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Margaret and Olaus Murie

May 25, 1961

Fairbanks, Alaska

Margaret Murie talked about coming to Alaska in 1911 as a young girl. They traveled through Dawson and then caught the last boat of the season down the Tanana River. She remembers how beautiful the Tanana Valley was that fall. The first winter they lived in a small cabin at Eighth and Bonnefield. They lived in the last house at the edge of town. There was an oat field next to them. She remembers going to school at 8:30 and coming home when it was dark at 3:00. She remembered the wooden sidewalks and how crunchy footsteps were walking on the packed snow. She thought the women coming to Fairbanks made extra efforts for a little formality. People left their calling cards. The Arctic Brotherhood was a social organization that had formal parties in the winter. The newspaper would carry stories about the dances. Her stepfather was Mr. Gillette. She remembers the Alaska railroad bill being passed by congress. All the whistles went off in town and everyone celebrated. This meant the opening up of the coal deposits. As she remembers those days she remembers being far away and isolated from the rest of the world. People were more independent and simple pleasures were enjoyed. Once a week the six horse mail sleigh from Valdez. That was the only communication with the outside world. Supplies and mail arrived along with passengers. One of the drivers was Harry Martin. The schoolchildren enjoyed watching him drive the sleigh down Cushman Street. When spring came they would watch for the first steamer coming up the river. The whole town would come to the waterfront to see the boat come in. Waterfront Brown would also show up to pick up people who owed money. When the first tourists arrived the women's club members would bring bouquets of flowers for the tourists. There were beautiful gardens in town. One of the first buildings was the Shaw House. Later there were tennis courts built near the buildings. In the summer there were picnics out on the river bars. Most of the houses had screened porches because the mosquitoes were so bad. People always had hanging baskets to decorate the porches. People did a lot of visiting in the early days. Berry picking was important.

She left in spring of 1918, she left town for the first time since arriving in Fairbanks. It was the last trip of the old NC stage line over the trail. The railroad was being built. They had to cross five rivers and they traveled at night. The ice was almost ready to go out. It took nine days to get to Chitina.

People were proud to be pioneers and to learn how to cope.

Olaus Murie talked about looking back over history. He came to Alaska in 1920. He came to Alaska to study the caribou. He used dog teams for travel in the winter and he walked during the summer. His area was all of northern Alaska. He covered a great deal of it with dog team. There were hardships. He and his brother were up in the Brooks Range and it was sixty or seventy below zero. They were staying in a tent. They thought twenty below it was good hiking weather. If they could hear their breath then it was at least fifty below and they wouldn't travel.

[section of tape that is difficult to understand]

He talked about the plan to cross reindeer and caribou. He planned to catch caribou around the Savage River. They built a corral. This was about 1922. The Loftus brothers were there. They caught several caribou, but not males.

It was interesting to be in Mt. McKinley National Park in the early days. Harry Karstens, the first superintendent of Denali National Park, told him many stories of early Alaska. He and Hudson Stuck climbed Mt. McKinley together. He talked about some of the visitors to the park. He talked about President Harding's visit.

When he was in the back country he ran across many old timers that were living in cabins. He said many of them were well read. He believes that the Indian and Inuit attitude towards life should be followed. He values his honorary membership to the Pioneers of Alaska. He was asked about several old timers.

In 1925 he went out to the Alaska Peninsula. He collected several specimens of the brown bear for the national museum. In 1926 and 1927 he went through the Aleutian Chain and studied the biology of the islands. He was to recommend which islands could be used for fox farming and which should be used for birds only. That survey information was recently published.