

SE Brotherhood starts Native history project

by Peter M. Metcalfe
for the Tundra Times

JUNEAU — The Alaska Native Brotherhood, the oldest such Native American organization in the United States, will celebrate its 75th anniversary during the Grand Camp Convention to be held at Sitka in November.

In anticipation of this event, ANB Grand Camp President Richard Stitt has announced the commencement of the Alaska Native Brotherhood History Project. Conceived as an effort to preserve photographs, written material and oral history that documents the ANB's contributions to the progress of Native Alaskans, the ANB History Project will result in:

- A series of 30-minute radio interviews with past Grand Camp presidents of the ANB and its companion organization, the Alaska Native Sisterhood.

- A 48-page magazine format pictorial history.

- The creation of a photographic archive that will be placed on permanent loan with the Alaska State Library.

Fund-raising efforts have been started and have met with enthusiastic response from Southeast Native corporations.

Yak-Tat Kwaan, village corporation for Yakutat, has the honor of being the first Southeast corporation to make a major contribution to the Alaska Native Brotherhood History Project.

According to Vicki Demmert, Yak-Tat Kwaan business manager, board members made a \$1,000 contribution because they felt that the ANB is the cornerstone of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

"The board recognized the importance of documenting the ANB's contributions," Demmert said. "Without their foresight there wouldn't be any village corporation.

"It was their leadership in fighting for our education, in fighting for our rights, that got us to where we are today; where we are able to compete in the non-Native world and play their game."

Shee Atika Inc., urban corporation for Sitka, quickly followed with a \$1,500 contribution. Andy Hope, a member of Shee Atika's board, said that his fellow board members recognize the value of preserving and promoting the modern political and

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cultural history of the Native people of Southeast.

"Our forefathers made great sacrifices that we might have better opportunities than they did. It is time that we recognize this and preserve our history before it is lost," Hope said.

Phase I of the ANB History Project will concentrate on producing a fully documented historical, photographic archive. A 48-page pictorial history of the ANB will be produced prior to the 75th Grand Camp Convention in November.

Andy Ebona, first vice president of the Grand Camp and project supervisor, said that the Alaska State Library has responded enthusiastically and is willing to help in establishing the photographic archive.

"It isn't often that the library has the opportunity to get in on the creation of an archive like this," Ebona said.

"Usually these things are donated by someone who has inherited a collection that is poorly documented, if at all. In this case, we will document and organize the archive prior to putting it on permanent loan with the library."

Ebona said he has received numerous inquiries as to the nature of the research that will take place.

"There are two major concerns people have that we wish to put to rest: first, we are looking for photos and documentation of those people who have received little recognition for their contributions, and second, the ANS is one and the same as the ANB as far as we are concerned."

The radio interviews will be conducted by veteran newsman Vern Metcalfe of Juneau. Sealaska Corp. has made an initial \$1,500 contribution to this part of the ANB History Project.

Metcalfe said he intends to interview past and present Grand Camp presidents of both ANB and ANS.

"These people represent a tremendous resource. They lived through a period of time when the Native people were faced with racial prejudice, few civil rights and many economic obstacles," he said. "Not only did they overcome these problems, they prevailed. It is a great story and one that needs to be told."

Fieldwork is expected to commence in early September. Any corporations or individuals wishing to make a contribution or who have photos or documents they wish to share are urged to contact Grand Camp President Richard Stitt by writing in care of the Tlingit-Haida Central Council, 320 Willoughby, Juneau 99801; telephone: 586-1432.

Territorial Gov. Ernest Gruening is shown signing the Alaska Anti-Discrimination Act of 1945, as ANS Grand Camp President, the late Elizabeth Peratrovich, left, looks on. Roy Peratrovich Sr., Elizabeth's husband, stands at far right. Many private collections exist with photos such as this that need to be preserved.