

Tess Murie Holmes
McCarthy-Kennicott area

H76-212, b

Interview by N. Jacobs
Palmer Pioneer Home
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2 hours

Series: Tanana Yukon Historical Society tapes

I set the Nagra up in Mrs. Holmes room and started the tape, then turned to look at a photo on the wall I had noticed on entering; Mrs. Holmes is talking about her acquaintance with Bill O'Neil, mining engineer and U of A Board of Regents member, who is in the photo on the wall, when the tape opens.

Mrs. Holmes describes her acquaintance with the O'Neil family and their life on Dan Creek, up the Tizina River--a tributary of the Copper River system about McCarthy.

Tess Holmes was born in Los Angeles in 1889. At six she moved to Tucson, Arizona. Visiting a relative there, she learned basket making from a Hopi Indian woman who worked in the household. Mrs. Holmes was making a raffia basket during the interview, and digression^{es} from the interview subject^{at one point} to explain how she learned to weave and to describe her technique as she is making the basket.

Tess came to Alaska from San Francisco with her first husband, Jim Murie (no relation to the naturalists, Adolph and Olaus).

Jim Murie made the Chisana gold stampede but found it unprofitable, so the Muries bought an idle roadhouse on the Nizina River.

After rebuilding and developing the property, the Muries ran the Nizina River Roadhouse--on the trail between McCarthy and Chisana--for 24 years, until 1940.

In 1940 Jim Murie became terminally ill. Tess accompanied Jim to Oregon where he passed away. By that time World War II prevented her return. Walter Holmes, a miner friend on Day Creek, looked after her properties. After Tess returned to Alaska in 1945, she married Walter.

The tape is especially interesting because of the character of Mrs Holmes. She is the grand-niece of an early Massachusetts governor, born of an early California family, and she speaks like one from one of the old aristocratic California families that no longer exist but who combined New England pride with Spanish warmth.

Mrs. Holmes was a business woman but also a gracious "lady" and consequently came to know the management of the Kennicott mines from many angles. She was anxious to relate in this tape interview what she had observed during her years in connection with the Kennicott operations.

The story is personally a warm tale of an interesting human life, and also reveals much about the life and land of the McCarthy-Chisana region during an era totally unlike any other.

Tape One is primarily autobiographical, with details of the operation of the roadhouse, how it was built, or rebuilt; about the people who mined in the area and traveled back and forth over the glacier to the Chisana fields via Kennicott, about the glacier and shver of the Tizina, communication and transportation of the time, as well as observations about people connected with the Kennicott Corporation.

Tape Two develops the Kennicott theme and Tess describes people involved in the management and discusses her views on the final closing of the mine, which she based on close contact with the mine and townspeople.