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Barrow today: Barrow economy, technology and economic change

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> **Notes: Original in 7-inch tape, master copy on CD. Produced by Roger McPherson.** THESE TAPES WERE PRODUCED AS A PART OF AN EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM NOW DEFUNCT AND WERE BROADCAST OVER THE RADIO FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES.

[Theme music by Pete Sovalik's dance group.] The announcer's [Jeff Kennedy] voice says today's program is "Barrow today: Barrow economy, technology and economic change." [More singing and drumming.] He tells that in Barrow, subsistence hunting remains an important livelihood and that before the arrival of the whaling ships, trading was important in obtaining goods that were necessary for survival. When commercial whaling begun, wage labor was introduced and has remain an important part of Barrow's economy. Technological change followed: dog teams are replaced by snow-machines that have widened the range of hunters. It's now possible to work for wages and still hunt.

Willie Silas remembers the difficulties of traveling with a dog team: He tells that he hunted with a dog team in tundra. Sometimes they didn't get anything. Sometimes they traveled in stormy and windy weather and never stopped except when they went down to the village to get some food. Today they don't use dogs anymore, but have ski-dos that are good for hauling ice. Everything changes now.

At 3:29 Allan Shontz introduces himself and says he runs a general store in Barrow where they handle groceries, dried goods, cosmetics, sporting goods, snow-machines and so on. They have just about anything one might have a need for "up here." The interviewer [Roger McPherson] asks which would be the most important items and Allan tells that they have the largest selection of snow-machine parts in Alaska. Snow machines are a necessity of life because one needs to haul ice for water in winter and hunt which is faster [with a snow machine] than

with a dog team. They are important for a person who's holding a job and not making much money since the people can still go hunting on weekends or holidays. Even in summertime people have their snow machines in boats and then they run them all over tundra.

Some other person says he doesn't go by dog team anymore because they are too slow, albeit more dependable. He doesn't have that much time available since he is working. If he wasn't working, he'd be more than glad to have a dog team, but now his time is precious and he takes a skidoo.

At 5:43 Joseph Upicksoun and he tells that prior to Caucasians coming into their land, they had no way of measuring man's time and his worth in dollars and cents. His people lived off the land and the land yielded game like caribou and all the fur bearing animals for pelts. Then they have rivers that have been good to them since they yield fish. They also have the ocean that has been really good to his people. Every spring they harvest whales. The Eskimo will form his own crew on a 28-foot skin-boat and with his skill can bag a 60-ton whale.

Another man says that especially in summer time he does all his hunting and his brother and he have their own boat. For the first time in last spring, they got a whale with their crew. They hope to get another one.

Joseph Upicksoun continues that there are very few people on the planet who have killed a whale, especially from 28-foot skin-boat. When a crew gets a whale, they have cooperation as it is called in Caucasian society. The beauty in his people's cooperation is that it's automatic once they get a whale. The way the whale is divided is beautiful and one can compare the bagging whale with striking oil. The stock holders in an oil company celebrate with champagne when the company has struck an oil well and in case of Joseph's people there are portions of the whale that could be likened to champagne. The captain of the crew gets a certain portion of the whale and they celebrate. Sharing is pretty much the same than it is in a corporation.

10:19 Edward Hopson introduces himself and tells that he likes to hunt and that in winter he's involved with community activities: the city council, school board and so on. He still likes to hunt and especially when the school stops in the

summertime, he uses his annual leave and leave without pay to go hunting for caribou and walrus.

Joe Upicksoun tells that they have difficulties in measuring time and its worth in dollars and cents because between them and their game there is no middle man, no corruption. When they stalk their game and bag it, it's totally theirs without having income tax or state tax taken out. That's the beauty of getting something whole.

The narrator says that subsistence hunting, as Joseph Upicksoun pointed out, has not changed much since the introduction of dollar economy, but the younger villagers lack the experience of their elders and have less ability to relate to their arctic environment.

[Music is playing in the background.] The interviewer asks someone where he went to get caribou and a man's voice says he went to "the same place." He went out there with his brother with a skidoo. The interviewer asks someone else if he does hunting, but he says he doesn't do it very much. He doesn't know if he goes hunting in the summer. Today they [unclear, talking about Polar Bears, not clear whether they are talking about the business or about actual polar bears?] and the movie Bonnie and Clyde that deals with people robbing and getting killed in the end].

At 13:59 a man's voice says that their young people are making a living with only what they know. They [the older people] are sometimes disgusted when they look at making a living without a thought of living like they have known. It seems to result in a conflict between them and their young. The young people know the present day life and the old people know the past life. He says that sometimes it's hard to communicate with young people and he feels like they don't know what the older people are talking about when they talk about dog teams and hunting. Hunting continues, but the older means of hunting were simpler. The Eskimo weren't afraid of cold because they had warm clothes that were reindeer or caribou. They know how to survive out in the tundra and they also know how to make snow houses. Their youngsters don't know much.

15:44 [Theme music.] The narrator says this was the first part on the economy in Barrow, Alaska's largest Eskimo community and northernmost city. Barrow Today was written and produced by Roger and Karen McPherson with the support of

Alaska Rural School's project, Department of Education and KUAC of the University of Alaska. Voices in the recording were Willie Silas, Al Shontz, Nelson Ahvakana, Joe Upicksoun, Edward Hopson, two teenagers and Reverend Samuel Simmons. Music was performed by Pete Sovalik's dance group. [Break in the recording.]

At 17:02 theme music begins again. The announcer's voice says that the program of Barrow Today will discuss wage and welfare economies, boom and bust. Barrow's remote location gives it the advantage of having hunting areas in land and sea and the disadvantage of being economically dependent on government agencies and short-term construction with limited local employment opportunities. Despite of unemployment problems, few people depend on welfare economy.

The state welfare representative in Barrow, Louise Conway, explains the Barrow Welfare –program and villagers' attitudes toward it. She tells she works with the State of Alaska, Division of Public Welfare and that she's a Barrow representative of that division. It seems to her that people in Barrow prefer to be independent and work and hunt when possible. Most of the people who are on welfare in Barrow are not able to work for one reason or another or they are one-person families.

The narrator continues that the oil strikes in Prudhoe Bay, 200 miles east of Barrow, have recently created job opportunities for Barrow people. Flights to the oil fields are provided by the oil companies, but the hours are rough, work unrewarding and promotion requires long experience. Edward Itta, a young Eskimo who has worked for one of the oil companies, describes the situation and then Al Shontz who is the owner of the largest general store in the village will discuss the impact of new employment for his business.

At 19:46 Edward says that he worked up in the oil fields for about a year. The job wasn't too bad: he didn't like it too much but the pay was good. They worked 12-hour shifts 7 days a week for 28 days at a time and then they got 2 weeks off. He says 28 days is quite a while, but that some other people had week on and week off. They have it pretty good. They can earn money and stay with their family for one week and go hunting. Everything is balanced out: they get money and still are able to hunt and spend time with their family which is a culture-thing.

Al Shontz says there are between 70 and 90 people who are employed at the oil fields. They have some who work one week and are off one week. Some people go up for 2 weeks and some others for 4. It's hard to say who is working and who isn't, but there seems to be a considerable amount of cash in the village. They also have a social services program which is a BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] welfare program that is funded by the city and it works pretty well. Then if someone needs immediate cash, they can be written a check. If some families feel like they couldn't spent the money wisely, they can have a charge account for $30 dollars a week or so. The food stamp is a program that hasn't been explained to the people properly and so they don't take an advantage of it. It would be a tremendous help for the people who are in off-the-land economy in winter. If one works 6 months of the year and draws unemployment for 6 months, it helps if one is able to supplement their income by going hunting while unemployed.

Louise Conway says that a typical household in Barrow often includes a number of families who are living in one house. There might be an old couple, their grandparents and grown children whose families might live in the same home. When it comes to eligibility for welfare, the only people receiving the welfare are ordinarily the grandparents. However, if the older children don't have jobs at the time, they might be dependent on one another for assistance. Often the grandparents share the expenses of living with the others in the house. When one says there are X number of people living on welfare in Barrow, it's not true because more people are dependent on it [than the official figures suggest]. Many families choose not to apply for assistance as Louise says.

At 24:58 a man's voice tells about family cohesiveness, traditional sharing, and varied wage and subsistence income that contribute to survival of the Barrow people in the Arctic environment. One man may support a family with his job and hunting during his vacations. Nelson Ahvakana and Edward Itta describe the demands of wage economy and the decisions a man must make in order to make a living:

A man's voice says that when he first got out of school, he had to work since his family didn't have money to pay for his college. He started off working for the DEW [Distance Early Warning line] line and for Central Electric. He was hoping to work at least for a year to get enough money for his tuition, but he didn't get a

chance to go back to school. He started working for the DEW Line and his parents were pretty much dependent on him and he spent the money to buy groceries for them and didn't get the chance to go back to school.

Another man says one has to start as a roustabout that so one can get used to the whole rig. Everybody starts up that way and they end up being roughnecks which is better than being a roustabout. They start off from a scratch and later make it as a roughneck or they don't. The speaker says he doesn't know any Eskimos who would be drillers, but says that there are one or two. One has to have so much time in order to get to know the great majority of things one has to know in order to be a driller. It's all up to an individual if they want to become a driller and the company would surely like to have Native drillers who would be around a long time because who else would be better suited for "up here" than the Natives and they might make lifetime employees.

At 27:57 the narrator's voice says that in the past, Barrow's economy has been seasonal, characterized as a boom-bust economy due to periods of rapid construction that were followed by inactivity. The city of Barrow recognizes the need for local employment opportunities and is working on some plans towards this end. The city manager Jack Chenowith feels a new airport facility offers a partial solution. The city is also preparing final plans for an air-terminal in the vicinity of the airport to include a ticker counter, a restaurant, gift shops, a flight services station and a 40-room hotel with a state office building to house the offices of the state officials. The whole package would cost $2,5 million dollars and the funding is promised by various state agencies. The construction will probably start in September, 1971.

In terms of jobs, permanent and part-time jobs would be needed in building and maintaining the airport facility and in a town with chronically high unemployment, this would be a blessing.

In the Arctic, heating costs are high, food expensive and jobs scarce. Past studies of Barrow's economy have urged more collaboration to prevent sudden flooding of the economy that would result in later unemployment. At present, there are not enough jobs for the current workforce and outmigration is an inevitable choice for many. In oil exploration, few permanent jobs have been created for Natives.

Villagers combine wages and hunting and balance new technologies with old skills to gain a stable economic base.

30:29 [Music.] The narrator says this was the second part about the wage and welfare economy in Barrow. Barrow Today was written and produced by Roger and Karen McPherson with the support of Alaska Rural School's project, Department of Education and KUAC of the University of Alaska. Voices in the recording were Louise Conway, Edward Itta, Al Shontz, Nelson Ahvakana and Jack Chenowith. Music was produced by Pete Sovalik's dance group and [unclear].

[End of the recording.]