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Tom Snapp, Three friends of Howard Rock remember him

Moses Wassillie, moderator

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Mo Wassillie said Howard Rock was most known as the editor of the Tundra Times. He asked Tom Snapp, editor of the All-Alaska weekly, about how he got to know Howard Rock. Tom Snapp said in 1960 he was a writer for the Fairbanks news-miner. He covered the rural Bush areas of Alaska. He met Howard as an artist. Later one of the issues he was covering at the paper was a proposal blast of a harbor near Cape Thompson. Howard had been to Pt. Hope on a visit. The people were concerned about the project and wanted Howard to help them get the project canceled. He began to gather data to send to Senators Bartlett and Gruening. Snapp said he worked with Howard on the data gathering project. That same year (1961) there was an incident up at Barrow. It concerned shooting ducks and geese out of season. The Fish and Wildlife Service had moved out into Bush areas to enforce the Migratory Bird Treaty. They had never done this previously. The Fish and Wildlife Service was relieved of most of its duties by the Fish and Game after statehood. They were met with resistance when they went out to enforce the treaty. It was the first case where they had Eskimo people putting up a strong resistance to something. If the Natives obeyed the Migratory Bird Treaty the Natives wouldn't have been able to take ducks and geese for subsistence. The treaty claims that birds can't be harvested until after September 1. In Barrow there wouldn't be any birds left at that time of year. So that became a big issue. Because of these two issues and other problems the people from northern Alaska called a conference. They got assistance from the Association of American Indian Affairs. Snapp said he attended the conference in Barrow and shared a room with Howard Rock. Howard and Frank Dagnun helped him to gather data so he could report on the conference. He became very good friends with Howard Rock. At the conference Snapp said he really became involved. He was asked if he wanted to help start a newspaper. Snapp realized how difficult this could be. He envisioned that they wanted a newsletter. Howard was going back to Fairbanks. They tried a grant route at the University of Alaska. They were going to have to make a huge grant which would take a lot of money to develop. They decided to go their own way. They asked the Association of American Indian Affairs to give them names of members. They tried Dr. Henry Forbes from Massachusetts. He had attended school with Senator Gruening. Mrs. Niilo Kopenen was a relative of his. Snapp wrote a long letter to him about why a newspaper was needed at that time. Snapp said he was preparing to return to school. They got a telephone call from Dr. Forbes and he said he would fund the paper as long as Howard Rock was the editor and Tom Snapp would assist him. Snapp stayed in Fairbanks. They worked together for a year. They worked all aspects of a newspaper. After a year Snapp was satisfied that Howard Rock could work on his own. Howard was an unusual person. He made the newspaper work. Normally he wouldn't contribute his work to causes because he feels that working in certain clubs is wasting his time. He said he was glad to contribute his time to the newspaper. Mo Wassillie asked about some of the issues at that time. Snapp said they were getting a lot of flak. The

Daily News miner claimed they were pressing for reservations. Snapp was saying they wanted blanket claims. Snapp said at that time Native people would threaten Howard. Snapp thought it was because of all the false claims about reservations.

Song

Laura Burt has been on the Board of the Tundra times and has been involved with the Eskimo Olympics. Laura talked about her family and Howard Rock's family. Howard Rock's family was from Pt. Hope. Her family is from Kotzebue. There is a long standing family relation. Howard's brother used to come into Kotzebue by dog team from Pt. Hope. He brought in muktuk and brought back mail or reindeer. His relatives would stay with her grandmother in Kotzebue. She got to know Howard fifteen or twenty years ago. He asked her to serve on the Board of Directors of the Tundra Times. She became involved with the paper. She talked about working with the Eskimo Olympics. Howard Rock was also involved. Howard was an artist first. He had a great feeling for expressing himself on paper. He was not a business man. They had the Tundra Times banquet to supplement the newspaper. He was a very quiet man to many people. Mo Wassillie asked about her work with him on the Art Institute project. Laura Burt said that was his idea. He serves on the National Indian Arts and Crafts Board. It is under the Department of the Interior. Howard thought it would be fantastic if an art institute could be established in the state of Alaska. People sent in their proposals and Laura said she was funded. They completed the study last September. Tommy Richards, Mary Jane Fate, and Roger Lang helped her with the study. They visited 60 or 70 villages. It took over a year to do this. They didn't visit just the usual villages where studies are always done. They wanted some traditional opinions. They used interpreters where necessary. They talked with students, educators, and legislators. Howard was pleased with this. The state is coming through with money to carry this through. Mo Wassillie asked what the board was doing now that Howard was gone. Burt said the board had a meeting in San Francisco. Howard was too sick to attend. He told her that he was going to send a telegram. He was going to urge them to support and continue the art institute project. Mo Wassillie asked about continuing the Tundra Times. Laura Burt said Suko Nash will be acting editor. They shall try to pick up the torch where Howard left it.

Song

Tom Richards who is director of services for the Tanana Chiefs Conference has worked with Howard Rock. Tom Richards said Howard Rock has been a friend of the family for many years. His father used to fly Howard Rock to Pt. Hope in the 1950-1960s. Richards said he got to know Howard in 1968 when he was at the University of Colorado and decided to return home. He wrote Howard and asked him for a job. He was hired as an advertising salesman. He then worked as a staff writer, photographer and Washington correspondent. He also worked as a relief editor over the years. He knew Howard for about seven or eight years. Mo Wassillie asked about some of the issues that he covered. Richards said at that point it was all about land claims. He spent a great deal of time with the AFN board covering their deliberations about how to proceed in trying to obtain a settlement. He received a draft notice in 1969. He joined the Navy and ended up in Washington. He continued to write from there. He covered the 91-92 Congress when most of the settlement legislative activity occurred. Wassillie asked if he was managing editor, too. Richards said he was briefly in 1973-74. He left the paper after having a difference

of opinion over where the paper should be located. Richards wanted it in Anchorage. They got over the dispute and were very good personal friends. They used to meet after work at Tommy's. He also wrote a column when he had a tour of duty in the Philippines. Only one of the columns he wrote was ever rejected by Howard.

Mo Wassillie said the music they have been listening to was taken from Floyd Westerman's album.