

H97-66-04 Pt. 1-2

Paul Solomon

February 24, 1966

Fairbanks, Alaska

Pt. 1 Side A Paul Solomon is introduced by an unidentified speaker. He was born near Arctic Village in 1883. He was married twice and has nineteen children. Thirteen of his children are still living. He talked about his children. One son was in the military at the time of the interview.

His first contact with a white man was when he was eight years old. A preacher baptized him at that time. The next time he saw a white man he was fifteen years old. He talked about traveling to Herschel Island where they traded for ammunition and guns.

The name of his tribe is Neets'ait Gwich'in Indians

He went south to go to school in 1903 [?]. When he got to Circle he had to make a living. He later learned to read and write from John Dishaw. He learned to read and write in English and in his own language. He was on John Lake when he was baptized. When he was a child they were always traveling. There were lots of caribou when he was a child. To catch caribou they would build a caribou fence. There weren't many moose in his country. In 1904-1912 there wasn't any game in the Old Crow people country. Lots of people starved to death. He talked about people in Fort Yukon being fed by the United States Army in 1897 because of the starvation conditions. He came into the town in the spring to trade fur. He had marten, fox, wolf, wolverine and bear furs to trade.

Someone from the audience asked about Archdeacon Step. Paul said he knew him and he started the Native Council in Fort Yukon. Paul said that Archdeacon Step thought relief was ruin of the Indian nation. Someone from the audience asked about Doctor Burke. Paul said he knew him and that he had operated on him. Someone asked about Frank Yasuda. Paul said that he traded with him and liked him. He was asked about his diet. Paul said that he ate mainly meat. He said sometimes there wasn't very much to eat. They would eat roots. They would have berries in the summer. He was asked about clothing. Paul said that their clothing was made from caribou skin. They had calf skin underwear. Boots were made from caribou. Their houses were made out of caribou skin. Two families usually lived together with a fire in the middle. The women would gather spruce for the frame of the house.

He was asked about dogs. He said that they always had dogs even before white man. A family would usually have about five dogs.

He was asked about how they caught the caribou. Paul said that the snares were made out of rawhide. His mother would cut them and his father would twist and dry them.

They used caribou and sheep skin for blankets. They used bow and arrow and guns to hunt the sheep. It was difficult to get ammunition. They would trade meat with the Hudson Trading Company. He also

used a bow and arrow to hunt caribou. His father taught him to make the caribou run before you can shoot them. He used bone, horn, and flint for his arrows. He used sinew to fasten the arrow to the shaft. He would use hawk feathers to guide the arrow. He would fish for grayling in the creeks. They would build a trap in the creek to catch fish. Most of the time they ate meat.

He was asked if he moved his house very often. Paul said that sometimes they would move every day. Sometime they would get many caribou. If there wasn't any game they would have to move. He didn't have timber where he lived. Paul asked his father to move to Circle where he could go to school. He came to Circle in 1899. He had to work there to support his parents and little sisters.

Someone asked him how they started fires. Paul said they had matches and they also used steel and flint.

Paul said he was trained to be able to dodge a bow and arrow. They were taught to be ready to face anything such as wild animals and enemies. They were taught to make snares. His tribe learned to read and write without school.

Paul said he lived on the Salmon River. He was born about forty miles from Arctic Village. He went over the other side of the Brooks Range to live for a while. Lots of fish came up the creeks from the Arctic Ocean. He said they had clear water on the other side of the Brooks Range.

Someone asked if Paul's people had a story about how Alaska was made. Paul said Alaska was already here when they arrived.

Someone asked about the mythology of his people. Paul said he used to know all the history. He was asked where his people came from. Paul said that they came over on the land near Adak. He said the first land they got to was Saint Lawrence Island. He was asked about Christian Village. Paul said that is his tribe. He said he is related to Chief Moses.

Someone asked how they crossed the rivers. Paul said they built canoes with birch bark. He said the women would have bigger canoes. The men would have smaller canoes. He said the women would make clothing. Starting in the fall they would tan and sew the hides. They would also make clothing in the spring for wearing in the summer.

Paul said Chief Peter was the last chief. After he died they did not have another chief.

Someone from the audience asked about their god. Paul said that when people misbehaved they were reminded that someone can see you or hear you. They did not have a name for their god.

Someone asked how he supported himself in Circle. Paul said he worked in the mines. He worked at Mastodon Creek. Miller House was there. He joined to gold rush in Fairbanks. He came over with a dog team.

Someone asked about the Tanana River Indians. Paul said they were kind people. He spoke a different language than the Tanana River Indians. Circle, Ft. Yukon and Arctic Village are all a little different, but they could understand each other.

When the war was on he went to many different places.

Paul said the first missionaries were up in Arctic Village more than one hundred years ago. They were from the Church of England.

Discussion about the Russians and how far they went up the Yukon River.

Pt. 1 Side B

Continued discussion about the Russians. Paul said they never came up past Tanana.

Someone asked about the whalers that were up at Herschel Island. Paul said they went into the bay so the ice wouldn't hurt them. He said that area is Eskimo country and there aren't any Indians up there. He was asked if they were afraid of the Eskimos. Paul said no they were treated well. They traded with them on Barter Island. They would meet every summer. He said they traded skins and sinew. They would barter there. Paul said he could talk Eskimo when he was eight years old.

Someone asked him what a brush man was. Paul said that was a man went into the country and never came out again. Paul said if you murdered someone and the tribe told you to go you would have to go. You went out and lived on your own.

Someone asked him what happened when you got sick. Paul said his tribe didn't make medicine. He saw medicine men at work in Circle. Paul talked about his Christian religious beliefs. Before white man they had the concept of heaven.

Paul was asked about initiation rites. Paul said they are trained as young men. He was trained as a young man. Someone asked him about Henry Appelle. Paul said yes he knew him and the Indians had a special name for him.

Paul talked about coming to Fairbanks. He took about taking two months to get to Fairbanks from Circle. He sold moose meat to other travelers. There were many people that came from Dawson. There were many people living here in tents. Everyone helped each other. He taught people to snare rabbits and hunt spruce hens. They also lived on cranberries. He would travel at night because it was spring time. He stopped at a cabin one night and was invited to spend the day. It belonged to Felix Pedro. He owned two or three lots in Fairbanks. He sold one parcel and gave away the other two. He stayed in Fairbanks for about one year. When he first arrived there were only five cabins. Barnette had a little store. It was 1903. He then returned to Circle and

stayed there until 1911. After his father died he went down to Fort Yukon in 1912. He married his first wife in 1906. His oldest child is sixty years old.

Someone from the audience asked him about his trap line on Beaver Creek. Paul said that he built it himself. He would travel on it six days a week. He wouldn't trap on Sundays.

Paul said he made a lot of money when he was trapping. He quit trapping when his children started school.

Paul was asked if he was ever sick in his life. Paul said he was in the hospital recently.

Someone from the audience asked him about people from Circle. He knew Tex Rickert, Al Mayo, Don Callahan, Judge and Ed Wickersham, and Judge Claypool.

Someone asked him about gold discoveries on the Koyukuk and prospectors killed at Christian Village. Paul said he didn't know about that. He said he knew that a preacher discovered gold at Circle on Mastodon Creek.

Someone asked about Jack Van Hatton. Paul said he had a store at one time. He was a partner of Frank Yasuda. He talked about the first store in Fort Yukon that was owned by Bowman after Hudson Bay Company left.

Someone asked him about Rampart. Paul said he went there in 1907. He knew Manook.

There was a discussion in the audience about gold discoveries.

Someone asked him about cattle in Fairbanks. Paul said that he was in Fairbanks when they brought in the first cattle. Cow Miller worked on the cattle.

Someone asked him about catching the caribou with snares. Paul said the snares were on the ground. There were little poles on both sides. Someone from the audience talks about the caribou fence in Ketchumstock.

Paul talked about brown bears. His father had a run in with a bear. He killed the bear with a knife.

Someone asked about potlatches. Paul said it was believed that too much money was not a good thing.

Paul talked about Native names for mountains.

Paul mentioned Ed Owen and Joe Ward.

Someone from the audience asked Paul if he had any close calls in his travels. Paul said if you leave a bear alone and don't crowd it then it will not fight. He said that bears could be snared. He

also snared moose. He talked about moose being snared in one of his wolf snares. He would use rawhide for snares.

Paul said they didn't preserve berries. He dried his meat all summer and would cache it. They dried their meat with smoke.

Pt. 2

Paul continues to describe snaring caribou.

Someone from the audience asked him about the size of his tents. Paul said they were all different sizes. You could stand up inside. He said they slept on caribou skin on top of spruce or brush piles. Where he was raised they didn't have any timber.

He was asked how a man was chosen as chief. Paul said that if you attend school you get to be chief.

He was asked what his grandfather was like. Paul said his mother's father was Chief Peter. He was a chief in Minto. Paul believes that the parents, the preacher and the schools teach the children three different ways. He taught his children how to make a living and how to be safe. He said sixty years ago there was a different language used by whites.

He was asked about Joseph Gilbert from Anvik. Paul did not know him.

Peter talks about having a potlatch when he graduated. He was twenty-three years old.

He was asked if he dried fish. He said they only had fish in the fall.