

FOR: ANS 401 - - NATIVE ELDERS

BY: PAUL NEWWIRTH

RE: TAPE SUMMARY OF OSCAR NICTUNE

DATE: TU. 26 APRIL, 1988

PRINCIPLE GAMES PEOPLE PLAYED WHEN OSCAR WAS YOUNG

When Oscar was a child (before entering fourth grade) he attended school at a small mission center, where he remained after classes. He recalls having played football at the mission during after-school hours principally during the winter for his 2 to 3 year stay. In general, "football"*, was the most important sport in Alakaket as well as the one most often heard in conversation.

The typical football game lasted the mainstay of both day and night and played near the main river of the village. To Oscar, football was a "no supper game", serious, and not for the easily debilitated. After Church Services, this sport was one of the principle forms of entertainment every Sunday.

To Oscar, his recollection of football games brought back "good memories" of the past where he almost felt he was reliving some of them. In the middle of his discussion of football he also mentioned the "long foot race": The race stretched from village to village including Alakaket and must have totalled nearly 70 miles. The bulk of the race occurred in fairly deep snow and was, like football, a test of endurance and perseverance. Many noted locals such as Henry, Lee (^{«ARNAKUK»} medicine man), etc. ran the race. Oscar himself ran in a top team when he was young. Since the weather was cold he wore some heavy mittens during the run.

Oscar cited ~~one~~ ^{an} example race in 1908 (he was around 7 years of age). Sammy Hoe ^{resident} Alakaket ~~stakeholder~~ was the fastest runner overall. The race involved snowshoes. A village stakeholder bet \$5.00 on the race which occurred not far from the Arctic Ocean. One runner scraped his leg. A medicine woman, Miss Carter who resided at and oversaw activities and general life at the mission, treated the runner and many others who visited her. Some people visited Miss Carter on a regular basis.

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* NOTE: "FOOTBALL" AS MOST AMERICANS ARE FAMILIAR WITH IS "MELLOW" COMPARED TO THE VARIETY POPULAR AMONG THE INUPIAT AND ATHABASCIANS DURING THE EARLY MISSION DAYS. OSCAR COMPARED THAT VARIETY OF FOOTBALL MORE CLOSELY WITH RUGBY WHERE LONGER ENDURANCE (UP TO 1 WEEK) AND SOMETIMES NEAR BRUTAL BEHAVIOR PREDOMINATE.

Amidst his conversation on Sports, Oscar described other aspects of life in and around the mission. Oscar continued. The mission, itself, was founded by the Episcopal Church. One of the founders and ^{the} presiding Archdeacon in Alakaket was Fr. Hudson Stock, who ^{told} of the many exciting, but nearly perilous events which accompanied Dogsted races in his, One Thousand Miles by Dogsted. The Church bought land from the territorial Government. The actual mission was built in the middle of the village. In more recent times (~ 20 years ago) a new church replaced the former mission. The presiding Bishop, Bishop Pensly, bought the lumber needed to construct the church. When residing at the mission, Oscar never worked on Sundays nor on Wednesdays and Fridays, since these days were regarded as holy and dedicated to Church services, but afterwards to play.

Oscar again spoke about sports, in particular Football. He and his friends had to find reasonable places to play where there was no rough ice or other obstructions. One mishap occurred in the early 1920's when a young man injured his leg very badly ("to the bone") after having snagged his leg on an object. He eventually died. The game resembled "Rugby" where the ball was round and made from many guard hairs (Beaver) lined on the outside with Moose hide. When the ball "crashed" on the ground a very loud notable sound was noted.

OTHER SPORTS AND ACTIVITIES

Oscar noted that he and other sports enthusiasts were always practicing and preparing for upcoming games. Other sports such as wrestling, arm pulling, and finger hacking were also popular. The "yoyo" is and was not too popular in Alakaket, but more so on the Arctic Coast. Other "string" games were practiced, where the greater the spin, the louder the noise was. Whistles were commonly used and normally constructed from willows. Oscar comments on a short tale: If one blew over a grass strand and a "whistling" noise was heard, rain was inevitable the next day.

Another favorite pasttime and game was "Kaalii baadla" (not sure of spelling) within this game a large ~~stick~~ ^{ring} was used, having been constructed out of willow bark wrapped around many times with more bark and willow strands. The ring was tossed onto trees and poles much like ring tossing among other American games.

OSCAR'S YEARS AT SCHOOL

PAPER WAS NOT GENERALLY USED AS A WRITING MEDIUM, BUT OSCAR RECALLS USING a slate board whenever he took notes or learned how to spell new words. He recalls often having oral spelling quizzes by his teacher who was accompanied by an interpreter, George Butler to translate some words back into Inupiaq. Oscar had great difficulty in reading, and as exercises had to copy many sentences on the slate board.

Oscar never passed beyond the fourth grade level. Just before he left school his teacher married (during Oscar's third grade). This was the first time Oscar ever witnessed a Western style wedding. After grade four, Oscar learned more English and sought work. His first job was a combination janitor - dishwasher for a roadhouse (salary: 50¢/day + Room & Board). He was barely 13 years old at that time. Oscar makes note of the predominance of only log cabins and simple wooden shacks during his childhood. Only very recently has the concept of building with frames been introduced into Alakaket. In modern times Oscar built a foundation for a new house, a 24x20 frame house with only one window.

MARRIAGE AND "MIDDLE" YEARS

During his childhood, Oscar recalls that intermarriage, especially between Athabascans and Inupiaq was forbidden or at least highly dissuaded. A rumor popular among Inupiaq was that intermarriage with Athabascans would result in the birth of a child with "rheumatism". Oscar's own wife was from Alatna. He believes she was smarter than he was. They married July, 1924 a "date of infamy" for Oscar.

MEDICAL & OTHER HEALTH TIPS

For Frostbite Oscar suggests holding snow on the injured area. He used this remedy, though having suffered embarrassing scars during the recovery period.

Oscar ran more for fun than for health, but commented that good training was needed before serious running and other sports events were even to be considered.

To "toughen" children some younger Inupiat children were expected to walk barefoot over fires, and also lie in the snow for a while.

World War I was devastating to Alakaket since disease and famine struck during those years. The health status and overall mood of the people was much better during World War II when more spirit to fight was prevalent and more jobs and needs of the U.S.A. boosted at least Oscar's local community's economy. He recalls working at Rosie River (Spring, 1942) during which he trapped small mammals for furs. Two "trapping teams" entered in contest, one from Kobuk, and one from ~~Tanna~~. For his work, Oscar received \$15/day (Not bad!)

On other sporting events, Wilfred Evans started dog racing in Alakaket. He distributed prizes to leading entrants. Snow shoe racing was also introduced (though earlier). These races traversed across the main river and back, though, today, they reach out further to Alatna Mountain, down to the lower Koyokuk, ..., spanning over 2 miles.