AS  Well, he was no...he just...he was a trapper. He caught them with that cage.

DW  Yes, that was not a conventional way of trapping. Did he use snares or long spring traps? That's what I meant.

AS  He caught 33 in there in that cellar.

DW  How did he do that again? Used a looking glass?

AS  Yes, you see he had already had a cellar or cave dug and these poles put across there then he put some more poles up there and then he had some bailing wire. He wired these poles on and then he made a pen on top of this cellar which was kind of a B. This looking glass was facing the east and the moon would shine against that. He had this piece of tin with screen door springs fastened about the center, then he had this come around there with that scent sack. The snow come up to this V where this trail was where the grey wolves come in. They would hit that tin and they would fall into the cellar.

DW  Was this under his house?

AS  No. It was up on a ridge and he dug this cellar up on kind of a high place. He pulled the dirt out to make it higher so that it would be down in. then he had a ladder in it to go down in there. the first night he got a round, he took this sack of scent and a gunny sack and he brought it around to the face where this inlet comees, where the looking glass was. Then the wolves, the grey wolves, would see himself in the looking glass and he would want to fight this wolf and then he hit that tin and he would fall down in the cellar.

DW  The tin was laid like a false floor?

AS  Yes, it was only about 18 inches wide. Then when he would see himself in the looking glass, he would fall in there. The first night he had 33. These grey wolves, three of them was female and wolves that didn't have no teeth. Anyway he was supposed to shoot from the roof with these guys in Calgary. Then they would come to Edmonton and which they wasn't. Well, he was supposed to be there the 10th of the month and he wasn't there. So they went out and Mr. Gray, he called in a moose with his moose horn. Because the cabin door was open and the tea kettle was on the stove, it was froze up and busted. He shot a moose because he had a 30-30 rifle. He shot this moose and he wounded him and he was out there trying to kill him. He was standing up, his one foot was under the moose, under his neck like and he was
against a tree. This dead tree was about over four feet tall. He leaned against the tree. He had his foot under the moose and the moose and him both was froze stiff.

DW He was leaning up against the tree maybe to get another shot or something?

AS No, he was just trying to get his foot from underneath him.

DW Did he get pinned up against the tree?

AS Yes, he was pinned up against the tree. His...in his horns and he couldn't get out. They were both froze stiff when they come back from Calgary to see what was wrong with him.

DW Was that the same year that he was trapping those grey wolves?

AS Yes, that was the next spring.

DW When he took that bag of scent and drug it around the outside of this area that he had dug this pit, placed this looking glass on one side of it, I guess. What was he using for scent?

AS No, he just had some blood and coyote scent in this sack that he dragged. That would draw your grey wolves to that piece of tin where he would fall in the cellar.

DW He must have had it kind of blocked on the side so that they'd kind of walk in a narrow walk way over that tin?

AS Well, it would be to come into that looking glass. Then as soon as he got to that tin, he would fall into the cellar.

DW Did he show you those wolves after he trapped them?

AS Oh, no.

DW You didn't get to see them?

AS No, but he explained it before we went down there. Then, of course, that was the cellar from the wolves. He went there, he was there in the first place on his homestead, or his cabin there, his squatter's cabin and then he would get them moose for those millionaires from Calgary to come out that would get the moose. He would put them in boxes and then they would haul them to Edmonton about 100 miles there on dogsleds.

DW What did they do with the moose? Did they want it for meat or for hides?

AS They would take it to Calgary. When Mr. Gray was caught
with that moose against the tree then he froze to death. I often thought if I had been there, maybe I could have helped him. I was just 15 years old.

DW Was that the time he had asked your dad if you could go with him?

AS No, that was another time. Dad wouldn't let me go along with him because that was after and then he froze to death at the cabin. They come from Calgary and he was froze there. If I had been there I might have helped him, I might not. I might have froze to death too.

DW So Dan Fletcher is the main person that you met in Canada that was a trapper?

AS Oh yes, what become of him, I don't know. I think he drowned though.

DW Did your dad ever show you any trapping? You said he used to trap.

AS Well, he used to show me how to snare.

DW He used snares in Minnesota?

AS Oh yes.

DW What did he snare with these?

AS He just showed me how to snare rabbits, which I could catch.

DW So when you moved to Montana, did you start trapping right away or did you ... how did you get into it?

AS Well, oh yes, we trapped. When we come back from Idaho, we trapped here in south of Harlowtown. We trapped practically everything that was to be trapped. Mostly mink and muskrats, we used to trap a lot of skunks. The latter ones, I don't like to skin them.

DW Who...did you have a partner?

AS Oh yes. Well, my wife and I, we trapped.

DW In the 30's and 40's?

AS Yes, that was after 46, then we didn't trap anymore. We moved to town then. Then again I trapped after '61, after '62. Trapped in the Big Hole in '62, then after that I trapped again.
DW Say that again. You trapped in the Big Hole in '62?

AS Yes, with Ralph Hootan. Then after that I trapped some at Grass Range and any place over the state as far as that goes.

DW Could you explain to me when you trapped south of Harlowtown in the late '30s? What kind of time are we talking about? Are we talking about every day, three months of the year, just what kind of time span?

AS Well, I trapped in '41 south of Harlowtown, just small such as muskrats and mink. Well, I didn't trap any coyotes because I didn't ... because I trapped skunks. You could trap skunks, well, you would only get about $8 for a mink and muskrat, they was all the way from about 80 cents to $1.25 at that time. You could do pretty good with mink at $8, about all you would get for them. That was in '41.

DW Did you do this after work, you started to tell me that you weren't working at the time?

AS No, I wasn't working.

DW So you were able to trap full time.

AS Full time at the ranch. I had a ranch down east.

DW What months of the year did you trap?

AS Well, we started in the fall and until spring.

DW Were there seasons set by the Fish and Game Department then?

AS Oh yes, but I didn't know much about the Fish and Game at that time, so I just trapped. I don't even think you had to trap on your own place. I just trapped skunks, mink and muskrats.

DW No beaver?

AS No beaver at that time.

DW What determined when you trapped them? The weather?

AS Well,, I most generally went - I trapped on the American Fork Creek mostly and Bibbo Creek. Up and down there and then on my own place. That's what I caught mostly muskrats, mink and skunk. Skunks - they were a good price at that time.

DW What was the main thing that determined when you would decide to trap?
AS  Well, you just had to...

DW  Was it the condition of the fur or the weather conditions because it ...

AS  It was the hard times.

DW  How does the person, if he doesn't have a trapping season set by the Fish and Game Department ... how does he decide when is a good time to go out? Was money the main thing for you or was it something else?

AS  The money was the main thing for me because ...

DW  Let me put it this way. Why didn't you trap in July? Did you not need money then? Was it because of something else?

AS  No, because it was out of season. About November, the middle of November, you would start, the furs are better. There is a better price for them. Of course, when we come, we bought a place, you see, south of Harlowtown from John Ritz. So John says, "Are you a carpenter?" I say, "but if you help me make a big house" ... so okay. Anyhow I worked for him, I helped to make a big house. I got $36, so we went to town and spent the $36 for groceries but we had two bits left. My wife says, "You got two bits, here's five traps in the Gambles store. They're 25 cents a piece. Buy these five traps for a dollar and a quarter that was all the money we had. There was five traps, 25 cents a piece. That's how we started to trap again that year. Well, muskrats at first wasn't very good price, they were only 35 cents. After we got to catching them, we needed the money, they went up to 85 cents. Muskrats, well, I think old Ritz give us the money because we needed it but afterwards the price went down. It didn't make any difference, we had plenty of money anyhow.