

Call Number: 02-00-13

James Van Stone, No Location, Interview by Jerry Shakura (sp), Note reads RI/12/83

Summary created by: Jacob Metoxen

Date of creation of summary: 2/12/2013

Notes: Original of 5 inch reel. Master copy on CD.

Discussion topic of the night is archaeology in Alaska; its aims and purposes. Mr. Van Stone's defines archaeology as "the job of the archaeologists is to reconstruct human history from the earliest times to the present." He says to do this the archaeologist uses the materials he finds in the ground such as the houses, pottery, and tools. The archaeologist in Alaska has a number of problems and benefits. Mr. Van Stone says he is lucky to be working in somewhat of a natural environment with people who live the same way their ancestors did. The preservation is also very good because the ground is frozen. Because of this, the archaeologist is able to find a lot about how the people live.

Mr. Van Stone says people often ask the question of where the Eskimos came from and where the culture came from. He says all of the work leads us to believe the Eskimos came to Alaska across the Bering Strait region and from the St. Lawrence Island region. They are fairly certain the Eskimo came from the Bering Strait and migrated all the way through Alaska. Van Stone believes there is no other way people came to the U.S., the only explanation is the Bering Strait.

The next topic of discussion is the contributions the University of Alaska has made to the expeditions of the north. The university has been very active in archaeological research. Back in 1926-27, Mr. Otto William Geist made an archaeological reconnaissance of St. Lawrence Island and then again in 1931-1933 the University carried on excavations with territorial funds. And then in 1934-1935 with an additional grant Mr. Geist carried on excavations on St. Lawrence Island. In 1936, Geist and Dr. Froelich Rainey published results of their work. At St. Lawrence Island one large mound was excavated called the Kuklick Mound. Many Eskimo groups have been identified at St. Lawrence Island. The older cultural sequence is towards the bottom of the Kuklick Mound and the recent ones are toward the top of the mound. The earliest level was called the Old Bering Sea Culture dating back 2000 years ago. The Eskimos had a fully developed sea mammal hunting culture and did very elaborate art decoration on hunting objects. Artifacts were found from the Punup [sp] period and seem to date around 1200 AD. An even further elaboration of the mound revealed sea mammal hunting techniques with a degeneration of carving. The top level seems to be fairly recent around 1700 showing the Eskimo culture pretty much how it is today the changes were brought about by the American whalers with their beads and iron tools. Around 1879 there was a severe epidemic in the island.

There seems to be an entirely different development on the mainland. University has done mostly research at Point Hope. The expedition was led by Dr. Froelich Rainey of the University of Alaska Museum, Dr. Heidi Larsen [sp] (Danish Museum), Dr. Louis Giddings of the University of Alaska. The

Putak site was different than any on the St. Lawrence because it was a village site made up of lots of houses. There were about 800 hundreds and a good number of houses had been washed out to the sea. The village seemed to be laid out in avenues just like a modern city with streets and houses lined up in a pattern. The economy of the people in Putak seems to be different from St. Lawrence. There wasn't a strong emphasis on sea mammal hunting but instead an inland aspect of hunting such as caribou and land mammals.

At Point Hope today whale hunting is prominent but apparently there aren't characteristics of whale hunting in Putak there aren't tools left over or evidence. The Putak people may have only stayed on the part of the coast for part of the year. Part of the time they spent inland hunting caribou. There was a careful blending of land hunting and sea hunting, which can't exist on St. Lawrence Island. Almost all of the objects found in the houses are made of antler which shows how much the caribou were depended on. There was also a great collection of arrowheads and flint arrow points and side blades. These are distinctive and unique compared to other Eskimo sites. Some of the finest flint working techniques in the new world were found at Point Hope. Putak people were therefore not primitive according to Van Stone.

The Putak site seems to be about 1,000 years old. They excavated a great number of burials. Most primitive people include tools with the buried. Ivory carvings and chains were also found. Objects were exclusive to burials and seldom in the houses.

Putak or Pt. Hope elders tell the children that if they don't behave themselves, the man with the ivory eyes will get them. Putak sites are also found in Pt. Spencer, Teller, Bristol Bay, and Deering.

Jerry Shakura [sp] Women's Club is the interviewer