

H97-66-14

Oliver Morris

Fairbanks, Alaska

Side A Irving Reed introduces Oliver D. Morris. He lives in Fairbanks Alaska. He was born in 1894 in Seattle, Washington. His father, Will H. Morris was a prosecuting attorney. He is married and has two daughters and a son. He is retired now. When he was young, friends of his family would stop by to visit them in Seattle on their way to and from Nome, Alaska and he would hear about Alaska. He came to Alaska in 1914. He came to Teller, Alaska on the Victoria. Johnny O'Brien was the skipper. His brother-in-law was mining on American Creek. He came back to Eyak, Alaska in 1920. He was fishing for Libby, McNeill & Libby. In 1922 he went further north and finally ended up in the Coronation Gulf, Northwest Territory. White fox fur was profitable at the time. He and his wife moved over to Alaska and put in posts in several different places including Barrow, Cape Halkett, Barter Island and Demarcation Point in the 1930s. The market went up and down for fur. When they were at Coronation Gulf they traded with the Eskimos. Steffanson called them the Blond Eskimos. The Eskimos wore their hair down to their waist. He describes their clothing and the why some of the residents committed murder. They were nomadic Eskimos. In the winter time they built their houses on the ice usually where it was good sealing. The caribou migrated through their country and the hides were used for clothing. They were the barren land caribou. Oliver and his wife were bartering for the furs. He trapped and his wife did the trading. At the time the Hudson Bay people were fighting the free traders. They operated off the schooner which they used for their warehouse. After a while the Hudson Bay people gave up. He knew Joe Bernard and Ira Rank in the Northwest Territories. The old timers were whalers, mostly Americans. Oliver and his wife were up in this area around 1924. He moved to Alaska in 1931. In Detention Harbor they had musk ox. All through the north islands they had big herds of musk ox. Someone from the audience asked about his trapping. Oliver said that he trapped white fox. There were wolves, wolverines and polar bear in that country, too. He talked about the plane making the country so much smaller. There were landing fields all over the north. They constructed a shelter on land during the winter time. They would pull the boat out of the water during the winter. The snow was a hard snow because of the wind. They used many things for fuel their first year including tussocks, blubber, and bones. It was a tough first winter. After that they would buy coal for fuel. Dog teams were their transportation. They would trade from a sled. They had ammunition, sugar, tea and tobacco to trade. After the Hudson Bay Company came in they weren't allowed to trade from a sled. They would trade from their place. They would get most of the fur from trading. They had one trader who came in from the ^{Barter} Bering land country. This trader claimed that he had killed three Indians inland. He actually didn't kill anyone he just wanted to go out. The Copper Mine River had char. Oliver would go out in the fall and catch char. He would use the char for dog feed. Someone asked if the Eskimos had kayaks. Oliver said that the Kagmalak people would make a very narrow kayak. Rasmuson had a few made for himself. Someone from the audience asked about how they hitched up their dogs. Oliver said they used the Nome style, but the Kagmalak people used the Greenland style. They used a mud runner sled. They would bring in the dirt in the fall and knead it like dough. In the cold weather they would put it over the runner. They would take a bear skin and run it over the runner with a light coating of water. In the spring he would make canvas mukluks for the dogs. He would also use belly bands on them which were made out of caribou hide. A shoe on the dogs would last half a day in the spring. They would have overflow of water in the spring. Jim Cassady asked about a typical trapping trip with the dogs. His trapping season would start in November. He would take fish and blubber on the sled for the dogs

along with other supplies. He would build his first camp out of snow blocks. He would then set his traps for half a day and repeat that for eleven camps. He had about fifteen to twenty-five miles between camps. He used about 500-700 traps to set out. He had about three hundred and fifty miles round trip and he would run his trap line twice a month. He had emergency supplies on his sled when he ran into bad weather. He would build a shelter with a snow knife. He would use a drift with three or four feet of snow to cut blocks. The blocks were two to two and a half feet long, one foot wide and about a foot deep. He described how he would cut out the block. He would start with a king block and build it around to the right. Right at the top of the house it is about three blocks wide. Then you go inside and cut blocks and set them from the inside. Then the inside is chinked. It is about six or six and a half feet high and eight feet wide. The king block is upright. The door is cut after the house is built. The block that is cut out for the door is plugged up at night. A vent is needed which is cut with the knife. Someone asked where his children were born. His first one was born Outside. His son was born in Barrow. His other daughter was born in Coronation Gulf and he was the midwife. His oldest girl is married to George Hupprich. The country he was in had been explored in the 1500 or 1600s. Irving Reed asked what he did with his dogs when he was traveling. Oliver said he would toggle them. Jim asked if he ever used a loose leader. Oliver said he did use a couple of loose leaders. One was good at night and one good during the day. Someone asked about the price of white fox pelt. Oliver said during 1922 they were \$70 which was \$7,000 for one hundred skins. Irving asked about the fox traps. Oliver described how he set out the trap sets. If they are set properly with the right snow they should last two or three weeks. He used all steel traps. He anchored the trap with a little piece of wood. He knew where he set his traps and his leaders would know where to stop. He used blubber in the winter time for bait. The traps he would cache halfway during the summer. He always had snow to build a house. He used coal oil for fuel.

When he was at Cape Simpson he had crude oil to burn from the creek.

There was a war on Copper Mine Creek between the Eskimos and the Indians in the past.

Jim Cassady asked about his clothing that he wore on the trail. He said he wore clothing made by the Kagmalak people. The clothing was made from caribou yearling. There were different types of boots for different seasons. The winter boots were made from the neck of the bull caribou. They made pants from polar bear. Every year he would have a new suit made. The new suit he would wear after Christmas. The inside clothing was made from fawns. Caribou harvested in early to mid-August had hair that was the right length for clothing. The ruff was made from wolverine which doesn't mat up. Polar bear fur doesn't mat up either. He used canvas and fur mitts with storm mitts over them.

Side B Someone asked him about how long he worked during the day. Oliver said you're working practically in the dark in the winter and a full moon could give enough light to work. He was asked how he dried out his mitts when they were wet. Oliver said he would have a line inside his shelters where he would hang out his socks, mitts and boots. His primus stove would heat up the inside. A new snow house is warm. He would use a sleeping bag made from caribou fawn skins, blankets, and canvas. He described how he kills the fox caught in the trap. He always carried a rifle on his sled. Once in a while he would run into a polar bear. The dogs would chase after the polar bear. Someone asked about drinking water. Oliver said that on the islands there were fresh water lakes. In the summer they had salt water ice to melt. He never watered his dogs. They would eat snow. Someone asked about caribou hides. Oliver said that the Kagmalak people would tan the skins. Oliver said he would use soap to tan the hides. It was a long process. Someone asked about his family when he was on the trapline. Oliver said his wife was at home by herself for most of the winter. Oliver said one winter they were stuck in

the ice on a schooner above Wainwright. High water came in and took the ship out with the ice. ^{"Baychino"} Someone from the audience asked if he did any seal hunting. Oliver said yes he was a hunter. He would hunt seal and ooguruk (bearded seal), too. He hunted a big seal that had three to four fingers of blubber. He would go sealing with his wife from May 1 to June 1. They would camp on an island and get their seal on top of the ice. They would dry the meat and keep the blubber fresh on the snow. They would render the blubber. They would use the blubber for their dogs. He explains the difference between the seal and the ooguruk. Beluga whales would go as far east as the McKenzie Delta and further east. He was asked if he did any winter sealing. Oliver said he did seal with one family. They needed a lot of people to cover all the blow holes. The seal hunter would stand up over the hole and wait for the seal. The third time the seal comes up the hunter would spear it and use a seal pole. Jim asked how the seal was killed. Oliver said they used a knife to kill them. In June they would use nets under the ice to get the seal. Jim asked if the blow holes were easy to see. Oliver said the dogs were able to find them. Jim asked about the population of Herschel Island when they first arrived and when they left. Oliver said that Herschel Island was the point of entry for Alaska and Canada. Hudson Bay had a store there and Bill Seymour had a store there, too. If you put ashore there you had to pay duties. There were forty or fifty Natives there. In the whaling days the whaling ships would winter there. There might be three or four hundred people wintering there on their ships. At that time the whale bones were being used for corset stays. They were paid about \$7 a pound and one head could be worth \$8,000. One ship east of Barrow had 62 heads after two years. After he came out then many other ships came in there. He talked about his trading posts. He bought one from Tom Gordon. He came to Cape Halkett in 1932. He put one at Point Barrow at 1936. At this time he was strictly a trader. He was asked about wolverines. He told a story about a wolverine getting white and blue fox from his traps. He finally got the wolverine, but it was too old to eat. They didn't have any brush in the area. There were a few draws that had willows. They had blue fox on the islands. Someone asked about how the polar bear hunted. Oliver said the polar bears hunts on open water on the leads that form in the winter from west of Coronation Gulf to Barrow. The polar bear will lay on the edge of the leads. There were lots of wolves on Victoria Land. He sold out to David Brower in 1945. Samuel McIntyre was once a partner with Oliver. Sam had Tin City in 1907. Barrow had a population of 320 when he arrived in the 1930s. They used blubber and bones for fuel. Most of the houses were sod huts. He said the Natives were good whalers and good providers. Dr. Gryce and Newhall were there at that time. He talked about a book about Bill Finney. Alec was his wife. When he and his wife first arrived in Coronation Gulf they were young and the old timers would call them the children.