

2014-16-04 PT. 1

Morris Morgan

March 14, 2015

Fairbanks, Alaska

Karen Brewster, interviewer

University of Alaska 100th Anniversary tapes

Karen Brewster asked Morris Morgan about education. Morgan said historically both sides of his family have been interested in education. He said his paternal grandfather was a superintendent of schools. His mother's parents sent all of their children to college in 1900-1910. He became interested in education. He has had a desire to help the Native population in Alaska. He said being a geographer he realizes the awful conditions that circumpolar people live in as far as education is concerned. He said it is a region that is very difficult and very expensive. When working with the Tanana Chiefs he dealt with raising vegetables. He encountered resistance. He had to explain and give examples of other Native Americans who were successful agriculturalists. He ran into acceptance and rejection in different areas. They were able to raise potatoes in the villages. Prior to this they were paying a lot of money for potatoes. Most of the work in the gardening area was successful. Dr. Skarland told him it takes twenty years to get a cultural item introduced. It requires a great deal of follow up. It requires a great deal of follow up. He said the Interior of Alaska has agricultural potential unless you go off on tangents. He discussed the barley projects in the Delta Region. It never worked out except it go a lot of land cleared. He said it is an example of doing something in an area that can't be reasonably done. He bought equipment from someone who tried to raise corn in Alaska. He said it is possible to raise corn in gardens, but not commercially. He said there are experiments with fruit trees that have been moderately successful. He said if you are to succeed you must know something about geography. He talked about using the wrong kind of plow in the Midwest and creating a dust bowl. His wife was from an area with dust bowls in New Mexico. He continued to talk about present-day farming in the Midwest and the migration out of the Midwest in the dust bowl days. He said mistreatment of the land isn't unique just to the Dust Bowl. He said there is a limit to the abuse the planet can endure.

Brewster asked how he ended up working for the Tanana Chiefs. Morgan said he had a chance to work with the gardening project. They shipped out equipment and seed to the villages. He had a chance to work with the village elders. He did some work for the university. He taught classes off campus such as Fort Wainwright. He became interested in the routing and building of pipelines. When he worked on his dissertation research they knew there was the petroleum reserve. They weren't involved in looking for oil or prospecting for any company. Their work was studying the delta, the polygons and the formation of the dunes. The delta is a v shape and great areas are barren of vegetation. The prevailing winds are out of the northeast and blow the sand across the delta. The vegetation in the dunes traps it and it becomes a high place and obstructs more sand. There are a series of dunes. He said a pingo is a frozen

area by its expansion rises up and pushes the tundra with it. He said there are other sand dunes further west.

Brewster asked him how he returned to Alaska. Morgan said he got real homesick for Alaska. He has been in the same house for 50 years. He wished he knew more about Alaska. He said it would take a lifetime and more to study Alaska. He returned to Alaska and got a job with the university and with Tanana Chiefs. He was asked to lay out a pipeline route. He had the contract and had barely gotten into the job when the company stopped the project. He was paid for his initial work. He said he isn't expecting to see the pipeline in his lifetime.

Brewster asked if the Tanana Chiefs had the gardening project ready when they hired him. Morgan said he was convinced about kitchen gardens. He saw a need and the possibility of raising a garden in the Interior. There was a cultural resistance that was expected to be found. This was a change. He said even with the early arrival of westerners in Alaska there were gardens. After the gold mining that only a few people in the Interior raised gardens some in connection with hot springs. The recent interest in gardening and food production locally is a good thing. In the 1960s Fairbanks got the vegetables that couldn't be sold in Seattle. And fruit, too. He said it made people want to grow here. He said there are long days and nights here. He explained the reason for this. We have an extreme seasonality. He wrote a paper with Dr. Taylor about SADD. He wrote about the mechanics of why our days were like they were. Dr. Taylor explained that certain patients went into hibernation.

Brewster commented about the village of Tanana historically having a large community garden. Morgan said there were some gold rush people who stayed and made Alaska like where they came from. He said we now have the possibility to burn scrap for heating greenhouses. They are doing it down near Tok. They furnish vegetables for schoolchildren. Chena Hot Springs has come up with a solution to their energy problem.

Brewster asked about an examples of successful gardens and unsuccessful gardens. Morgan said it generally had to do with the size of the village. If it was large enough it was easier than the smaller villages. The smaller villages were more hunter gatherer oriented. They didn't feel they had the need to farm. He talked about the connotation of farmer in our culture. Brewster asked what it was like going into the villages. Morgan said it took a little maneuvering. He said don't go into the villages and say you are from the government to help them and don't talk too much. He said he used illustrations and said state what you can do. They were giving them a start with seed, fertilizers and instructions. He said he needed to sell these ideas so it doesn't seem to interrupt their normal lives. He said people in the villages are often quite busy. It's a burden on their time. Gardening requires time and patience. You have to go to the basics. When carrots come up they look like weeds and are often uprooted. He had to be on the spot during planting and harvest. Harvest what they grew was also a part of learning. He said cole crops were fairly easily raised. He said you have to think about nutrition. He talked about zucchini. He said you have to talk with the people from the very beginning. He spent quite a few years on the project and turned it over to a Native person. He said it is something now that many of the Natives know how to do. Many Natives knew how to garden before the Tanana Chiefs started the project. They were often enlisted to help to carry the program forward. Brewster asked if he felt it was a successful

program. Morgan said he did. He said there were ups and downs. Tons of potatoes were raised. He said he liked to point out that Native people propagated potatoes in the Andes. He talked about the potato being carried to Europe and the eventual tragedy in Ireland. Brewster asked him how long he worked for Tanana Chiefs. Morgan said he doesn't remember exactly. He also worked with them on river flooding. He went to Manley after the end of the roader shot a bunch of people. He was called out because he knew about river hydrology and he would be able to help predict where bodies might be found. He never spoke more than ten words at this gathering. He was called as a geographer to say if something was feasible. He helped design water power from the river for lifting irrigation water. He designed a food processing building and greenhouse combination. He said they have developed turbines now to go beneath the water. He still has drawings of some of the things he designed. Morgan said he worked for Tanana Chiefs for about three years. Brewster asked him what he went on to do. Morgan said he then went to work for Arctic Gas which didn't last long. Brewster if he did illustrations on the side. Morgan said he did some illustrating. He said he did consulting work for road feasibilities. He did some work with Alyeska and the problems they had at river crossings. Some of the crossings were over many feet of boulders. Some of the rivers had the majority of their flow below the bed of the river and they had to deal with it. He said there were times when he didn't have much of an income. He had some injuries during WWII that he collected on a deferred disability for four to seven years. He applied for disability in the 1990s. His wife always wanted to work. Brewster asked about her work. Morgan said she was in charge of the stenographer pool at the university. He said when he was studying in the university the stenographers would type up the written notes.

Morgan said he wanted to talk about the book, *Education in the North*. It was written in 1972 and edited by Frank Darnell. He said it was written from the first conference on cross cultural education in the circumpolar nations. He said they discussed the impact of foreign culture onto the indigenous people. George Rogers was involved who was an economic geographer. Morgan said not one of the papers gave a reason for why the circumpolar nations are as unique as they are. He said they didn't mention geographic fact. He discussed the typical education of a western teacher. He said when he arrived in Alaska he was ignorant of the day lengths and temperatures. He said he was moving into an environment that he didn't know. He started teaching courses that his predecessor taught. They were regional geographies. He said Skarland was a geographer as well as an anthropologist. Brewster commented about the university emphasizing Alaska. Morgan said when he left he left course material for Dr. Rasche that emphasized the region. He left the university in 1967. He talked about Dr. Rasche's wife, Gertrude Rasche, who taught in the English department. Brewster commented about writing papers. Morgan said he didn't have any time because he taught so many courses. He was exhausted.