Donald Mitchell oral histories, Archives and Special Collections, Consortium Library, University of Alaska Anchorage. Maurice Carmody interview, 1993 February 11. Transcript completed by Andrea Atkins.
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MR. MITCHELL: Today is -- just for the purposes of this tape, if any student one day is ever listening to all this -- it's February 11th, 1993. And I'm -- I've had a cup of coffee in the home of Mr. Maurice Carmody, who is a long-time Alaskan, who -- who was involved and knew very well Stan McCutcheon, when he was getting involved with the -- with the folks over in Tyonek. Well, maybe before -- before we get to McCutcheon, just by way of background, how -- how did you first get involved over there? How did you get up to Alaska?

MR. CARMODY: We came up to Alaska and went to Juneau. And a vacancy came up in Tyonek, and that was in November of '39.

MR. MITCHELL: Is this to teach school or --

MR. CARMODY: To teach school, government teacher with BIA, Bureau of Indian Affairs at that time. So that was our first experience in Alaska and it's kind of rugged too.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, what was Tyonek like in '39?

MR. CARMODY: Now, Stanley, I met him August the next year. And I -- I kind of did a little research myself down there, and I found out that we were living on a reservation, which you probably know, right? The Moquawkie Reservation. And they had -- the Natives had a fish trap, which they -- they were charging them for, a tax. So I investigated that and found out they shouldn't do that because it was a reservation, it's the same as Metlakatla.

MR. MITCHELL: So the territory was charging them tax?

MR. CARMODY: Right. So we got that straightened out through Stan. That's how I first met him. I came to Anchorage and met him, he was a young lawyer then. And he became kind of interested in Tyonek. So he flew back with me and spent a couple three days out the Tyonek, talking to the Natives and helping them with any questions that they might have. One was divorces, you know, and that's where he got started with the Natives.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, now, had he been down to Tyonek before he came back with you?

MR. CARMODY: No, that was his first experience. And that was before the oil, of course.

MR. MITCHELL: Right.

MR. CARMODY: A long time before that. And he kept in contact with them over the years. And then I retired in 1965, so I lost contact with Stan and the Natives about that time.

MR. MITCHELL: Now, were you -- were you at Tyonek all those years or --

MR. CARMODY: No. We were in Tyonek two years and from there, we went to Afognak. And then the World War II broke out, and we were in Afognak which was not a very good place to be.

MR. MITCHELL: Right. You -- you guys think the Japanese might be coming up the beach?

MR. CARMODY: We sure did. We sure did. So did the people on Kodiak in the military.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, they should have. I mean, it's --

MR. CARMODY: We were pretty vulnerable at that time.

MR. MITCHELL: -- hard to imagine now. Well, what -- what -- when you arrived in, I guess, '39, what -- what did the Village of Tyonek actually look like?

MR. CARMODY: It was just a collection of very rudimentary houses and there was no electricity there. And one of my first jobs was to install electricity in the school. And fortunately, we had a CC Camp organize that, and we had one Native, Alex Flatchen (phonetic), his name was, he was a very good electrician, and he helped immensely in getting that project going.

MR. MITCHELL: But -- but the rest of the village didn't have electricity?

MR. CARMODY: No. No, they didn't have electricity. And they did a lot of hunting. And I came -- we came to school one morning in March and there weren't any children there. We wondered what happened. Well, they had all gone out beaver trapping. At that time we were supposed to let them go, you know. And if one or two were going out with them or stayed in the village.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, did -- you mentioned that you had done this research when you had gone over there as a teacher to -- to -- about the Moquawkie Reserve.

MR. CARMODY: Yes.

MR. MITCHELL: Was -- was that generally, known to people at that point? That --

MR. CARMODY: No, they didn't know a thing about it. They were really surprised. I did just little research, and I think Judge Folta was in Juneau at the time.

MR. MITCHELL: Right, Judge Folta.

MR. CARMODY: So I telegraphed him about it. And sure enough, they'd been charging them for the -- for the fish trap and they shouldn't have done it. And then under the Indian Reorganization Act -- do you remember about that time?

MR. MITCHELL: Sure, '34.

MR. CARMODY: We -- we organized the village under that. Because really, there wasn't any law enforcement there, there wasn't anything there. It was kind of seeming like an island.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, now did -- did -- when you arrived, did -- I mean, was the village council functioning before this reorganization?

MR. CARMODY: No, there wasn't -- there wasn't anything. They had an old chief there, Chickalusion.

MR. MITCHELL: Right.

MR. CARMODY: Simeon Chickalusion, and he was actually about the only authority that they had there. There wasn't any other kind of law enforcement or -- there wasn't any council or anything there.

MR. MITCHELL: So then, did -- did you get -- did the BIA sort of send you a letter and say, "We're going to organize all these village councils," or did you --

MR. CARMODY: Right.

MR. MITCHELL: -- or did -- is this another thing that you thought of --

MR. CARMODY: I just understood that -- that we could do it, you know. I -- I thought there was a real need there. So we had a village meeting to organize. It worked out pretty well too. They were quite interested in it.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, then how did -- did they sort of enforce --

MR. CARMODY: They all --

MR. MITCHELL: -- if people were drinking or people were shooting somebody or --

MR. CARMODY: Yeah. Right.

MR. MITCHELL: -- something?

MR. CARMODY: That's right. They had their own kind of regulations and they took care of -- in their own ways. They did have a problem there with making this -- I forget what they call it. But they set up a barrel, you know, and get it going behind a stove and -- and it's pretty -- they were pretty intoxicated.

MR. MITCHELL: Oh, like a still?

MR. CARMODY: Right, a little still. And they did away with that for a long time. They stayed away from it.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, then I guess I was going to ask you about -- about Stan again, and that was did -- was he coming down -- what -- he came down with you? I guess he was a pilot, right? Did he --

MR. CARMODY: No. He wasn't at that time. He might have been later, but at that time we had our own pilot that brought us down. He might have been a pilot later.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, then how much time -- he came down to do this -- this fish trap thing and to talk to people?

MR. CARMODY: Yeah. And he -- he just kind of took an interest in Tyonek. And kept his -- you know, he kept an interest there and it just started to develop. So he was their legal counsel for all this time.

MR. MITCHELL: So -- I mean, was he coming -- was he --

MR. CARMODY: He could come down occasionally, yes.

MR. MITCHELL: Just for the fun of it or was he always there sort of on business?

MR. CARMODY: Well, you see after we were there two years, I'm not sure that he came down so much after that. They probably would see him in -- in Anchorage when they came in. They came in to Anchorage to sell their beaver pelts and --

MR. MITCHELL: Okay. Well, that's -- that's very inter- -- I -- for some reason, I had been under the impression that -- and I didn't have any firsthand info -- that somehow he had been down there as a kid or as a teenager or something. But you don't recall him ever --

MR. CARMODY: No. He never said anything like that to me.

MR. MITCHELL: Okay.

MR. CARMODY: As far as I know, that trip that I took him down there was his first trip down. Well, I don't know for sure.

MR. MITCHELL: Right.

MR. CARMODY: Like I said before, he stepped in our (indiscernible) stalls.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, now how many -- there's a question. How many -- obviously, I assume you were married at the time?

MR. CARMODY: Yes, I was married. My wife was -- she was the assistant teacher and I was the teacher, the government teacher.

MR. MITCHELL: Right. So then --

MR. CARMODY: We had one -- one son at the time.

MR. MITCHELL: So there was -- there was your family. Were there any other non-Indians living down there at the time?

MR. CARMODY: No. No, there weren't. They had kind of -- as you know, they had kind of a policy. They didn't want any non-Indians there.

MR. MITCHELL: Right. I guess, actually that's where I was --

MR. CARMODY: That was the time when they came to Anchorage, they had these signs up -- before Gruening worked on the problem -- with, "No Natives allowed." And they couldn't get a hotel room. At some restaurants, they couldn't find a place to eat. And so they naturally had quite a bit of resentment. So they had a little structure down there where they had a jukebox after they got their electricity -- after the school got electricity, I think they got a generator and had they their little -- kind of little nightclub. And they had a sign outside, "No whites allowed."

MR. MITCHELL: And that was sort of the response to what was going on in Anchorage.

MR. CARMODY: Kind of a response, you know.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, now -- actually, that's -- that's an interesting subject. What -- I mean, I'm -- I'm familiar with what Ernest Gruening did when he was governor --

MR. CARMODY: Right.

MR. MITCHELL: -- in terms of getting rid of all that -- of all that in the late 1940s. But what was your impression of how Native people were treated in Anchorage in those days? Was it -- was it just the bars on Fourth Avenue that had these signs or was there more discrimination?

MR. CARMODY: They were -- they were really discriminated against. The taxi cabs were bad because they would get them and take them all around. First thing, you know, they would spend all their money. And, you know, it was kind of a bad situation in Anchorage.

MR. MITCHELL: How about -- how about in terms of, like, renting an apartment or house or that sort of thing? Did you notice --

MR. CARMODY: Well, like I said, they couldn't even eat in some restaurants or they couldn't get a hotel room.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, great. I very much appreciate you --

MR. CARMODY: Yeah. Is there anything else that I can help you with?

MR. MITCHELL: Well, I'm -- as -- as I said, what I was really interest -- I've been really trying to get to the bottom of -- of how -- because he's such an important link --

MR. CARMODY: Right.

MR. MITCHELL: -- to this whole story, how -- how McCutcheon sort of got involved down there and this -- this fish trap thing is -- is, basically, you know, a very interesting bit of new information on that. So I'm not sure how many -- other -- other than people like us, I'm not sure how many thousands of people care about this stuff. But to me, I think it's really pretty important.

MR. CARMODY: And I'm interested -- and I'm very interested when I hear about, you know, the claims and so forth and sovereignty in the -- at least, I can recall back when we set that up.

MR. MITCHELL: Right. Do you -- was that -- would that have been in, like, 19- --

MR. CARMODY: 1940.

MR. MITCHELL: 1940 was when that -- that IRA council got set up?

MR. CARMODY: Yeah. It might -- it might have been a little before that. But when we set it up it was about 1940.

MR. MITCHELL: Okay. Yeah. That is actually sort of off the subject that I'm writing about, but I do follow all of that. And it is -- that's why I was very curious about this no whites allowed policy.

MR. CARMODY: Right.

MR. MITCHELL: Because I know that all of this -- you know, they're trying to enforce this village ordinance. And I know that it's -- I can't remember how old that ordinance is, but it's pretty old. It might even have been from --

MR. CARMODY: Well, somebody -- I lived in Oregon for a while. And somebody sent me a clipping where they were having trouble with some white family --

MR. MITCHELL: Right.

MR. CARMODY: -- that wanted to live there. It was in all the papers up there.

MR. MITCHELL: Right. Well, that -- that -- that's the instant.

MR. CARMODY: Right.

MR. MITCHELL: And what's interesting about that is that -- is that the white family had been rented a place to live in the village by several people who lived in the village on the property. So there --

MR. CARMODY: That's right.

MR. MITCHELL: -- was the whole very interesting legal question about, you know, they're obviously capable of renting the property to whomever they feel like. But then, of course, there's this community ordinance that said no non-Indians allowed in the village unless the Indians gave permission.

MR. CARMODY: Right. That's right.

MR. MITCHELL: And this council hadn't given permission. So -- so you're saying that there -- that there was a lot of that sort of thing working around when you were there, except it was a response to this thing in Anchorage.

MR. CARMODY: That's right. It was kind of a backlash from the --

MR. MITCHELL: What did -- what did Chickalusion think of all that?

MR. CARMODY: Chickalusion was one of the most intelligent man that I've ever met.

MR. MITCHELL: Really?

MR. CARMODY: And his head was screwed on real -- real good. He had a lot of experience, very wise, I'd say. He was a patriarch. A very wise man.

MR. MITCHELL: Did -- how about the -- how about the Kaloas? I know that Albert Kaloa --

MR. CARMODY: I knew Albert real well, yeah.

MR. MITCHELL: What was Albert like?

MR. CARMODY: Albert was -- well --

MR. MITCHELL: When you say -- when you say --

MR. CARMODY: He was a strong personality and he had a lot of influence down there. But he was not like Chickalusion because he didn't quite have the feeling for the Natives, although he was married to Native woman and had a family there. But, you know, he was Hawaiian, half

Hawaiian and half Danish. And he -- he had quite a background, too, because I guess they stole all his father's property in Hawaii. He really resented that.

MR. MITCHELL: You mean when the United States took over and all that stuff?

MR. CARMODY: Yeah. They just somehow or another, they -- they got ahold -- his father had a lot of land over there. But I always liked Albert. He died here not too long ago.

MR. MITCHELL: All right. How about -- did you know his son, Albert, Jr.?

MR. CARMODY: Yes, I knew him. I had him in school.

MR. MITCHELL: Did you?

MR. CARMODY: Yeah.

MR. MITCHELL: What was -- what was he like as a kid?

MR. CARMODY: Yeah.

MR. MITCHELL: Was he --

MR. CARMODY: He was a nice kid, very nice.

MR. MITCHELL: Was he --

MR. CARMODY: Pretty intelligent.

MR. MITCHELL: I was going to say, he was, like, just normally intelligent or brighter than most?

MR. CARMODY: I would say --

MR. MITCHELL: Or less bright?

MR. CARMODY: -- above the average. Of course, when you're living in a -- a village like that, you're experience isn't so great and you're kind of limited that way. But he was smart.

MR. MITCHELL: That's pretty --

MR. CARMODY: He was one that was burned up in the fire here.

MR. MITCHELL: Right. In '66.

MR. CARMODY: And the younger one that just died, he was very young when we were there.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, I think -- unless I go home and I think of it, because I'm sure I will. As soon as I go home and I'll think of some other thing to --

MR. CARMODY: Well, you just give me a ring.

MR. MITCHELL: I'd be -- I'd be delighted to if I could.

MR. CARMODY: Sure, absolutely.

MR. MITCHELL: Because I -- as I said, I think -- I think this stuff is both important, and one of the things I regret is that there's so many Alaskans that have all this kind of information and you guys are all moving to Hawaii and --

MR. CARMODY: Yeah.

MR. MITCHELL: -- getting --

MR. CARMODY: Well, when I came back -- we came back to Alaska in '86, I got a letter from Tyonek inviting us to come down, which I thought was nice, you know. The village council down there wanted us to come down to visit.

MR. MITCHELL: Did you -- did you go down?

MR. CARMODY: No. We didn't get around to it, but we should have. My wife passed away about two years ago.

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah. It would be interesting -- I'm assuming there's probably a lot of -- a lot of those kids are old men down there.

MR. CARMODY: Oh, yeah. They're old men. Yeah. That was a long time ago.

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah. Yeah. A good half a century.

MR. CARMODY: But it sure made an impression on us because it's a brand-new experience. We had to run the Native store, help run it. I had to countersign all the checks on the store. We had a lighthouse that we had to take care of. And I had to run the CC camp. And we did all the medical work in the village, you know, in connection with a nurse. So we really had a responsibility.

MR. MITCHELL: I would say. What -- this fish trap, where did -- did the fish go? Is there a cannery nearby?

MR. CARMODY: Yeah. Emard's cannery picked up the fish. But it made it real easy, you know, they just go into the trap and they get them out of the trap and sell them. Of course, those became illegal --

MR. MITCHELL: Right.

MR. CARMODY: -- quite a long time ago.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, was -- was that cannery on the Tyonek side?

MR. CARMODY: No.

MR. MITCHELL: Or was it over --

MR. CARMODY: No. That was in Anchorage.

MR. MITCHELL: It was in Anchorage?

MR. CARMODY: Yeah.

MR. MITCHELL: So it'd come down --

MR. CARMODY: It was -- I think it was Sonafie (phonetic) had a cannery and Emard. They come down with a (indiscernible) and pick them up.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, now what about just regular fishing where -- in the summer where -- obviously, the thing with the fish trap, obviously, it catches lots of fish. But you don't really need everybody in the village out.

MR. CARMODY: Well, they would do for their own use, for their dogs and things. You know, they had gill nets that they would put out and do their own fishing.

MR. MITCHELL: But that -- but they weren't commercial fishing?

MR. CARMODY: I think they did some commercial on the side too. But fish were very reasonable then. I think they got 10 or 12 cents a fish. It's almost inconceivable to think of all the prices. Of course, our money was worth a lot more then.

MR. MITCHELL: Right. I was going to say, you know, 10, 12 -- they got 10 or 12 cents a fish or a pound?

MR. CARMODY: One fish.

MR. MITCHELL: One fish?

MR. CARMODY: One fish.

MR. MITCHELL: Boy, yeah. Well, I was just going to say at 10 or 12 cents a pound, that would still be pretty good money. But at 10 or 12 cents fish --

MR. CARMODY: No, a fish.

MR. MITCHELL: -- that's not --

MR. CARMODY: I was getting $1800 as a teacher down there. I thought that was great.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, that's -- sure goes to --

MR. CARMODY: That was during the depression, right at the end of it.

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah. Well, you know, when -- I was born in '47. And, you know, my parents, I think they bought their house for $10,000.

MR. CARMODY: Sure.

MR. MITCHELL: And they thought that was one whale of a lot of money, you know?

MR. CARMODY: It was at that time.

MR. MITCHELL: But these things really change quite a bit. Well, listen, I very much appreciate you taking the -- the time to do all this.

MR. CARMODY: Well, I just hope that I've been some help to you.

MR. MITCHELL: Well, you have been. And particularly, actually, on -- now that I think about it, on this village council business getting organized, I think that's a very -- it's a really interesting part of the whole history over there, particularly in light of what's happened since that -- that a lot of folks aren't -- aren't aware of them. I'm surprised that no one has -- has tracked you down before because that's -- you know, it's probably not even many Tyoneks left over there that would remember what went on in 1940. So that's pretty historically important. Well, let me turn this off and -- (End of audio recording.)