

ORAL HISTORY 97-66-39

Otto William Geist

November 16, 1961

Tanana Yukon Historical Society meeting

Most of the tape is difficult to understand

Otto Geist talked about whaling on Saint Lawrence Island. He said the people on the island are very dependent on whales for meat and blubber. He talked about the first time he went to the island when he went there for the Indian Service in 1927. He returned to the island several times. He stayed with the Natives on the island. He was allowed to accompany them on a whaling boat. He was able to partake in the whale ceremony which was usually held in early April. People would watch for sign of whales at sunrise. They would stand on mounds in the village. He talked about where the different hunters were on the boat and how they used the sails. He described the functions of the striker and the captain. The striker cannot harpoon the whale again after the first strike. He talked about the whaling ceremonies after the whale is killed and when it is brought back to the shore. The whale is cut up and distributed among the captain and the different members of the crew. Otto talked about a Siberian that was also on the whaling boat. Otto had made the mistake of pointing at a whale and it upset the Siberian. The whale is considered sacred and might consider it offensive to be pointed at. After a question from the audience Otto talked about harpoons.

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