

Call number: 02-00-133-05_PT.1

Barrow Christmas, 1971

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Date(s) of creation of summary: 09/24/2013, 09/25/2013

Notes: Originals on 7 inch reels. Master copies on CD.

Series:

(Appears to be a continuation of 02-00-133 PT.2)

A pastor (Darrell Redfern(?)) is speaking, describing Christmas festivities:

He says that as the last scene (presumably of a Christmas play) is drawing to a close, he goes to the platform with the Inupiat version of "Silent Night" being sung by one of the ladies of the church with organ accompaniment. The pastor made a few comments and said a prayer of benediction. The program was well received and worth the effort it required.

On Friday, the pastor did not have any pressing duties. He had a few friends in for the evening meal and opened Christmas gifts late in the evening. The children were very enthusiastic.

The Christmas feast on Christmas Day is the biggest day of the year, says the pastor, for villagers that attend either of the churches. This year, on Saturday, there was a full house as always. There was an abundance of meat, muktuk and fish, tea and coffee, as well as turkey, dressing, cakes, jellios, ice-cream. The banquet began at one and continued to 4 or 4:30. The cleanup crew took over and in an hour and a half to clean up the building to prepare for the Saturday night film showing.

This concludes Christmas week as such.

The Sunday services following Christmas were a little bit slack due to the activities of the week before. The attendance was down slightly. The week before New Year is a very quiet week as far as church activities are concerned. The regular midweek prayer and Bible study is held. The next official activity of the church is Friday night's "Watch Night Service" from 10 o'clock Friday evening to midnight, with a midnight communion service to say goodbye to 1971 and usher in 1972.

The local church in Barrow has always had a Christmas program of some type, dating back around 75 years or so. The Assemblies of God are only 18 years old in Barrow. Only in the last three years have the facilities been large enough to encourage attendance of more than just regular church attendees and promote the Christmas program.

The food for the feast is provided by the local people, especially the successful whale hunters. Others bring in caribou meat and fish, cut into 1 to 2 pound chunks (for whale meat) and 8 oz. to 1 pound pieces (for fish). Desserts are brought in by the ladies of the church.

The church underwrites the incidental expenses like gloves for food servers and plastic to cover the church carpet.

The captains of whaling crews that are members of the Presbyterian church bring a gift of meat over to the Assembly of God church and the Assembly of God church captains take a gift of meat to the Presbyterian church; usually several hundred pounds, back and forth.

The pastor says that in the four years he has been in Barrow, there has always been an abundance of food. People take home as much food as they can carry; maybe 30 or 40 pounds. This is not always the case, however, when the hunting is not as successful.

The official church board organized the work crews for the feast. An overseer is selected. There are three men selected as "lookouts" to ensure that the food is shared equally. Eight young women and eight young women are selected as servers. The men carry the food and the women distribute it. First the soup is served, then the meat or muktuk. Two middle aged women are usually selected to be in charge of the meat. These women make sure that meat is distributed equally. Usually two women and four men are selected as a cleanup crew to clean up the church afterward. Everything but the platform is transformed into a cafeteria for the feasts for Christmas and Thanksgiving. This is not normally done in Assembly of God churches in other places; "Food is not usually served in the sanctuary."

The tape cuts out and the next section of tape is of laughter and chatter of a group of people. This is probably recording of a sports competition. A man shouts, "One, two, three, four, five." Children can be heard. There are thumping noises followed by laughter from the crowd.

The tape cuts out again. During the next section, noises of the crowd continue. A man is being interviewed. He says he does not know how to describe it (apparently a flag) or who made it. The interviewer asks why he is holding it. The man says, "Don't ask me." A woman says that it is for the singles and whoever wins keeps it.

The tape cuts out. During the next section, noises of the crowd continue. Again, counting, thumping sounds and laughter and cheering from the crowd can be heard.

The tape cuts out and back in again. Crowd noises continue. A woman explains that men are competing in the high kick. A target is lowered from the ceiling. A man holds his left foot in his right hand, kicks with his right foot and lands on his right foot. Different men compete and then the glove is raised. Each man gets three tries. The woman says that Errol Kokuk(?) is now going up to try. He didn't make any of the three tries this time. Another man, Harry(?) goes up. The tape cuts out.

Next, a man speaks. He introduces himself as Samuel Simmons(?) of Barrow. He gives a description of the Christmas celebration in Barrow. The Christmas celebrations were started by early missionaries. Ever since the Native population learned about Christmas, they started having feasts at Christmas time. Christmas programs were started by the church. The church also brought schools. So, the church and schools combined for the Christmas programs. This year, the elderly couple of the church presented the Christmas pageant. The following year, in 1972, the young people will also give the Christmas

pageant. They take turns in giving the Christmas message to their people. The people look forward to this. They also have a Christmas feast, similar to the Thanksgiving feast. The man says that Natives always want to feast after a good whaling catch. During whaling, the captain of the crews sets aside enough to give during the Christmas feast, the Thanksgiving feast and during Nalukataq time.

After the celebration of Christmas, the Native people have a time of games. This dates back to before the showing of films was introduced. Everyone looks forward to the "Christmas vacation" from Christmas day to the New Year. The games are going on at the present time. To make it more interesting the singles compete against the married couples.

When he was a boy during the short days of the year before the showing of films was introduced, they would usually have a time of playing football. Everyone would look forward to having fun outside despite the cold, dark weather.

Other Native activities (games?) are during July 4th.

The man says that he doesn't participate much in the games anymore but he does watch. Last night he saw some games that he had never seen before: the high kick. He says that villages used to get together, give presents, dance, and compete, but that doesn't happen anymore.

The man says that the captain of a whaling crew gets such a large percentage of a whale when it is divided up because the whole portion doesn't actually belong to the captain. Much of it is to share for the Christmas and Thanksgiving feasts. Many captains say it is wonderful to share. The man says that he does not know how long the feasting will continue since the buildings are getting so crowded. There will come a time when there is not room for all the people who come. It used to be that presents were brought to the church, piled up and then distributed. But this has already stopped due to overcrowding.