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Tom Alton, Will Mayo and Bill Schneider

Tanana Yukon Historical Society tapes

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Fairbanks, Alaska

Ron Inouye begins the program. He discusses the photograph taken by A.P. Johnson of the Tanana Chiefs. He introduces Bill Schneider.

Bill Schneider introduces Tom Alton and Will Mayo. He talked about the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Tanana Chiefs Conference.

Tom Alton said for two days in July of 1915 the Tanana Chiefs met with Judge Wickersham. They met at the library in Fairbanks. The Tanana Chiefs met with federal representatives including Wickersham. It was the first meeting of its kind in the Interior. The conference was reported in the local newspapers. The meeting was organized in just two months. The chiefs were alarmed about a new railroad coming into the Interior. They were concerned about its impact on their traditional hunting areas. They wanted to get the facts directly from Alaska's congressional delegate – Wickersham. Wickersham had visited Chief Charlie's camp in the Minto Flats in May. Wickersham met up with Chief Alexander at the mouth of the Tolovana several days later. Wickersham talked with Chief Alexander about the coming railroad and what changes were coming. Wickersham believed there were two options for the Natives. First was to establish a reservation for the Indians or they would take allotments of 160 acres each. Wickersham suggested to Chief Alexander that he discussed this with as many people as possible.

Wickersham stressed the creation of an Indian reservation and they could be shown how to plow the land and raise crops. He left the Indians with a warning about the white man taking the good land and after a while the Indians will have no land at all. Bishop Rowe had pleaded with Wickersham to make a reservation plan before this. Wickersham had dismissed the idea of reservations in Alaska. Bishop Rowe was appalled by the poor medical and sanitary conditions in many Native villages and was worried about white man profiting in the liquor trade with Indians. Rowe proposed the Natives be confined to their villages under the authority of the Army. He wanted Wickersham to work with the United States Congress to accomplish that. Wickersham dismissed the idea at that time. He believed that the Indians should have been left alone. Rowe continued to work for a reservation system. Rowe took his argument to Washington in 1912. Rowe was convinced that once the Indians were on reservations they would be docile. Wickersham continued to oppose the idea of reservations.

Rowe and the Episcopal Church were represented at the 1915 meeting by Guy Madara. He was a young missionary who was living in Chena. He was said to be interested in the welfare of the Indians and was influential with the Indians. He was concerned about preparing the Indians for the coming of the railroad. St. Mark's mission in Nenana had become the model mission. The missionaries knew that its success was due to its isolation. They were concerned that the advantage of isolation would soon be

lost because of the railroad. Madara objected to the idea of individual homesteads for the hunting and gathering lifestyle of the Natives. He called for the opinions of the Natives themselves. One of the Natives, Williams, objected to the idea of homesteads because they do not have money to build a cabin on a homestead. Reservations would take away the old homes and habits they used to for living. After the first day of the meetings it was becoming aware that homesteads and reservations would be a hard sale to the Indians. C.W. Ritchie said every head of household could file for 160 acres. Thomas Riggs of the Alaska Engineering Commission urged the Indians to take action soon because the land would be overrun with white men who would kill off their game. The railroad was approved by Congress in 1914. President Wilson said the line would run from Seward to Fairbanks. Survey work started in the summer of 1914. Wickersham and Riggs had their differences, but they both tried to convince the fourteen Athabascan leaders to confine themselves to a plot of land. Chief Ivan addressed the group. He did not want to go on a reservation, but wanted to stay perfectly free as they are now. Chief Thomas said they didn't know the way of the Indian, but expressed confidence that the government would do the right thing for his people. Chief Alexander expressed similar views. Guy Madara was concerned that homesteads would kill the sense of community which is such a part of Native life. Madara talked about the sense of mutual helpfulness in the Natives. Wickersham thought a reservation would be the best thing for the Indians. He warned them that Mr. Riggs was going to build a railroad and when the railroad was built the people would be coming. The Indians did have a plan to do something. Paul Williams outlined the need for industrial boarding schools to learn trades. The Indians also wanted equal access to railroad construction jobs. Wickersham promised to send to the Secretary of the Interior a full report of what the Indians said. A manuscript of the proceedings was prepared and sent to Secretary Lane. Alton talked about the attendants speaking in the own language and Paul Williams translating. The stenographer took notes in shorthand and then transcribed the notes. There were several steps removed from what the Natives actually said.

Bill Schneider introduces Will Mayo. Will Mayo said he was the son of Arthur May from Rampart. His mother, Agnes Mayo Moore was born at Mission, about four miles above Tanana. He is in the direct bloodline of Chief William who was one of the delegates at the 1915 meeting. Chief William was the representative from Tanana. Chief Victor Joseph was in the audience and the current chief of the Tanana Chiefs Conference. Guy Peters was also present and in direct line of Chief William. Will Mayo said he is to talk about the follow up since the 1915 meeting. He said all of the issues raised by the Indian chiefs are still current. Even with the land claims act settled in 1971 there are still land disputes. Congress has amended the settlement act on a number of occasions. After Chief Alexander from Tolovana met with Wickersham he went to the other chiefs. None of the other chiefs believed him which Chief Alexander commented on during the 1915 meetings. Wickersham told the group that everything that Chief Alexander has said is true. Mayo commented on the written word and the loss to human memory and oral tradition. Fall to winter was a time of education in the Athabascan society. Mayo said some of the issues that occurred in that meeting were the need for reservations to protect themselves and the idea of homesteads. Mayo said the reading of the transcript was bittersweet for him. He said there are villages all around Alaska that have received a land settlement all around their community. There are communities that do not have a settlement to this day including the community of Chena. He wonders what would have happened if the Chena community did achieve a settlement. He was raised by an elder

from Salchaket and wonders what a settlement could have meant for them and their community. Tolovana and Cos Jacket were also communities that did not have a settlement. Cos Jacket came about from Natives who fled Tanana because of the bad influences there. It was a refuge from Ft. Gibbon. Mayo said that one of the chiefs in the 1915 meeting requested consultations with the government. They wanted to establish a government to government relationship. Education was high on their list of priorities. Fishing and hunting threats were a concern. Riggs was giving dire warnings about this. Mayo said that is true to this day. There are tremendous pressures on the moose populations. Mayo talked about the state of the king salmon populations in the Yukon River. The returns are not adequate. They are getting less than one fish per female. He said tribes in the Interior and Yukon Kuskokwim Delta have decided to self impose a moratorium on fishing stocks because of this challenge.

Mayo said that federal consultations with tribal leadership is a very important priority. They will challenge state and federal government at every opportunity. Just as Chief William and Chief Thomas challenged the federal delegate to Congress in that day so it is that current chiefs are meeting with congressional representatives and others and the message is the same. They need consultation. Chief William said they needed it in writing. This is verbatim what is being stated today in meetings across the nation. Education, hunting and fishing threats and farming and gardening came up. When he lived in Tanana he decided to raise hogs. He related a couple of stories about raising pigs.

Labor contracts and jobs were also brought up at the meetings. The Natives couldn't get contracts. The Army let out contract for wood and other products and they couldn't get the contracts. Delegate Wickersham responded back that it was because they couldn't read and write. They said they could do just as good a job with a Swede saw and they could cut better fish. This continues to be a challenge and Congress has passed acts to insure job availability under the federal trust relationship. There has been a lot of progress and there are a lot of Natives in the work force contributing to the economy. The Native corporations are a tremendous engine of economic opportunity and development in Alaska. Native corporations are always in the top performing businesses.

Mayo said another concern brought up in the 1915 meetings was medical concerns. It is still an issue in the Native community and great strides have been made. There were concerns about Native representation in Congress. Chief Jacob Starr said they have been discussing how they need a representative. They were already discussing representation. The transcript reveals that they were forward thinking. There have been improvements there, too. There were communications issues. They wanted to know when there were changes in the federal government. They wanted it in writing. They understood how important it was. This is true today. Cultural protection of the Native ways was also of concern. Mr. Madara had pointed out that people take care of each other in the Native community. If they are put on a small piece of land then how will they partake in their seasonal subsistence activities? They wanted hunting and fishing by their own regulations. The Native community can't hunt that way because of season regulations and other restrictions. This was a change from the cultural way of hunting and fishing. In Canada they regulate their own take and have their own management systems. In the lower forty eight some of the reservations manage their own game and fish. The Apache tribes have guided elk hunts with many clients. They use the income to provide jobs for their tribal members and providing revenue for their management. They have an advanced management systems. Mayo said he

often mourns the fact that they are not permitted to do that in Alaska. They are often islands of strong management successes surrounded by shortages around them because of their successful methods. Whenever he reads the 1915 transcript he gleans something new. He is appreciate of the intelligence and foresight of these leaders and their challenges. He thinks they have made progress but they have challenges as well. Years ago they began to push for education for their young people. They have produced teachers, business majors, biologists, doctors and lawyers. They are proud of them. The victim part of that success is it has created an outflow from their villages. Getting them into higher education has created a desire for a different way of life or to go where there is a better opportunity. They are now looking at how they can bring back that talent pool back into their communities.