

Sadie Brower Neakok

Barrow, Alaska  
Three reels

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Interview by Neville Jacobs  
Barrow, Alaska  
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Sadie Brower Neakok is United States Commissioner at Barrow, and is the daughter of the founder of the community, Charles Brower. The interview was made on a Sunday, Sadie's "day off," but she took time out from other plans to make the tapes--we walked over to her offices to have quiet because several children at her house made quiet impossible.

This is one of the most unusual tapes I have collected and it is difficult to describe its contents because there is a great deal of subjective implication that is not strictly explicit. Barrow--a town of 3500 today, composed of factions - Eskimo blood line groups - from all over northwestern Alaska--stands where once there was only the Cape Smythe Whaling and Trading Station, founded by Sadie's father. People who worked for Charlie Brower are today strong leaders in the community, and Eskimo people are proud, and very subtly competitive. If a person knows other Barrow people, knows the history of the families and some of the subtle interchanges between groups that make up the present population, one can glean more than the words alone.

Explicitly, this tape tells the story of Sadie's life, and a good bit of her father's, and the unusual story of her mother's life.

Off tape, Sadie told me that her father's/so-called autobiography is not truly such; he had submitted his original manuscript to a friend who was a publisher; the "friend" had the book rewritten to popularize it, then, still unsatisfied, he had the rewritten version again rewritten--hence much was lost and changed in the revision.

Knowing there was much omitted from the book also, Sadie told me she spent a great deal of time with her father during the last year or two of his life, seeking stories from him about the early years when he settled at Barrow. She said she wanted to get some of these onto the tape now, "for the record."

This is the story she told:

Charlie came to Alaska in 1882. His ship was caught in the ice, but he got off of it some distance from shore, near Point Hope. He expected to be able to return to the ship, but it was caught in a lead and put out to sea, so Charlie was left on the ice. He was near to perishing when he was found by a woman, Tuktook, and her brothers, from Point Hope.

Tuktook and her brothers took Charlie to their igloo to nurse him. Now, at this time, before any white men had come to Point Hope, there was a strong shaman-chief who declared that white men should be killed if they came into the village. Tuktook and her brothers made this clear to Charlie, and one day, out hunting, the shaman attempted to kill Charlie. He was able to "turn the tables" and best the shaman in some way so that the shaman became his debtor. After that they became good friends. Charlie then married Tuktook and eventually moved to Barrow and founded the whaling station.

Tuktook had four children, and died in childbirth with the last.

Later, these children were sent to the states and raised by Charlie's relatives; of them, Sadie mentions one who made a trip to Barrow.

After Tuktook died, Charlie hired a woman to care for the children. Her name in Eskimo was Ahseangatuk, which meant "my little sweet berry."

Ahseangatuk eventually married Charlie, and this was the mother of all the Brower children (now the elder generation) who have contributed so many to the Barrow community.

This is the story of Ahseangatuk.

Ahseangatuk was born at Shishmareff on the Seward Peninsula. Ahseangatuk's mother died when the girl was a baby. It was common practice for the Eskimes to let a girl-child die when there was no one to care for it, so Ahseangatuk was buried alive with her mother.

She had older brothers, however. Two young brothers came to visit their mother's grave, and heard the baby crying. Overcome, unable to bear the sound of the baby crying, they opened the grave and took Ahseangatuk out, and back to their igloo. The brothers then were responsible for the girl-child, and so they raised her. When Ahseangatuk was a young woman the family traveled north; whether to Barrow, or to another village where Charlie hired or "found" her was unclear. At this point however, she came into his employ and subsequently married him.

Charlie had ten children by Ahseangatuk; Tom, who owned the Browerville hotel and store was the eldest, and Sadie was the <sup>sixth</sup> fourth. She was born in 1916.

Charlie sent Sadie, when she was 13, in 1929, to school in California. Her elder sister was studying nursing in Berkely. Sadie went to a high school near the Presidio; in 1934 she graduated. She took entrance exams for Stanford University, passed them and was accepted. She planned to enter Stanford that fall, but in the summer she had an attack of appendicitis and landed in the hospital.

Her sister at Berkeley brought her a family album to enjoy while she was convalescing. It made Sadie homesick. About that time, a family friend came to see her and told her he was bound for Alaska. Sadie begged him to take her with him. Finally he agreed. She sailed north that summer, landed at Nome and sent word to her father she needed transportation on to Barrow. When she finally arrived at Barrow, it was fall, and her father was just leaving to take another child south to school. He was aghast that Sadie should have forsaken her chance to go to Stanford, but left her behind.

Sadie continues to describe her life following her return to Barrow, then going on to school at Eklutna Vocational School where she worked as a teacher's aide; then to the University of Alaska where she worked with Otto Geist; then back to Barrow; and marriage to Nate, whom she says had "no formal education, but is educated in the things that matter." With Nate, Sadie had twelve children.

Sadie was mayor of Barrow for six years, and has been magistrate since 1962--twelve years.

Sadie tells how she became magistrate by helping her father who was U.S. Commissioner. She tells a few stories about her father's early life at Barrow toward the end of the interview on reel three; and finally conversation turns to present day problems at Barrow in education, alcoholism, and political development.