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Howard Rock talks about land claims

Lael Morgan, interviewer

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Howard Rock said at that time the only people that used the natural gas in the Barrow area were the government installations. Later on Senator Bartlett had a bill passed and since that time the residents in Barrow used gas. Up to that time they were using oil at very extravagant prices. It was about one hundred dollars for a fifty-five gallon drum. The installation of gas was a very big thing and saved them a lot of money. Their expenses were half or less.

Morgan asked about the eider duck problem [migratory bird act?]. Rock said they discussed that at the council meeting at Pt. Hope. They found that other areas had experienced problems. Pt. Hope was having problems with Project Chariot. He told the council members that it might be good to have some kind of publication that would tell about these problems in different areas and perhaps the leadership could meet and discuss their problems and how to solve the problems. Morgan asked if he had written anything. Rock said he had written things about something like hunting, but not on lands and other problems. Morgan asked how he felt about writing to the secretary of the Interior. Howard said Pt. Hope is a small area to spring a letter of such importance. Washington, [D.C.] seemed many miles away and impersonal. With encouragement from La Verne Madigan at the time he had the feeling that the letter would be important. He started to help the Pt. Hope folks to write the letter. He could type some at that time, but not much. He remembers writing the letter in long hand.

Morgan asked Rock how he helped the Minto people to map their land. Rock said they didn't have a direct thing on it but they publicized it. When they first started publishing the Tundra Times one of the first things to come up was the road from Minto to Fairbanks. Chief Richard Frank had a meeting and talked to the people of Fairbanks. It further inspired the effort of the land claims question. They knew that Chief Frank was going to have a meeting and Tom Snapp covered it. It turned out to be a very important effort on their part. They bought maps and the people of Minto showed where their land was. At that time the state had achieved statehood. The law gave the state the right to withdraw 133 million acres of public land. The state began to withdraw lands some of which were right into the Minto area and hunting lands. Some of the withdrawals came right into the villages. This alarmed the villagers. If they didn't do anything they would lose their lands. Rock believes this is the impetus that gave the land claims effort from which to spring. This was the starting point. Morgan asked if the other newspapers reported on this, they were the only ones that talked about these things although they might have mentioned something. At that time others were mostly against their effort. Morgan talked about an article in the *Tundra times* about not sweating in the artic. Rock said very early in his life he heard from other people that in order to survive in the arctic you dress properly and don't make too strenuous of an effort and sweat. In cold weather when you start to cool off the moisture in your clothing will freeze. When you did that you were inviting death by freezing. Morgan said that probably applied to his management at the newspaper, too. Rock said they tried to keep an even keel when they worked. He had a little difficulty at times because Tom Snapp was eager to go and he had to tone him

down several times. Snapp later began to appreciate that attitude. Morgan said Rock did that to her, too. She asked if he was ever discouraged. He said one of the big worries was his need for leadership to spring up in different Native areas. It was a long time coming. After about four years of work some of the leadership began to speak up. They began to blossom into articulate speakers and that was a very welcoming sign. They started to quote the person that spoke out. They were good quotes which helped the effort a great deal. Right from the start they were surprised by the caliber of the people that started to speak up. Morgan asked about the education that the people in Pt. Hope had. Rock said there were quite a few of them that could read, although they may not have understood what was being talked about. After a while things began to jell. This process was enough for the people to pounce on it and they began to work on the settlement of the land claims. Morgan asked what kind of education the people had. Rock said at the time they wrote the letter to Washington, D.C. there wasn't anyone in the village with an education beyond the fourth grade. There were younger children with more education but they didn't have an idea what was going on. Morgan said the people were aware of the problems. Rock said they absorbed the potential effect of this nuclear thing. They were able to understand that it would harm their environment. They had a meeting on Project Chariot in June of that year (1962). Otto Geist was there at the meeting. The meeting was scheduled for about an hour and a half and they (AEC) would talk about what good the project would do – establishing a harbor. They kept asking them questions and the meeting lasted for four and a half hours. Morgan asked if there were Atomic Energy people there. Rock said yes. Morgan commented about the young people at that time becoming leaders later on. Rock said they are mayors and involved in other things. Morgan asked if he was ever discouraged. Rock said the only time he felt discouraged was when the leadership was slowly coming along. He said they rejoiced when the leadership started to come out like Emil Notti and Hugh Nichols. Morgan made a comment about some programs sponsoring people. Rock said they were discouraged for a long period and it finally came up. He told two government officials about his disappointment and they both told him that is what you think. He said people were reading the editorials and digesting them.

Morgan asked him what he thought about the future. Rock said he has always told people in the past that he wasn't worrying about the future of the Native people because of the fact that they had sprung from such difficult areas, solved profound problems and learned how to deal with the problems of living in Alaska for centuries. This has developed leadership, reason, and ways of approach. These have been handed down and have become tools for the present leaders. He said one thing that has already happened is selection of the village lands. These people that didn't have much of an education have met the deadlines. They were asked to apply their abilities to complex problems. Morgan asked how Native politicians compare to other politicians. Rock said that was another concern they had very early in the existence of the Tundra times – to point out the importance of politics. He had written quite a few editorials on the subject. He said the Natives developed their politics into something that works. It needs to be refined. Morgan asked if the Natives have real political power. Rock said they have proven in their ways of negotiating such as during the land claims effort. They used their advisors and legal help. Morgan said one thing that people worry about is with this money the Native people are turned into capitalists and going over into the white man's ways. She wonders if they can compromise. Rock said this will have to fall back onto the innate intelligence of the Native folks. This is a very new, young thing. It is surprising that they are beginning to move in a very short time. They are getting this money to make more money. For example the Bering Straits Native Corporation is establishing contracts. They are

working on the new development of the Lost River area to develop minerals. They can understand the ways of businesses. The Nome area is fortunate to have Tom Drake.

Morgan asked if the people are going to hang on to the old ways. She mentioned the language programs and cultural programs. Rock said there has been a renaissance. He said they included in their early publicity the importance of culture to a people. It has been their strength. The arctic area has a different cultural facet. He talked about the southwestern Eskimos and the language dialect differences. Morgan asked if they were forbidden to speak their language in school. Rock said they were taught that they shouldn't speak Eskimo in school. Some of them were also told not to speak Eskimo at home. Morgan said Pt. Hope people have always been very proud, but in other places people were ashamed that they were Eskimo and Indian. Rock said he has run into this even now. When he was attending school he felt that his igloo was not as good as a framed igloo. He was ashamed of the sod igloo even though it was warmer. Morgan said he must have been sold on the white man's ways because he did well learning. Rock said he was curious about how the white people lived. He wondered what their homes were like. He said his brother told him when he returned to Pt. Hope in 1961 that you can never be as good as any white man. Rock said he kept writing and bucked the tide. He said they have been able to change a great deal. They have changed the ways the BIA system has worked. The BIA is beginning to do the things that they were supposed to do in the first place. They were supposed to help the Native people instead of telling them how to do it. Now they are beginning to realize what their role should be and that is to help. Morgan made the comment that Howard doesn't seem to think in terms of Native and white and never has. Rock said that he realized a long time ago that Alaska will not always be all Native. They just can't help absorbing things that white men brought with them. Their paper has pointed out their own cultures which were rich and useful in the environments which were very different from anywhere else in the world. They were attune to their surroundings. He said it is a very enlightening thing to know how your people lived and how they approached dangers. He said he has told people that Alaska will never be like New York. Their culture influences the white folks. Their leadership may become a president someday but he would like to see him come home and still eat muktuk.

Morgan asked him if he can talk about one of the times he was very proud to be Eskimo. Rock said one of the times was in Seattle. He had been fighting with someone who had belittled his ancestry. He began to think about what his parents and others who had been able to survive their environment in the old days. They had a lot of intelligence, ability and knowledge. They worked out systems for any situation. He said all of the Native people should be proud of this. Morgan commented about the Outside Indians who have very little pride left and how much pride the Natives have. Rock said they had to have a lot of knowledge to survive and it has been shared with their offspring. Morgan asked about a story that Tundra Times published that he was happy about. Rock said they tackled the problem of radioactive fallout. No one would mention it at that time. Project Chariot was in the works. The university was involved with research on the project. They kept writing about how the Eskimos would be affected. It had been proven that the Eskimo had taken in radioactive material through eating caribou. People involved in the study were in Anaktuvuk Pass. They might be lower now because radioactive activity is far less now although other countries might be doing it now. They didn't make friends publishing this type of information. Along with Tom Snapp they tackled this in Tundra Times. Senator Bartlett got into it. As a result of their effort there was an international conference about this and a conference on polar bears. Rock said one of the things that Tundra times has achieved through its 12 years of existence has been respect of people. It came slowly. First they were very much distrusted. He said they kept on doing

what they thought was right and fair. Through their efforts they have gained the respect of people. People understand why they did what they did. Morgan made the comment about being at a banquet and being invited to the Petroleum Club and that there was a decided turn in attitudes after the land claims were solved. Rock said he remembers a banquet with some kind of award. Morgan said you were nominated for man of the year. He said people did start to look towards them in a favorable way including some of the papers that were against them in the past. It was a very fine turn of events. They were thankful for the outcome. Morgan said there were also people that helped that were against them like Bill Snedden. Rock said it was a good example of keeping at something you believed in. Morgan said Rock had once said he wished he was younger when all this happened. Rock said he still has young ideas and feels young in his mind. He realizes that he is starting to get old and that makes you believe what a short life the human has in this world. Morgan asked if he thought Native politics were going to get more exciting. Rock said when the land claims were settled things haven't ended they have just started. He talked about corporations and people handling complex things. He still has a lot of trust in their leadership. He believes they will survive just like in past days. He said there are lots of men and women who have practical experience.