

# Traditional gathering designed to clarify, preserve Southeast's Native heritage

## Event scheduled for late February



Cultural preservation; a topic that weighs heavily in the hearts of Alaska's Native elders for obvious reasons.

Traditional leaders from the Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian nations announced recently they are planning a cultural event scheduled for Feb. 24 thru 26, 1982 in Juneau.

This historic gathering is a result of previous meetings where 14 Elders of these nations met to discuss various cultural and historical issues. Consensus of those planning the meeting is, "We must pass the traditions, customs, legends, historic events, songs, dance, and lifestyle on to our children and children's children so they will know who they are and where they come from."

The group of Elders are concerned that much of their recorded history is incomplete, some inaccurate and most often misunderstood. The Elders expressed an urgency to begin preserving their culture and heritage before it is lost forever. George Davis, descendant of the Dei She Taan Clan stated, "There are a lot of people (elders) that are passing away. In this day and age, the Titanic that sunk can be raised, if desired. But what we can't do as people is go to a person's grave and ask that individual to tell us about our people."

Walter Soboleff, descendant of the Lee Nei Dee Clan, con-

curred stating, "We need more than ever to unite ourselves to preserve our folklore and anything about the culture of our people. We've been waiting a long time to do this. Let us look to this goal. If it isn't done now, we will have lost about 90 percent of it."

"The fulness of time has come. Now is the time to begin recording our history and traditions for ourselves and our people," added David Katzeek, Shun Goo Kei Dee descendant and president of the Sealaska Heritage Foundation. Katzeek emphasized the need for all traditional leaders to join together and become "of one mind" to attain the goal of cultural preservation.

Ira Booth, Metlakatla historian for the Tsimshian Tribal Association commented, "If we lose our culture, we've lost our place in this part of the world. We're just like sand on the beach. As long as we maintain our culture, we identify with the land."

The special guests at this historical event will be traditional and knowledgeable leaders who represent clans from the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian nations as far north as Yakutat and as far south as Metlakatla.

This historical event is being sponsored by contributions from Sealaska Corp. and a grant from the Alaska State Arts Council and coordinated by the Sealaska Heritage Foundation.

The Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian culture and history.

The foundation is fully supported by Sealaska Corp.

**I.S. WEISSBRODT PAPERS:**  
Sealaska Heritage Foundation,  
Juneau, Alaska

Meeting held in the public school house of Juneau, Ak., by request of Indian chiefs on account of the presence of His Honor, Gov. John G. Brady. Chiefs of the different tribes desiring to make their complaints to the governor respectfully asking His Honor and agent of the government present to assist them in getting to the President of the

United States and Congress in session such relief in an enactment of laws as will at least partially relieve their complaints made to the governor. The meeting held Dec. 14, 1898. Complaints have been translated by the government interpreter, George Kostrometinoff, as taken here-with:

### CHIEF KAH-DU-SHAN, FROM WRANGELL

"Long time ago before the white people came to this country, Tlingit had laws and at every village there was a chief, some villages two or more chiefs. Now around Wrangell we have names of different mountains; different creeks, bays, points, all have names. Around Taku, the Tlingit gave names to different points, islands, mountains, as well as Chilkat and other places.

"Three principal rivers in this country through which the Natives of the country would go into interior are Stickeen River, Taku River and Chilkat River. The Sitka Tlingit as well as Hoonah and they go to Yakutat.

"Ever since I have been a boy, I have heard the names of different points, bays, islands, mountains, places where Tlingit get herring, hunting and make camps, that is why I think this country belongs to us.

"Long, long time ago before white people came to this country, our people lived here at certain places where they went hunting and fishing. When the Russians were here they did not have any stores in the interior but they used to trade with our people here (means on the coast).

"I was a boy when this country was purchased and soldiers came here to Wrangell and to Sitka. There was a captain by name of Smith who told us that Americans had purchased this country. Then the business men followed the soldiers. They commenced to trade with our people.

"Our people did not object; did not say anything to them. By and by they began to build canneries and take the creeks



(Continued from Page Nine)

away from us, where they make salmon and when we told them these creeks belonged to us they would not pay any attention to us and said all this country belonged to president, the big chief at Washington.

"We have places where we used to trap furs; now the white man get up on these grounds. They tell us that they are hunting for gold but the judges and governor tells them to look for gold. We know that the white people get lots of gold money out of these places as well as out of the Yukon River. Here at this place as well as other places they take our property; take away ground, and when we complain to them about it they employ a lawyer and go to Court and win the case.

"There are animals and fish at places where they make homes. We are not fish. We like to live like other people live. We make this complaint because we are very poor now. The time will come when we will not have anything left. The money and everything else in this country will be the property of the white man and our people will have nothing.

"We meet here tonight for the purpose for you to write to the Chief at Washington and to let them know our complaint. We also ask him to return our creeks and the hunting grounds the white people have taken from us.

"Of course, we are not as powerful as white people. We have no soldiers. We have no strength. We ask the big Chief at Washington as children ask their fathers. The missionaries and teachers tell us that no one but God make the people. We know that the same God made us. And God placed us here. White people are smart; our people are not as smart as white people. Just like the sun shining on this earth.

"They are powerful. They

have the power. They have men of wars. It is not right for such powerful people as you are to take away from poor people like we are, our creeks and hunting grounds. Among our people we have Chiefs. We have nice people, that is why I think the white people are our chiefs.

"Long time ago our fathers used to tell children who was the Chief and what happened long time ago and that is why we know how the Chiefs are made and what our ancestors used to do. Present are Johnson, Koogh-See, and another young man who are Chiefs, and also old man by name of Shoo-we-Kah. We do not ask the whole of Alaska.

"We simply ask the President to give us a ground where we can raise vegetables and places where we can hunt and prepare fish. We do not want all these things we ask for by force. We have eyes and we have sense. We see you are powerful. We do not want to be angry with you. We want to be friends with you. We simply ask you to give us all these things.

"What I am saying to you now are the words of our people to a great many different villages, Taku, Sitka, Chilkat, and other places. We get married; take wives from one village to the other and what I am saying to you now are the words of our Tlingit."

## CHIEF JOHNSON

### FROM JUNEAU —

Chief of the Taku Tribe

"What Kah-du-shan has said he told you the truth. We have not talked to you for long time, for many years. We have not said anything to you since Russians lived in this country. All the people would like to say something to the Governor. We are perfectly willing to give this country Alaska to you. We know this is our country. How long we have been living here we do not know, very long time.

"I do not know whether the law-making people living at Washington get any pay — the man who teach the people to be good. We do not know anything about the United States law, the law that the Governor knows. Things that I am saying now did not use to happen in olden days. The government now sell land. Our people, we have simply patches of ground raising vegetables and place where our people go hunting; creeks where they fish, we want you to give them back to us.

"We never had any trouble with the white people of America. We love you as children love their parents. Now we know that the United States have a great deal of trouble with Indians in the States about the land. We never had that trouble with you. We are perfectly willing that you should have Alaska.

"We did not know that the Russians sold this country; of course we know it now. When the American soldiers came to this country that was the first time that we heard that this country was sold by the Russians.

"The Indians in the States made great deal of trouble for you about the land. We never made any trouble. We love you. We love you as our friends. The Tlingit are getting poor because their ground is taken away from them. We ask you to refuse to do that then our people will starve.

"All these people came here for the purpose to tell you what they want so you can tell the Chief in Washington. We have not been talking to you for long time; but now we are compelled to talk to you because white people are taking all those places away from us. Places where we used to make food. I like to say more but I would not say anything now as several people here present who would like to talk to you."