

Call number: 74-06 SIDE A

Grandma Minnie Tucker with Francis Baker, Minnie's daughter Edna Wilder and Margaret Harrey.

Summary created by: Varpu Lotvonen

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Notes: Original on 1/2-inch tape, master copy on CD. Identities of speakers are uncertain.

Francis Baker introduces the people present and says that most people know Minnie Tucker as Grandma Tucker and that she lived in the area before white people came. Another woman talks about flour that they threw in the air and the children watched it. Grandma Tucker said somebody had given them flour but they opened it up, tasted it and found it no good so they threw away the flour but kept that sack. [Laughter.] They were going to use the sack for thread in sowing.

Someone asks if it was strong enough to hold skins together. Grandma Tucker tells that they used sinew for mukluks and the flour sack sinew they used for [unclear] skin. The interviewer asks if sinew was hard to make. Grandma Tucker says that it was quite hard but that White Whale [unclear, seals?] and Edna clarifies that they twisted it. Sometimes they used sinew for herring nets, which are different from salmon nets because [seals?] net. Edna [?] says that they used rawhide for salmon nets.

The interviewer asks if Grandma remembers the first flour she used or that her mother used. She tells that they had some flour and an iron pot from a sailing boat which was different from an Indian boat. Mom got one and mixed up milk and flour which she boiled. They ate it. Then her brother went trading [?] up to Fish River and they came back with money, flour and beans. They mixed potatoes and beans together like they would make ammammak [?]. Like they would make Eskimo ice cream, says Edna. They boiled everything first and then added the oil. The interviewer says it was like Eskimo ice cream, fluffy and mashed and it was eaten with oil.

At 5:03 Edna urges Grandma Tucker to tell how she hid from the first white man. It was below Rocky Point, which is between [unclear] and Nome. The white people came home, there was a winter camp and a summer camp, not very far [unclear]. White man came [to their camp] when they were mining up at Nome. Lots of people came up with row boats and 7 lost their lives [unclear, in a storm?].

When she saw the first white men come into her house to trade, she was making a grass rug. She didn't know that white men were going to come. In spring time they were going to Nome. Grandma Tucker hid underneath the bed. Her mother was there and the white man wanted to buy the rug Grandma Tucker was making. He traded tobacco for it. The interviewer asks what other things the trader wanted besides the rug. Grandma Tucker doesn't know since she was under the bed.

Grandma Tucker says that she and her cousin used to hide when boats came. They hid in the bushes.

The interviewer asks if they were startled when they saw white men, or if they were afraid of them. She says they were afraid. They [the white men] were different kind of people. The interviewer says they might have heard a few stories about white men fighting with the Indians that came from the Interior. Grandmother Tucker says that they had a story about how a white man came to winter camp where everybody was after fall time. White men came and nobody could understand each other. They treated the white man nicely, gave him a bed and Eskimo food. That was before Grandma Tucker's time. He came from San Francisco.

9:26 Edna prompts Grandma Tucker to sing that song that was made about Sammy Tsisco as they called San Francisco. [Granma Tucker sings the song.] Edna explains that it means "Where did this white man come from? He keeps talking about Sammy Tsisco." Grandmother Tucker says that the man asked for tea and the Eskimo gave him fish egg soup. Another woman asks if they made the song while the man was visiting their village but she tells that it was later. Edna explains that they made songs about everything that happened because there were no books. Grandma Tucker says it was a long time ago when the man came and she didn't know much then. She agrees with one of the ladies who says that they didn't have writing that time but they memorized things by songs. [Grandma Tucker says something unclear, cross-talking.]

At 12:04 the interviewer asks what she wore most of the time. Grandma Tucker says everything was made out of skins. They used squirrel skin on the inside and deer skin [unclear] and mukluks were made of seal skin. They were made like leotards that went from "down below" up to the hip.

Another woman asks if they got all the animals from their area or if they traded for skins. [Unclear answer.] They got real deer, caribou, at that time, not reindeer. They used all skins before the white man came. Interviewer asks how come they traded for calico. Grandma Tucker says it was freedom [unclear]. Edna asks her to tell how she took down mukluks for an empty can of coffee. Grandma Tucker tells that they traded seal skins for an empty milk can and a white fox for a coffee can. They also traded white skins for cheap calico for their parkas. They traded white ermine weasels. The interviewer asks if they were Russians or Americans that they traded with. Another woman says they were Americans who settled at the trading post in Golovin. Grandma Tucker says that Russians used to come and trade tobacco or something and the Eskimo didn't live there but traveled and lived in [Rocky] Point and didn't know much.

Grandma Tucker talks about working hard in making the calico parkas and two pair of mukluks. One pair went up to knees and one above the ankle. It was hard time a long time ago. Edna prompts Grandma Tucker to tell how they followed the ice up to Nome and got lost, and the story has witch doctors. They were in Nome area and used to follow the ice when they were hunting. They came to Cape Nome to collect some murre eggs that they would cook and store in oil. [Talking about what are the Inupiaq names for different birds: murre, puffin, seagulls.] They traveled to Cape Nome and one time when they were there, a big wind came [unclear talking]. Someone [the medicine man] put water on a wooden bucket near the door and he started singing a song. [Grandma Tucker sings it.] Edna translates that the song said: "I want to see too, let me see what happened to hunters." He looked into the bucket and [unclear] [unclear] Creek. A lady asks if they found the hunters and Grandma Tucker says yes. Edna says

that they were where the medicine man said they would be, in a skin boat. Grandma Tucker's brother was there. [Laughter and talking about divination: modern day people look into a crystal ball.] Grandma Tucker says they were between Moose Creek [?] and Solomon. One of the women asks a clarification to the story and Edna explains that the wind had come so far from the north that the hunters thought they were blown out to the sea and got lost and so they never came back. After 3 days the family asked the witch doctor for help. [Eskimo name to witch doctors is given.]

21:55 The interviewer asks about the first airplanes that came into the area. Grandma Tucker tells that her husband read in the newspaper that they were coming. Edna [?] says that that was the U.S. Geological Survey plane that was mapping the areas. Grandma Tucker continues: They were picking berries and there were three of them. When they came home there was a noise that came from three airplanes flying over Nome. Grandma Tucker's husband worked in a mine and he didn't know what the noise was and suspected it to be a boat or something underground. [Unclear.] Hunting. They heard noise and one person said to another that he thinks he has a headache [he thought the noise was inside his head?]. [Talking about how people didn't know what the airplane was.]

Grandma Tucker's husband was an Englishman who had come to Alaska to mine. He got the overseas Daily Mail from England by boat. Edna [?] explains that from the fall they didn't get any more papers after the freeze-up until June. In the 1920s they started the dog team mail runs. The mail was mostly run on relay but there was one round that one mail carrier did in a week. They had 15-25 dogs, depending on how much mail they had. Sometimes they traveled with 2 sleds.

Edna says she has a picture with 24 dogs and says that sometimes he [the mail carrier?] came over to their house when the sled had tipped over on the ice and he couldn't raise it. Grandma Tucker says he sometimes came to eat. [Unclear talking about her good friend.] They are all gone except for Grandma Tucker. [Talking about how she has taken good care of herself and how they can now record with her to know what happened.]

27:36 Interviewer asks how she met her husband. Grandma tells that she was sick at the time. A woman who healed sick at Rocky Point healed her with medicine. Edna explains that she was sick with whooping cough that was really bad. Grandma Tucker's husband-to-be came with her [the lady healer] to Rocky Point to give them medicine. [Unclear talking.] He fed Grandma tomatoes. That was the first time she ate tomatoes and didn't like them [?]. Edna suggests that he gave them tomatoes because of the vitamin C. He had a medical book that his cousin, who was a doctor, had given him when he left to Alaska. Edna left it at Bluff when she got married and the book got lost. It was a good book that told what to do and not what to do. Everybody ate tomatoes and they got over their rheumatism. Grandma says they did [unclear].

They used to have wooden dishes and nothing more. They used to take that [unclear] and go from house to house. Then they started dancing. Someone asks if it was done at particular time and she says it was. It was on certain month in the fall. In Christmas they gave gifts for children. Gifts were given in a wooden bowl. Interviewer asks what happened if they didn't get a treat but Grandma says they didn't know about the trick part.

A long time ago there were a few of very poor people. Her grandpa was a good hunter. Edna says that that she meant he was rich. Someone says they didn't know about Christmas, and another woman says that it was in time before missionaries, when she was young.

31:51 Grandma Tucker tells that she met some lady who had two grandsons working [in Nome?]. [Unclear talking.] Edna explains that Grandma was looking for her [the lady] who was supposed to be at the airport but she was at home. Grandma says that her husband invited them [unclear]. She served him a little fresh trout that she fried. There's a regular stream with trout, grayling, and whitefish and little further down there's salmon. Grandma Tucker says there was very good trout. Edna [?] says that "down here" the streams are clear and with a rock bottom. Another woman's voice says that if they have all the fish there, it's easy to see why the Eskimos would settle to the Rocky Point. They had fish camp and a little steam with trout. They had berries on the hill and whale and seal in the ocean, and also birds.

A woman's voice asks if she climbed up the cliffs for bird eggs and she says she did. Edna says they had a poon [?] which was a little circle hook and a claw put around it, like a butterfly net. It was maybe 30 or 50 feet and she'd stand on the edge of a cliff and roll eggs into the net thing. If one took the eggs out every other day, the birds would lay another. In the middle of July they'd quit. Edna tells that Grandma Tucker had several spots where she'd stop to get the eggs. The ravens would eat the eggs too. Someone asks Grandma Tucker if she lost some eggs when she was rolling them into her net. The woman asks if the birds bothered Grandma Tucker when she was getting the eggs. She says they didn't.

Grandma Tucker says something in Inupiaq. Edna translates that Grandma Tucker is enjoying her singing and talking unlike before. The missionaries didn't allow them to sing old native songs.

37:14 The interviewer says that that was something she wanted to ask about and says that she knows that the church means a lot to Grandma Tucker. She asks Grandma Tucker about when she first learned about the religion of the white man. She tells that at first, the people didn't like the missionaries – Grandma Tucker doesn't know why. They didn't go to mission they go "to this one". Edna asks her to tell why the missionaries didn't let her sing her old songs. Grandma Tucker says that was the devil's work. Edna says Grandma Tucker would sing them by herself anyway but a lot of the people wouldn't even sing them. Another woman says that the songs like the ones she sang didn't have anything to with [cross talking]. Edna says that the missionaries would let them sing translated hymns but not their own songs. That's the way the Inupiat kept their stories and history. The other woman says that even the tunes were different. [Unclear cross talking.] Edna says Grandma Tucker knows few of the songs that they used to sing before the white men came. Grandma says she sings Eskimo songs and not English song. Edna asks her to sing one just for fun. [Grandma Tucker sings.] The song is about somebody finding a girl from atop of a little knoll. [Grandma Tucker sings another song.] Edna says that that was an [unclear] song. That was about a man who found something from the mountaintop.

At 41:21 Edna says that Grandma Tucker has a fable about a mouse. Grandma tells that a long time ago they used to cut seal intestines for windows. [Unclear talking how they procured the skin.] There was a mouse close to that skylight window. [Unclear.] The man stayed overnight and the next morning he looked down and saw mice. [Unclear] Then he stayed overnight with the mouse. [Unclear] round Eskimo

tent door. He looked down [unclear] and saw a big light out there. It was a fire and the man got scared and said [unclear]. The man said he'd better go find a great big root, but it was just a rotten stick. Edna explains that the man had thought a sun beam was fire and the rotten stick a big root. He started crossing a big lake which other side he couldn't see. It was a man's footprint. [Unclear, post that's holding up the sky, says Edna.] He made a long tunnel so that if the sky would fall down, he could stay there. [Unclear talking.]

[End of the recording.]