

Call number: 02-00-62-30

Mr. Murdo McCrae

Summary created by: Jacob Metoxen

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The recording begins with Harrie Hughes saying this is the second side of the tape and the date is June 1st, 1963 at Chatanika Alaska. In the room with him is Judy Eric and Mrs. Anna McCrae. They will continue with more conversation on the tape. Harrie asks one of the ladies about Chatanika and asks about the berries and the garden. She says the people had stables and she had a pony and sleigh. A fellow named Beatnip [?] had a pony. Harrie says that a lady told Frank Young she had an old rocker so she brought it in. Harrie picked it up and put it in Frank yard. She said Harrie should take the sleigh in and get it fixed. They are taking pictures with a black and white camera. He is taking a picture of Mrs. McCrae and Judy from the Fairbanks News Miner. In the window are plants. The recorder stops and resumes. Mrs. McCrae just showed them a diamond willow that is one of the largest that they've seen. It is probably 5-6 inches across the bud. Very odd shaped. Diamond willows are usually big enough to make a cane or pole. This one should be used to make a lamp out of it. Julie asks about disease. Harrie says the diamond willow gets a disease and it causes the willow to get a diamond shaped breakage on the surface. The tree then kind of decays. The disease is caused by bugs. Some trees have been known to burst with frost. They will become ruptured just like that. Julie asks if that is the reason why the willow doesn't get that big. Harrie says willows are small but Mrs. McCrae's is large. Mrs. McCrae says sometimes multiple willows become one. She raised the flowers in Alaska. All her flowers are from January.

At 6:20 of the recording Harrie begins discussing Mrs. McCrae's pet parakeet. The parakeet has fallen asleep. The parakeet will talk if he wants to. In the winter time Anna and Murdo don't work so they do stuff like taking care of the diamond willow and sewing. She says that she made a table and she wants Harrie to see how she was trying to paint a steam ship. Bob used to be an agent for the steamship. She can't remember Bob's last name. He used to have a cap on his head and she tried to paint it. She couldn't put a drawer in the table. She has never been lonesome in Chatanika even after the war and there was nobody in Chatanika. There are so many beautiful things in life that people can really enjoy. She says she was almost shot because people shoot guns. Harrie says that's one thing they should restrict in Alaska is people using firearms. She says one year she was hanging up clothes and a shot came about two inches from her ear. She didn't know what to do so she yelled and kept on yelling to not shoot. It was three solders down the road and they said they didn't know there was a house. Harrie says people coming up to visit Alaska must remember that it's just like the States, there are people living everywhere. Harrie says the army has done something about it. Some places are restricted to no personal firearms. She says she has seen them very careless. Harrie says construction workers do things here that they usually wouldn't do it at home. She says in the early days Mrs. Bunham [?] used to come out to Chatanika and teach people how to sow and they had a homemakers club. They had a bridge

club and in the olden days they used to play hand. They called it Pangini [?]. They had a big piece of board so that 20 people could get around and 20 people could play. They used to cut the board from house to house and play all winter long. It was lots of fun. They also used to have dances at Livengood. The biggest thrill was when KFAR came on. When the station came on she will never forget how she felt when she could hear the news on the radio. It was marvelous. She says when Murdo went out for war he was a little bit too old for the navy so he joined maritime marine. She moved out to Seattle at that time and there is his picture. She lived in Ballard. It was very nice. Of course Murdo had his first grade papers but the lure of Alaska brought him back. He would have been a captain but he decided to come back to Alaska. Harrie talks about Ben Fall running a camp alone.

At 13:30 Anna begins talking about the garden. She created the garden on raw ground. They used to have horses and stables. She used to have cabbage that you couldn't even lift. This is hard to believe unless you have done it yourself. She put potatoes in at about the 18th of June and picked them at the end of August and ate them. Just 9 or 10 weeks and that's all you need. Harrie asks if she ever used the wild rhubarb. She says yes. You can use the weeds of the rhubarb and use it as spinach. The wild flower that grows at the edge of the...[she stops]. She talks about Charlie Wokawich [?]. She says he's getting lame and he's the only old timer that she has left. She says he's had trouble with the dredge this year. Charlie is a dredge master. This is Chatanika dredge. The Fairbanks News Miner has been very good to them, says Harrie. Anytime the pioneers have any new materials the newspaper will put together a little article that shares the information with the public. Judy is going to write an article and take a few pictures like they did before. [At this point the recording becomes difficult to hear].

At 17:30 A man says in the olden days she used to leave her house open so the old timers passing through from the creeks would come in and eat whatever they wanted. Now she cannot leave the house because everything would be stolen if she kept the house open. It isn't a good feeling to have faith and not to trust. If you have faith in god you must trust your fellow man. She still doesn't trust her house open. Harrie says what he has discovered is there are a lot of people who come into Alaska and wouldn't do what they do in Alaska at home. Anna says the young people come up to Alaska and there are two families now. Sometime she would like Trudy to come up to Bell Creek and see that boy who Murdo gave a job to on the dredge. He is staking 160 acres in the wilderness. He ate his own strawberries that he made. He brought a house last year. He is going to have a pig in a couple years. He also has a baby. They lived in a tent and did that right on bell creek. Now it has helped him that he's working on the dredge. He intends on putting a meeting place and road house for next year. There are still young pioneers but Harrie says that class is thin now. There another couple of boys across from Carshiago [?] Roadhouse. They are building a roadhouse there. Harrie says he wishes the stinkers wouldn't come. Harrie says he is going to stop the tape and they're going to have a cup of tea and look at the piano.

At 21:23 of the recording Harrie Hughes, Anna, and Judy are walking down the main street of Chatanika. Harrie says Chatanika is a ghost town. The buildings are all vacant. They are coming up to the old Fairbanks Exploration Company office. There is a piano playing in the background. Anna is playing the BAUS piano. She says she is playing a song that she has known for a number of years. She doesn't know the name of the song. Harrie says Mrs. Judy is taking some pictures. They are now entering the old

Fairbanks Exploration Company mess house where they used to feed the early miners. The group meets somebody at the FE mess hall. The man's name is Oscar Severance. He has been in Chatanika for 12 years and has been in Alaska for 12 years. Harrie explains that he is recording history. They are now in the dining room and kitchen and the cook is making a lot of pastry. There is nice cinnamon rolls and bread. They really feed like they used. Mr. Simpson is the cook. Mr. Jimmy Simpson says that he has been in Alaska since 1952. He says he hasn't been working for FE for most of the time. [The recording is difficult to hear at this point.] Simpson says he knows Art Luthro and Ike Taylor. Harrie asks Jimmy to come closer to the recording. Harrie says Judy is taking pictures of James Simpson, the baker. The recording cuts out.

The recording resumes at 26:00 with a new recording of Murdo McCrae and his wife Anna McCrae. Judy Eric from the Fairbanks News Miner is along for the interview. Mrs. McCrae says she has been steady in Alaska since 1934. Anna says she doesn't call herself the real old timer because there is no families here like there was in the olden days. There used to be about 35 families and they had the school and teachers. Now there is only about three white women and two Eskimo ladies. She says she used to live in a house below the house. In the olden days she worked for the American Smelting and Mining Company that took over and bought all the ground from the old timers. Now these old timers Anna used to love to talk to them and listen to them telling stories about what happened in the early days. She said there were 7 saloons right beneath her home in the creek. There was a hospital in Cleary and a hotel there and other organizations. Anna says she thinks the women of the olden days were spoiled because there were few of them. The women worked hard but they were really ladies because all of the old timers respected women and loved them and took care of them and did for them. When she looks down under the hill there is nothing there but growth. Of course the company is dredging and dredging and bought all of the old timers out. Two Step Louie used to live over the hill and he used to come and stop in Chatanika. They called him Two Step Louie is because he used to love to dance the two step. One time he wanted a lady to dance with him very much and he told her if she danced the two step with him that he would give her the Polk of gold he had which was worth 50 grand. He gave her the Polk and many times Anna danced with Two Step Louie.

At 30:45 Harrie Hughes says he would like to get personal with the McCraes. He begins to ask about where they come from and what brought them to Alaska. Anna says when her husband came up to Alaska during the depression there was a man who came out to Seattle. They were married in Seattle. They will be married 34 years this fall. There was a man named Bill McCloud who was a cousin of Anna's from Seattle. The depression was hard. Bill McCloud is the one who put in the Davidson ditch for FE. Bill invited Murdo to come with him. Murdo was 26. Murdo was in the navy in the old country. They come from a little island in the north of Scotland. They went to school together there and they were in the same grade. Murdo worked on the Davidson ditch and was the first ditch walker the company had. Murdo got sick of something and had to come outside for something. They were married in Seattle and Anna told Murdo she wanted to come to Fairbanks with Murdo. Murdo told her no because the mosquitos would eat her alive. Murdo came up again and worked with Bill McCloud. Murdo said he loved the hills of Chatanika so much. At that time there wasn't the heavy trees. Murdo said the hills looked a lot like the hills of Scotland. Anna figured if Murdo was going to make his life in Chatanika then

she would join him. Anna had a brother with the Alaska steamship company who is retired from there currently. Anna came on a trip with the brother in 1925 to the coast. She liked the coast but Murdo said he would rather live in the interior. That's why they moved to Fairbanks. They came to Chatanika and have been living there ever since.

At 34:45 Harrie Hughes asks Anna how many people were in Chatanika. Anna says there were 35 families and there were miners and there was Smith over. There was Wolf Creek where there was mining. Quite a few of the miners and of course Cleary Hill Mine was good then. Murdo mentions Johnson who was outside. Anna says some of the old timers are dead. She said she had 6 old men who have gone to their rest since. Harrie asks about a few days ago there was a piano with quite a bit of history in Chatanika that the people have used for the school house. Anna says when she came the school was in Chatanika and there must have been 15 children in the school. It was before her time that the piano was presented to the community to the school. There are two of the children who are still living there. Chance Wistein [?] and Dick Lindtsrom both still live in town and had a part in the piano. Mr. and Mrs. Casey are still living and in California. They donated the piano. A lot of the children who went to school there like Reed Osien [?] and the O'Leary boys are in Fairbanks. Harrie asks Anna if she thinks that the preservation of that department would be important. Anna says yes and some people are living in the school. The piano was actually stolen from the school and halfway between it being stolen where they hid it, Murdo found the piano. He put the piano in the FE office and locked the office while taking care of it ever since. Anan says Mr. and Mrs. Ted Loftus thought that having the piano as a memorial would be wonderful for Chatanika. Harrie wants to know if he can get a record so that anything he takes for the pioneer doesn't get the pioneers in trouble.

At 40:24 Harrie says the first person came in a couple nights ago and donated \$25 for fuel. Harrie says FE has donated money for them work in the park. Jack parks provided caps and they did everything on donation until now. Chance Wilzeen [?] came to Harrie about the Piano. Harrie says he took chance with him to Dawson on a road trip last year. The piano has been locked for 4 years. Chance Wilzeenn [?] went to Harrie Hughes and she mentioned it to chance. Jimmy McDonald also talked to Anna about the piano. The recording stops.

At 42:33 Harrie Hughes comes back on the recording and says he is interviewing Mrs. McCrae at Chatanika and they have an old fashioned telephone that has different rings for different people. Anna says she can hear everybody from fish creek. 1 ring goes to town. Harrie says when he worked on Alaska railroad they had radio telephone from Seward to Fairbanks. The ring was 1 minute and it meant they had orders. When Anna came to Fairbanks she was looking for a lady and she couldn't find her so she went to the telephone to finer her. Anan says she asked people where she was and they told her to go up the blocks straight ahead one house to the right, there will a house. The house has a red mailbox in front. Anna went to Huey Mathieson's house. She went and the telephone operator knew that all you had to do was ask her. Anna and her husband talk the Gaelic language. Ms. Mathieson talks the same language. Anna told her "How are you?" and Huey looked up to her and said she had never heard that language for years. Huey was so thrilled that Anna got a hold of her and they have been friends ever since and that has been 30 years. Harrie interjects talking about how he used to fish and apparently knows a lot about the land in the area. Anan says the wheel was pushing the water back and

there was ways up the water. Anan says she can't believe they have a powerhouse up in the Chatanika River. Harrie says the break on the telephone was from the hydroelectric plant installed near Chatanika. Dick Dalish [?] was the one in charge. She isn't sure what year but it must have been 4 years ago when the project was started. The electric took over and they're selling it because the company doesn't use it anymore. Anan says her and Murdo are through in Chatanika next year unless the dredging goes up. It doesn't pay to dredge anymore. Harrie asks if the hydroelectric plant goes on in the winter too.

At 48:00 of the recording Harrie asks Anna about the bear that tried to crawl into their window. She says in all the years she has had lots of bears. The black bears never bothered them much, they fed them. Last year she was cooking a roast and the bear came to the screen door. She thought it was somebody trying to get into the house and she kept saying come on in come on in and she looked and here it was the nose of the bear. Anna thought it was a black bear because she had no idea that there were brown bears where they live. She went out and hit the bear in the stone with a head and he never moved. The bear charged her. Anna thought the situation was dangerous. She closed the door on the bear's nose and her husband at that time was coming home at 9pm and she kept making signs to him to look and Murdo saw the bear. The bear got into the garbage and he got into the potato peelings. She thought the bear was dangerous. Murdo started to shoot the bear and the gun jammed and he couldn't get the bullet out. Murdo went and got one of the boys and they got the bear up into the trees and they shot him. That was the only type of bear that ever attacked her. She doesn't know the different kinds of bears in Alaska. Harrie Hughes has seen every single type of bear in Alaska. The brown bear doesn't usually come this far in but a few do. Harrie has seen brown bears in McKinley Park. Anna says the black bear has more of a long face. Harrie said he never had any bear bother him. Anna mentions Dan Gillis getting mauled by a bear. She took Dan from the hospital down to Fairbanks creek. He was badly mauled. That night their transformers blew and poor Dan had to get out of Anna's house in the middle of the night. The recording ends.