

*Knowledge of Alaskan Native Elders*  
*Oral History with Johnson Moses*  
*Summary -Robin Mays-Ricky Pitta, April 18, 1989*

Johnson discussed several topics in class today. He talked about events that happen in June and July on up into the new year. The topics covered will be given in brief form.

-Johnson basically began his talk by describing what types of things he did as a young person. He said that during the first of June people pulled out their traps for muskrats. Johnson reported that muskrats brought from 50 to 75 cents per animal. He said that a record number of muskrats would bring about 150 dollars (300 muskrats). After this, the people, approximately 20 families would board their canoes..headed for Allakaket.

-When everyone reached Allakaket, they did spring cleaning around their houses. They had to clean up the areas after the long winter months. Many women made fishnets along the banks, while the others were arriving in Allakaket. The men would make boat or canoe frames during this time. Sometimes about four boats were made within a two to three day period. When these chores were done, the women would often make snowshoes, or play games with the rest of the people.

-Games were used to lift the spirits and occupy the time after all chores and meals had been finished. Johnson said that these games were played until the 4th of July or even on until snow fell. Some of the games that Johnson remembered playing were: 1) high kick 2) broom game 3) baseball 4) football 5) snowshoe racing and 6) shooting targets with bows and arrows. Johnson also remarked that in the game of baseball, mainly the women won this sport because they were so fast, and could also keep the ball away from the men. Amazingly enough, Johnson said that he thought the purpose of playing so many games was so that the people could get plenty of exercise. He said that they needed the exercise to be able to catch up with their food sources, like moose, caribou or other game animals. In addition to games, Johnson also said that dancing played an important role in his growing experience in Allakaket.

-Dancing occurred, according to Johnson, at the Community Hall. Johnson said that the people would elect a chief...and the chief would elect a floor manager, who would be in charge of keeping up the maintenance of the

Community Hall. Johnson said that he was elected as the floor manager, but was soon removed because he kept the place open....too often. Johnson said that children were allowed into the community hall, but were not allowed to dance with the elders/adults until they could do the proper dancing. Children watched the Indian and Eskimo dancers from their corners. (An area allocated for kids)

-Johnson said that many of the violin or music players were his immediate relatives. He had a brother who played the fiddle as well as cousins who played the other instruments used in promoting square dancing. Johnson learned to play from his cousin William William. Another part of the dancing event involved calling out the moves for the square dancers. Johnson said that the caller for the square dance was William Sr. (Uncle Joe) The calls were made in English because both Athabascans and Eskimos participated in the festivities.

-The music played at the dances was country music. One of the stars that Johnson remembers is Hank Williams Sr. Johnson noted that the older people would do Indian dances before the actual fiddlers began. The people danced together and with their own groups. Sometimes the women and men would dance with themselves, instead of male/female. Johnson also said that a number of the Eskimo elders would sing their own songs. When they did this, the Eskimo dancing would begin. The Athabaskan children were encouraged to try to learn both the songs and dances from the Eskimo elders.

-Johnson told the class a great story today about getting lost. He said that when he was 16 he thought he knew everything. He was soon faced with reality when he wandered away, and got lost in the woods. He told of being hungry and trying to light a fire to keep warm. He managed to be lost for three days. Finally, he remembered what his grandfather had told him about back tracking. (turning around and following ones own tracks) The moral of the story was for us to remember what our elders told us, and back track our steps and we won't ever get lost. Johnson said that things are a little different in Allakaket. He said that the TV has made a lot of people steer away from the old ways of entertaining themselves.