

Alaska State Library
Historical Collections

Guide to Collection

Watkins, Helen Abbott

Helen Abbott Watkins Photograph Collection

PCA 563

155 digital images from 1 album:

120 color photos, 33 b&w photos, 2 news clippings

1 interview, audio recording

Processed by: Anastasia Tarmann

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BIOGRAPHICAL or HISTORICAL NOTE

Helen Abbott Watkins was born in 1939 to Lilly (Klannott, born to James and Mary White, daughter of Anna White/ Woo Tu [sp?]) and John Allen Abbott in Haines Alaska. Mary White's sibling was Joe White, head of the Thunderbird Clan and a highliner fisherman. Helen spent six years in the Seward Sanitarium with TB, from age nine. Lilly Klannott Abbott raised 10 children; Helen is the ninth child. Helen's father died two months before she turned five. George Walter Abbott, Clara Katheen Abbott Mattson and Helen are alive of the siblings. The family lived in the area where the Federal Building is now, where stood a ball park. Mattson's fishing supply was across the street, as was a Presbyterian church, attended by Helen and other native people.

Because of the amount of time she spent in the hospital as a child with TB and Scarlet Fever, Helen received a patchy education. In 1971, she obtained her GED. Her first job at age 16, was for Haines Packing Co. , a cannery. Workers received \$300.00 for the season without overtime, with an average workday of 14 hours, since all the fish that came in needed to be processed each day. Her mother worked at the cannery also, in charge of the iron chink, two blades that cut the heads off. They salvaged and ate the heads. A van picked up the workers, mostly women. . In summer, they tanned seal skin and preserved fish. In winter, they sewed, making booties, mocassins, and souvenirs from seal and deer for ANAC (Alaska Native Arts Cooperative) cache. They often worked all night \$2.35 per pair to make the quota by Friday each week, under what Helen remarks were sweat-shop conditions.

Information for this biographical notes section are from a recorded interview with Helen Abbott Watkins, July 9, 2013 (in this collection, see Inventory). Photographs of Lilly Abbott Nigh and "Mrs. Klannott" regarding skin sewing in the Don Burrus Collection, and a few may be viewed on Alaska's Digital Archives at: <http://vilda.alaska.edu/> under a search for the Donald Burrus Collection, suggested numbers: ASL-P466-02-063-1, ASL-P466-02-063-2, and ASL-P466-02-071.

SCOPE AND CONTENTS NOTE

Tlingit family fish camp, Haines, Alaska, 1950s-1970s (bulk). Thunderbird House. Carr's Cove, Alaska. Tlingit heritage. Smoking fish.

INVENTORY

- 1 Mary Abbott, Helen Anna Abbott (age 7), Dolly Kay Abbott, George Katzeek, Jr.
- 2 Lilly Nigh's cabin, Haines
- 3 Dolly, [Mary?, and Helen, Port of Seattle?]
- 4 My mom, Lilly Nigh. My mom, age 17: Mrs. John Abbott. Presently, Mrs. W.E. Nigh
- 5 "Pop" John Abbott
- 6 Helen and youngest sister, Dolly, age 9
- 7 Great grandma Annie White: Mrs. Annie Willis White, Ku-xa-day-ouh Dalth-cu-thlu-steen.
- 8 [Lilly Nigh gutting a fish]

- 9 My Great grandma Anna White – great uncle Joe’s mother’s uncle. Mary White Klannot’s mother. Photo taken at Carr’s Cove in Haines
- 10 Great grandma Anna White, Thunder bird House. Grandma, Sophia, Jerry.
- 11 Grandma Mary White, daughter of Anna White
- 12 [Grandma Mary Klannott]
- 13 Grandma Mary White. Klannott. Kasko.
- 14 Uncle Joe White, son of Anna White and Karla Johnson.
- 15 Son of Anna White, Joe White, Brother of Mary White, with wife Annie
- 16 5 generations (left): Jenny, Cookie, Mom, Anna White, Mary Klannott, James Klannott
- 17 Grandpa James Klannott [in regalia with unidentified young man]
- 18 [Grandpa James Klannott (b&w photo)]
Left; Leonard Davis, Great grandma Anna White Davis, my mom Lilly Nigh, my stepdad Bill, my sister Dolly, me holding Danny Katzeek
- 19 My brothers; left: Charlie, Georgie, Tommy, Dog Sheila
- 20 Mom and Bill: Lilly and William Earl Nigh [on car in front of house-in Haines?]
Left: Tommy Abbott, Samuel Johnson, Sr., Lee Jimmy, Georgie Abbott, May 24, 1958 [in military uniform, in front of Haines house?].
- 21 Georgie Walter Abbott in Haines AK, Carr’s Cove
- 22 Sister, Clara; bother. Georgie; sister, Martha
- 23 Mom and Bill, Georgie on boat
- 24 Tommy, Charlie, Johnnie, Daddy Bill, Georgie
- 25 Bill gave away two daughters, May 24, 1958: Helen and Sam, and Clara and Lee.
- 26 Grandma Mary, Grandpa James Klannott, Joe Sheakley, Richard Sheakley, Larry
- 27 Helen, Cookie, Vicky, Dolly [In water]
- 28 Family gathering [1]
- 29 Family gathering [2]
- 30 Dolly, Mom, Mrs. Willie Lee
- 31 Elsie, Cookie Westmen, Mom, Bill
- 32 Grandma Mary
- 33 My youngest daughter, Lonnie, with her great grandma Mary
- 34 Mom/ Lilly [tending fire outdoors]
- 35 Mom/ Lilly [in kitchen]
- 36 Helen worming fish line Haines Packing Co.
- 37 [Helen on boat]
- 38 [Grandma]
- 39 My mom, my grandma
- 40 Work day, pulling net off the boat. Right [Left?]: Freddie Philips. Middle: Tommy Abbott. Right: Jay Shepheard.
- 41 Lilly B, boat
- 42 Our boat Thumper J, left: Lilly B, right: Baby Doll
- 43 Cars Cove, Haines, AK
- 44 Mending Gillnet
- 45 Mending Gillnet
- 46 Bill with big catch!
- 47 Mom and bill. Left: Dolly, me
- 48 Taken down the beach at Haines, summer 1955. Mom, Bill, Tommy
- 49 Taken at our family picnic July 7, 1957, at Big boulder, Haines. Bill, Mom, Dolly, Mike Mann, Helen

- 50 My sister Martha's Birthday. Evelyn Hotch, Luise Hammond, Dorthy Hammond, Mom, Mary, Martha, Jenny, Cookie, Dolly, Chris
- 51 Mom going to fish camp on the ferry
- 52 Work day! Dolly and Helen. [Doing laundry with pedal gas powered washer and tub]
- 53 [Similar to above (b&w)].
- 54 [Lilly Nigh's cabin in Haines, near cannery. The cabin was abandoned by U.S. military]
- 55 Fish camp
- 56 [Lilly's cabin]
- 57 Helen, Karla Jean Johnson, Sam (Jay) Johnson, [in front of cabin]
- 58 Our cabin at Haines, Alaska, 1955 [Cabin and Sam]
- 59 Wash days [Helen or Dolly washing cabin windows, 1955]
- 60 Wash days {Helen or Dolly hanging wash on a line at shoreline}
- 61 Wash days [Lilly by laundry line at shoreline]
- 62 Sunny days--Helen and Dolly [in bathing suits]
- 63 [Lilly Nigh, taking a break at fish camp]
- 64 Bill Nigh, Lilly Klanott Abbott Nigh, Helen Abbott Johnson Stringer Watkins [Preparing salmon for smoking]
- 65 It takes the whole family: Charlie, Helen, Mom, Ann Abbott [preparing salmon]
- 66 It takes the whole family: Charlie, Bill, Mom, Ann Abbott [preparing salmon]
- 67 Helen and Lilly [and Mrs. File preparing salmon]
- 68 [Helen, Lilly and Sam preparing salmon]
- 69 Helen [preparing salmon]
- 70 [Helen and Lilly washing salmon in ocean or river]
- 71 [Bill Nigh on boat]
- 72 [Bill Nigh on boat]
- 73 Helen Johnson...1 month pregnant with [Sam] Jay [film developed October 1960]
- 74 Helen Johnson...1 month pregnant, [film developed October 1960]
- 75 Fishing for a living
- 76 Wash the boat out
- 77 "Bill" no fish [no image]
- 78 Larger duplicate of #69
- 79 Making smoked fish [cutting into sections]
- 80 Making smoked fish [cutting into sections]
- 81 Making smoked fish [Lilly in smokehouse]
- 82 Making smoked fish [Helen in smokehouse]
- 83 [Lilly inside the smokehouse]
- 84 [Inside the smokehouse]
- 85 [Helen inside the smokehouse]
- 86 Mom's smokehouse [Inside the smokehouse]
- 87 Tanya, Kali, Malichi, Amanda, Kayla, Isaiah, Jordan, Brandy
- 88 Helen, Karla, Tanya with child, 2002
- 89 Lilly Nigh and Mrs. File, Pastor's wife [cutting salmon]
- 90 Sam Johnson Jr., Mom [Lilly], Karla, 1977 [putting fish pieces on a stick to smoke?]
- 91 Karla, Mom [Lilly], Sam Johnson, Jr.
- 92 Mom [Lilly], Sam Jr. Jay Johnson, Aug. 1977
- 93 Karla, Tanya, Amanda, Brandi's mom[?], Aug. 1977 [Karla and the fish are visible in the photo]
- 94 [Michael Earl Mann and father? with very large fish]

- 95 Michael Earl Mann, my nephew, Jeanette Mann's son [with very large fish]
 96 My Mom picking high bush cranberries
 97 [Lilly Picking high bush cranberries]
 98 Lonnie beating soap berries
 99 Soap berry queen
 100 [Helen with a bowl of soapberries in water]
 101 Soapberry stalks
 102 [Interior of Lilly's fish camp cabin in Haines]
 103 [Interior of fish camp cabin]
- 106 [Interior of fish camp cabin]
 107 My cousin Darleen: our mom's are sisters [Inside fish camp cabin]
 108 [Helen inside fish camp cabin]
 109 [Helen inside fish camp cabin]
 110 [Helen inside fish camp cabin]
 111 [Interior of fish camp cabin]
 112 We made it! On our beach in Haines Carr's Cove. Cousins Helen Watkins, Darleen Sheakley Betz
 113 My son, 1972. My #1 son, Jay, Sam Johnson
 114 Fireweed
 115 Bill, Canning fish
 116 Georgie, Bill, Johnnie, Charlie, Tommy
 117 [Haines cabin and shoreline, processed November, 1973]
 118 [Haines cabin and shoreline]
 119 [Haines cabin and shoreline]
 120 [Haines cabin and shoreline]
 121 Moonlight at Carr's Cove
 122 [Haines cabin and shoreline]
 123 Back of my shack [Haines?]
 122 [Haines shoreline]
 125 Mom weaving [basket]
 126 Happy days in Haines with my mom
 127 [Lilly Nigh, Haines]
 128 Jay Sam Johnson, Jr., Kenny [and?] Lloyd Jackson [Haines]
- 129 Christine, Cookie, Helen
 130 Play time! Cookie and Helen
 131 Rainy days! My girls, Karla and Lonnie, and Chuck Ramage
 132 Sewing the net [Helen and Chuck Ramage]
 133 Helen and daughter Karla, Klukwan
 134 Play time! Lonnie
 135 Obituary for Lilly Klannott Nigh. December 17, 1983
 136 Obituary for Joseph A. White, August 24, 1983
 137 Lonnie, Kayla, [?], Jordan [Interior of Lilly Nigh's cabin]
 138 [Interior of Lilly Nigh's cabin]
 139 [Interior of Lilly Nigh's cabin]
 140 [Interior of Lilly Nigh's cabin]
 141 [Dog and fishing net on shore]

- 142 [Dog running toward camera outside the cabin]
- 143 Mom and Bill Nigh, June 1, 1991--25 years
- 144 [Haines, winter, with boat and net at shore]
- 145 Lonnie Johnson and Helen Watkins [1980s?]
- 146 Ready to split after Thunder Bird House party, June 1972 [Helen wearing back pack]
- 147 [Carved Thunder Bird]
- 148 Inside our Thunder Bird House
- 149 Inside our Thunder Bird House
- 150 Inside our Thunder Bird House [?]
- 151 Lonnie, Mom Lilly Kannott Abbott Nigh, Lilly White, Aunt Anna Katzeek [in regalia]
- 152 Bill Nigh, George Katzeek, Sr. [in regalia]
- 153 [Postcard: Old Cannery at Letnicoff Cove...]
- 154 [Preparing fish for smoke house] Helen and Jeanette
- 155 [Preparing fish for smoke house] Jenny Mann, my sister

- 156 Interview with Helen Abbott Watkins, July 9, 2013.

Helen describes her family and growing up, cannery work, sewing for ANAC cache, fish camp, seal tanning, her various jobs babysitting for a radio announcer among others, cleaning the governor's mansion, and working at REACH, Head start. She talks about her life in Juneau Haines with three children during the 1950s through 1980s.