

Call number ORAL HISTORY 02-00-69 SIDE A

Arctic Village School dedication

Summary created by: Varpu Lotvonen

Date of summary's creation: 9/9/13

Notes: Original in 7 inch tapes, master copy on CD. This is the full dedication ceremony. A portion of the first part of the ceremony is on 02-00-66.

Series: Harrie Hughes Collection.

The recording starts with a woman speaking in Gwich'in. At 7:23 another woman's voice says that Maggie [probably Maggie Gilbert] was talking about when she was a kid. She doesn't remember how old she was at the time, but she is now 65 years old. They used to move around here, back and forth, back to school. When they were kids, there were no cabins over here, but there were some caches up the creek and that's the only thing she remembers. Then next time, there was a cabin over there where the old Gilbert [unclear]. When they started, there weren't any windows or doors or anything, just the building. Then sometimes [unclear] they got back there with [unclear, sounds like: cheap?, Chief?, sheep?] who started putting in windows and doors. They made windows out of a tanned skin. Then they moved into the village. Maggie said she sometimes visited with her grandmother. That was the beginning for all the cabins, which were built afterwards.

The first school she ever remembers [unclear, children are crying. She was talking about how she learned the ABC, but the recording is only fragmentarily intelligible.] They went over and over the ABC. They didn't have pencils or paper at that time. Maggie's grandfather had one pencil that was really short and stocky and they kept it to themselves. They [the children] were writing with black coals from the fire and that's how they learned to write. That was in wintertime. In summertime they usually [unclear] hunt or trap around. They would bring that [what?] back up and use it for paper. They'd write ABC on it with black coals and wipe it off then to write some more. They learned to [unclear]. They learned the hard way compared to what schools do today. When she comes over here and hears all these papers, it makes her think about the times when they used [unclear] paper. [Unclear]. [Gwich'in narration continues.]

[At 21:19 Translating continues but it's unclear in the beginning.] Maggie's [?] grandfather was working for the church and [unclear due to background noise of babies cooing and such]. They were building the Church, and he remembered hauling those logs "here" and there was nobody in the village then. Everybody was out. He remembered every time when they got around a bend and across the river they had hard time putting the logs up because they aren't very strong. When they were in sight of the village their mother would come out and meet them and told them [unclear]. Everybody helped in bringing logs for the church. Once they got all the logs in they all gathered around there and said prayer and [unclear]. She remembered when grandfather learned to be a preacher and learned to read the Bible. He really

had hard time with learning, but he really pushed it and learned the Bible. [Unclear. Someone is calling Steven. A man's voice is speaking in Gwich'in.]

At 34:30 a man [probably Mr. Gilbert] starts speaking in Gwich'in. The translator says Mr. Gilbert doesn't remember the teaching that was going on. Their parents were the only ones, teaching them from the bibles they had. They learned to say the [unclear] and that's only thing Mr. Gilbert remembers them having at the time. They studied the bible and later on put up [unclear] and then Mr. Gilbert remembers the Sunday school [unclear]. When the elders put up the church, [unclear], Old John [unclear]. Later on while they were [unclear] teaching them the Bible and how to read the Bible. If they work together, they can even get [unclear] and things like that. [Unclear.] He said that he wasn't the only one to remember the Old Albert talking to him and everyone else [unclear].

A woman's voice thanks all the speakers who told about the history of the Arctic Village and she thinks there should be a little intermission.

A woman's voice [later identified as Kathy] talks about how she did not complete the 8th grade so she did what she could [unclear, she is talking something about kids]. They have put all their time to do other things for the school. Even the days when they [unclear] there were people that could [unclear] that time. There were no means of transportation during that time and everyone's main food was meat and fish. [Unclear.] She is sincerely in favor of the children having all the education they possibly can because education is something in which the Native people are missing out. They won't be living all the time with [unclear]. She won't keep any of her children from that opportunity and her mind is put on this very [unclear]. Many people have talked about her what it's like to have an education, so this is a way of showing some people feel the same too.

At 49:20 another woman thanks Kathy. [Recording is very unclear due to things happening in the background.] A woman speaks: The first time when she started teaching children here, Albert Tritt [?] told her to do it. She started teaching. [Unclear] she has to do it. He wanted her to do it [start teaching] went up to Circle to pick her from Fort Yukon. She has to do everything Albert tells her to do. When she talked to the Chief up there, they talked how to get pens and paper for children. The woman talks paper that was used already [unclear]. Older people [unclear]. Albert Tritt always give her paper and he really wants the children to learn [unclear]. All the time there has been no books or paper but even [unclear] and some of the people give them pencils [unclear] to cover 14 children at school. She doesn't have [unclear]. She was 16 years old when she started teaching children and she doesn't even think about getting paid. That's all she has to say now.

[Unclear woman's voice thanks the previous speaker and invites other people to come forth.] She says she would like to present these [a gift] as a token of their respect towards the work they have done over the years in educating the children of the village. Even when the kids don't always like going to school, they will appreciate it later. [Appalause.] Now they have [unclear].

At 54:14 A woman's voice says she is very happy to be there and she considers it a great privilege at a time like this when they are dedicating a school. She has heard a great deal about the past and points out that the school being there is a result of "you people's" attitude. Without that it wouldn't be there. They have a great deal of respect for "you people in Arctic Village." She is sure that things today are different from what they were when the people who talked to you tonight were children. If they could look back further to people who were their parents and their parents' parents, they would hear other stories and learn that it was very different then to what it was when those people were little children. They would know things that probably haven't been told and that haven't been passed on because they were forgotten.

They [the audience] can look back still further than that and know that 250 years ago, Alaska was an unknown country. 250 years ago Russia came over to find out if there was land east from Russia and if there was a pass to Asia. They didn't know that then. About a 100 years ago, the first sailing vessel came down the Yukon somewhere around the area that is now known as Fort Yukon. It's possible to know [about] those things because people wrote things down. So by coming to school the children can learn about those things. They have a small library but each year it will grow bigger and the children can learn about the country and things that have happened. They read books considering their own land. The speaker is showing a map and talking about Hudson Stuck's travels around the Fort Yukon-area. There is a book about Hudson Stuck's trip around the Arctic Coast. When the children learn to read, they can read these stories, books about other Native people, encyclopedias, fun books like Tom Sawyer, and Bible stories, which are the best ones for learning how to read. By dedicating the school to these things, they will hold it in [unclear] for their children and children's children. They will all have a part in taking care of it.

Alaska became a state not very long ago and now that Alaska is a state, there is more and more reason for children to get education. Right now they have law-makers in Juneau whose decisions affect all of Alaska. The people in Juneau think they are making decisions that are best for the country but some of those people have not lived in Alaska for a long time and might not understand what living in Alaska means. Maybe they will make some mistakes. "You people" do not want other people coming into the country and making all of the laws. You want to have a part in it too and by sending your children to school to learn all they can, they are able to compete with all other people. You offer them an opportunity to become law-makers and the speaker is hoping that a couple of years from now, when she'll be a very old lady, there will be somebody in Juneau who is from Arctic Village. She thanks people for being there and helping to establish the school.

[End of the recording.]