

**Call number: 02-00-133-16 PT. 4**

**Salmon fishing on Yukon and Tanana**

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**Series: ATS-1 Educational Satellite Project Tapes**

**Notes: Original in 7-inch tape, master copy on CD. Produced by Roger McPherson. THESE TAPES WERE PRODUCED AS A PART OF AN EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM NOW DEFUNCT AND WERE BROADCAST OVER THE RADIO FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES.**

A woman's voice [Altona Brown, as indicated in the recording case] says that her father had a fish camp "just down on the big island." They put in a fish camp after Ruby [gold] was struck and there were lots of people at the time. He was selling fish to the people. That was in 1910 and 1911 and then they had a fish camp down below a big bluff. The speaker's father had a fish wheel and he sold lots of fish. Then he moved down to 8-miles. He didn't do much anything after they moved, besides trapping and fishing. They had to put the fish away too since there was no freezers or anything. They had a dug-out that they used for storage that was old-fashioned dug-out.

Roger asks how it was constructed and the lady tells that they helped their mother build one one summer. They dug it out and piled all the dirt about 8x4. Their father put the roof on and their mother gathered birch bark from an island. They peeled the birches and used that for insulation. Then the speaker and her sister and big brother packed moss "forever." The speaker was the youngest one for a long time until her mother got 4 little boys. She was a spoiled brat at the time, but worked like a horse with her mother.

2:58 The dugout was covered with moss and then again with dirt and their father put two pipes out on each sides. He did that for ventilation. The speaker doesn't know how much dirt was on there, but they had 2 doors. One was "about 3-feet out, you know, in between, so that frost will stay in." They used to get ice from the river and pile it up with moss and so they had ice in the cellar for whole summer. That's where they had the cold storage. They took meat there and it would keep for a month. They just hung it up.

The speaker says that that's the way their people used to store things away. They put their berries there. The speaker says she doesn't know what they did before, but in her time they used sugar. Her mother put very little sugar in barrels of berries and they would keep. It's cool in there.

4:28 In wintertime their father went trapping and in summertime he and the speaker's brother cut wood for the steamboat that goes up and down the river. He used to put up lots of fish. His fish wheel caught lots of fish. The speaker took care of the house and her father cut up the fish. He didn't believe in little girls cutting fish and didn't let the girls to cut fish until they were grown up. It was just him and her mother who cut fish and her brother packed it.

Karen asks if they smoked it. The speaker says they did. They put it up for dogs and for eating and they also sold some. That's how they got their groceries in summertime. They also had a garden. Roger asks

what they were growing there, and the speaker tells that they had turnips, rutabagas, carrots, potatoes. They had lots of potatoes.

Karen asks if all their income was from fishing and vegetables that they grew. The speaker says that that was it, and that her father always had a garden. She doesn't think she ever lived without a garden, and says that now very few people have gardens and that she suspects that they don't believe in them.

5:50 Karen asks how the smokehouse was built. The speaker tells that the first smokehouse she remembers was built out of woven willows. It seemed like a great big smokehouse when they were small. For them it was big. Their father takes standard willows and cut inside of them. He takes the willows and weaves them all way around, leaving the doorway. The building was square. Then their father put poles for the roof and put birch bark on that.

They had to go into the woods and gather birch bark for protection. When he put it up, that was quite a project. They also had to secure it with poles so it wouldn't blow over. There was no problem, no bought material.

The speaker doesn't know how long it took to build the smoke house. It was quite the project and they were fishing at the same time. Her father also had a fish wheel. The first thing he does in springtime is to put in a fish wheel and start catching fish. When they moved down to 8-miles, he built them [fish wheels or smokehouses?] out of boards since there was a saw-mill. He cut logs "with these people here."

He was a great big man and his name was Big Joe. He didn't have a last name. He was a stout man and a good worker.

8:48 They never lived in a village. The speaker says they lived at 36-miles as she remembers and they were alone there. They had a 2-room log cabin and had a nice place with a little garden. The speaker says she doesn't know why they never lived in a village. They would go see their grandmother and their great uncle in the village. Every once in a while they went to the potlatch. That was quite a treat for them. They didn't know too much about how their people were living in villages because they very seldom went there.

Karen asks her to describe one of the potlatches. The potlatches are where people gather together. Anyone that could come to the village would walk, take dogs, or snowshoe in. In summertime they'd use poling boats that didn't have engines or nothing. There was lots of food and people feasted for several days. [A clock is chiming.] They did that for their dead, putting on quite a ceremony.

11:17 Karen asks if that happened several times a year and the interviewee tells that any time when a person dies and there's about 3-4 of them, they will make a potlatch. They have songs and dancing and it carries on for a week or two before they give away all the dead people's stuff and have new ones that "they potlatch amongst themselves."

Roger asks if the potlatches were held in villages, and the interviewee indicates that it was so. She says they still have dinner potlatch, a potluck, "here" [in Ruby] whenever someone is gone. They do that in the memory of the dead. She started that a few years back when her uncle died. Karen asks how many people would come to Ruby in the old days. The speaker tells that there weren't many Native people in Ruby at the time since it was a mining town, but in villages all the houses were full and people would have to

pitch tents. The speaker says she couldn't tell how many people came but explains that people from small villages would come to the potlatches. That was their way of giving up their dead.

13:33 Roger asks what happened if people ran out of food, and if speaker's family ever ran out of food. She says they never did. Her father told about how they once ran out of food gong cross country because they had no fish. That happened when he was young, a long time ago. He used to tell them stories when they didn't want to eat certain things or criticizing the food.

Her father told stories about times when people went hungry. They went so hungry that lots of babies died because they couldn't be nursed and the people had to eat babiche out of their sleds and snow shoes. There was no meat or nothing, absolutely nothing. The one who could go [was still strong enough to do things?] would even get bark off the tree and eat it, and get anything at all, like birds and squirrels, camprobbers and such. They'd go over the hills and dig off the hills for caribou moss that they would eat. They would eat anything. The speaker's father was in that situation twice in his young days. The last time was when he was married to the speaker's mom.

16:06 Roger asks how the speaker has made her living while she has lived in Ruby. Then he asks if she's been fishing every summer. The interviewee says they have fished all those years. When she was "down at home" and was living with "this old guy," she had to fish after he got the wheel running. She had to cut the fish and bring it to Ruby and buy groceries with the money [of if they bartered, with the fish].

When she was 23, she and her husband got married. That was her own doing. He was a fisherman and didn't do trapping at the time when they first got married, because he had an animal farm "up here 2 miles." He had fox and marten, but that went away when they got married and he was fishing. That's the way he made living: fishing, trapping, taking care of dogs and selling them. The speaker was the one who raised and trained them. She "was pretty good in the dogs language." [Laughter.]

They fished a lot and got lots and lots of fish. They had 3 fish wheels. 1,820 [fish?] and that's been in two weeks of time. The speaker would be in the cutting raft for 11 hours sometimes. That's the longest she's ever cut fish, but she didn't mind because she was young and husky. She was good at cutting fish. She used to cut 120 in an hour. She split them and scored them 13 times on each side. She was the biggest fish cutter and she was taught by her father when she was young. She had to learn to cut the fish so that it wouldn't fall to pieces. When one does it so many times, she can feel the skin when one has a sharp knife. The speaker's knife always used to be like a razor. It's a wonderful thing to know how to do it, how many scores to cut and how deep.

19:44 They cut millions and millions of fish. The boat used to stop at 2-mile. The speaker sold the camp to Albert Yrjana and [unclear] after her husband died and everybody walked out of it. She didn't want to cut any more fish after he was gone. She didn't have any income when he died, but she got along fine. Her boy was sent to school. He was 11 years old when his dad died. The speaker had to pay for the boy's school and all that.

Roger asks what the price of dried fish was those days. The speaker says it was 0.12 cents a pound and salmon strips were 0.19 cents a pound. Just before her dad died, it was 0.50 cents a pound. That was good money and they used to put up 2 tons of it. If one put up 2 tons of salmon strips now, one would be rich. Everybody bought them around Fairbanks, Anchorage and everywhere else.

They used to board dogs too. They took care of the road commission's dogs since there weren't many airplanes those days, and they took care of McKinley Park's dogs. They had a whole bunch of dogs. Each of those companies had to buy so many pounds of fish for a year.

Then the speaker's husband used to put up fish for Fort Yukon. Fort Yukon is where people used to come to from Canada or somewhere there. They [unclear] used to have on all dogs and up there, there was nobody fishing. They had to put up fish for them. 10 tons of fish, 12 tons of fish. That's why the boat used to stop at the camp and load up the fish. Then airplane came from Anchorage to load up green fish in summertime. She doesn't know how much of those her husband sold, but just the same, the stuff one buys for so much didn't cost that much at the time. Fur was in good price and they used to catch good amounts of it. They were the only ones that used to bring in more fur.

[End of the recording.]