

Joshua (Maqista) Phillip

The following transcription is an excerpt from:

U.S. BIA ANCSA Tape 88CAL057 interview with Joshua Phillip in his home in Tuluksak, Alaska, on July 9, 1988. ANCSA interviewer is Robert Drozda, interpreter is Vernon Chimegalrea, and transcription is by Marie Meade.

[Numbered sections of narrative below match keyworded audio clips in the interview page]:

- 01) “Fine. The story behind the village of *Nunapiaq*, the place across from Akiachak. The old *Kusquqvak* (Kuskokwim River) is very, very old. Then here is *Uruniq*, *Kusquqvak*, and down below is the island. The river is narrow -- right above where it curves is the village of *Nunapiarmiut*. *Nunapiarmiut* was on the river *Uruniq*. The river did not cut across into the *Kusquqvak* however, but it was a deep river. But where *Nunipiar* River flows out to the *Kusquqvak*, it was shallow. The river *Uruniq* was not a wide river, it was small, but there were two villages on both sides of the river. I did see some graves when I was young at the old site they called *Nunapiarmiut*. I saw the old graves, the old dwellings and the old *qasqiq* (kashim), there were two old *qasgiq*. It was a big village. It was told that the village protected itself from the enemy. The enemy couldn't find the village unarmed. They had men patrolling the village day and night. Those that were up all night retired early in the morning and were replaced by others that had rested in the night. The people in the village didn't wander away from the village. There were many of them residing in the village. In the winter sometimes, they would go over to the *Kusquqvak* to entertain themselves on the ice. The ice in those days would freeze very thick when the winters were extremely cold. The ice was about 4 to 5 feet thick. But when the people played games on the ice and gathered in large crowds the water would filter out onto the ice. The ice would crack beneath them, though it was frozen about 5 feet. It was a populated village and they had two *qasgiq*.”

- 02) “At this time parts of the story will not be told about this village, but I'd like to talk about the lineage of the village, how the people migrated out of the village. I'll also mention the circumstances of the event. So, the story told of the village and its people, the village they called *Nunapiarmiut*. There's a treeless marshy area right above the actual site we call *Nunapiar* today. It's a place where the blackfish traps were set. So, it was told, one season, back in 1800s, they suffered from lack of food. In the summer, the salmon returned in small number. And, the blackfish suffered from lack of water. The blackfish and the pike shrank down to almost nothing. The village suffered from hunger. It was at this time the people began moving out. Some traveled down toward *Canineq* (the lower coast), where there's clams and stickleback. They say that sticklebacks do not bring natural disasters to people. Some of the people fled up to the mountains and survived on fish. They caught fish with hook and net. They also say the lakes up in the mountains will not cause catastrophe to people because of the depth they have. So, traditionally these were the places people found refuge when food was scarce. At this time, there are many

coastal people that claim their descendants are from *Nunapiarmiut*. It was in the 1800s they began the migration downriver, when disaster struck their village. Down to the coast. They remained down in the area after that. They say some of the people made their way over to the Yukon River and traveled downriver, but there's no trace of the group. It is believed they all starved to death along the way. But, those that went down to the coast can travel either lineage back to the village *Nunapiarmiut*. So that was the way it was told. The expansion of the village was caused by the starvation time.”

- 03) “Then, during the 1800s. It was close to the completion time, pretty near 1900. The village found their river losing lots of water. They were getting small in number, too. After many people died of starvation, they moved further downriver. When they moved the place right near the old site, it slowly began to crack open. The river began to form there. They moved down close to the mouth of the river after it opened up at the top. The name changed to *Qikertarmiut* for they were on an island now. It was close to the end of 1800s. After the people moved, the village grew again. When the village was referred to as *Qikertarmiut*, it was not called *Akiacuar* (Akiachak). And when they used their river to go across from the village, even at this time, now they would wade across the shallow water. Perhaps it was about 7 inch deep, not even 1 foot deep. Their river was shallow, but they would travel across to the berry picking grounds. So their village remained. There was no one living on the other side, at *Akiacuar*. So somewhere close to the end of 1800, one of the people established a settlement on the other side right below the village of *Qikertarmiut*. Then when the single dwelling was built, the people of *Qikertarmiut* began calling it *Akiacuar*. Then slowly the residents of *Qikertarmiut* started moving to *Akiacuar* and soon the village *Qikertarmiut* was abandoned. When they were all relocated to *Akiacuar*, they started calling their old settlement *Qikertalleq*. There were many graves at the old village because the people had lived there a long time. So, that is how *Akiacuar* (Akiachak) got its *Akiacuar*. First, they were at *Nunapiarmiut*, then they moved on to *Qikertalleq* where they moved across to *Akiacuar*.
- 04) When the people grew in numbers, they say, they were preparing to make a *qasgiq* (kashim), and the plan for the structure was ready. The village had enough people. However at this time, half of the residents made a move upriver and called their new settlement *Akiacuar* (Akiak). And how the name came to be, the story goes, was that one of the people went out searching for an appropriate site. The person carried a child's coffin with him, a body of a child. He was looking for a place for people. He had to be a shaman to do that, I'm sure, to carry a dead child while he looked. When he returned to the village, he was asked if he had found a site. He replied he indeed had found a place right across the spot where he had laid the little coffin. So the spot that was found by this man directly across the little grave was where a village began by some of the residents of *Akiacuar* (Akiachak). The new village called itself *Akiarmiut* (Akiak) for being directly across from the little grave. Then the *qasgiq* (kashim) they had planned to build, was moved up to the new village site. It was the name of the *qasgiq* they made for the village. But how the *qasgiq* in

Akiacuar (Akiachak) got its name, I heard, was this way. There was a person from the Yukon who was a son-in-law to a family in *Qikertalleq*. He was instrumental in the construction of the *qasgiq*. When the *qasgiq* was complete he said, "*Upussaluk* is completed." So when the people all moved from *Qikertalleq* to *Akiacuar* and erected a new *qasgiq*, the name remained *Upussaluk*. You see, those people in the past gave proper names to their *qasgiq*. The *qasgiq* was an important gathering place. The *qasgiq* was never left without a name. The *qasgiq* in *Akiacuaq* (Akiachak) was called *Upussaluk*, the one in *Akiak* (Akiak) was called *Qasgikaq*. And the *qasgiq* in *Tuulessaaq* (Tuluksak) was called *Tallurnavak*. And the one down in *Mamterilleq* (Bethel) was called *Urucaraq*. The *qasgiq* in *Napaskiaq* (Napaskiak) was called *Uivngavak*. These are the names I remember. I don't know the name of the *qasgiq* in *Kuiggluk* (Kwethluk) and the one in *Naparyarraq* (Napakiak) but I've heard that every *qasgiq* was given a name in the past. It was an important place to gather and drum and dance. So this is part of the story of *Nunapiarmiut* and how the people have scattered out in the area from that one village. I think I'll fold up right here with the story of *Nunapiarmiut*, how they've branched out and how it was once a big village.

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