

CVS Graduated Many Natives—

Closing of Copper Valley School Tragic

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Readers of this weekly are aware that Copper Valley School at Glennallen will close its doors to Alaskan high school students this coming June. That another Catholic boarding school disappears from the landscape is no big news any more, and is perhaps of little consequence to many people. But in this State, private effort and support of secondary education in accordance with state requirements and accreditation is as rare as palm trees on the tundra. The phasing out of this or of any other such school ought not to go unnoticed.

At a time when minority groups clamor for recognition, it could be said that Copper Valley was an attempt to respond to the educational needs of Alaska Native people. It was one of the few schools built on the idea of integration of the races, which for formative high school boys and girls is a sort of mutual recognition. The notion of college-prep was strong, and the ability and potential was recognized in any student who wanted to take the opportunity to polish up his or her talents.

Ted Mayac of Nome and Anna Patsey, formerly of Holy Cross, were the first graduates in 1957. From then on, readers will recognize names of graduates through the years: Demoski, Demientieff, Schaeffer, Norbert, Sipary, Hunter, Snow, Pitka, Stickman, Semaken, Solomon, Napoleon, Jorgenson, Olson, Bell, Wassilli, Aloysius, Harry, and many others.

Thomas Gemmell III of Clear is now completing his course at the Coast Guard Academy and graduated in 1967. Eileen (Norbert) Appolloni who won the Voice of Democracy contest for the State of Alaska graduated from Copper in 1964. And both Anna Patsey, '57, and Margaret Semaken, '65, were able to complete registered nurse's training outside after their high school years at Copper Valley.

It seems untimely that this effort toward secondary education should now end. There is more money in Alaska now than when the school was beginning in the middle '50's, more talent, more resources and more people. And the educational needs of the native minorities are greater than ever.

We are all wrapped up in Native Land Claims and that pipeline. The whirlpool of progress is upon us and when the bulldozers have finished the job, will big brother be here to stay? The promise of gold in every pot and two ski-doo's for every family may sound fine, but will it come at the price of computer credit-card culture? Copper Valley escaped all that. It was one of those impossible Alaskan pioneer adventures: drop in for coffee and pick up a hammer, grab a paint brush, fix that flat, skin the moose. If Jake Spils ever caught you around there, you'd spend the day pushing a loaded cement buggy for standing idle. In some sort of miraculous way, the whole place was patched together with volunteer help, and year after year, teachers and staff would come and go from all over the States, all volunteers, keeping the school alive. One wonders if such kind of spirit and character is soon to go the way of the dog team.

If some day you get the chance, stop in at Mile 111, Richardson Highway, at the Tazlina Bridge. Take a look at the place, rather large and sprawled out, like seven spokes coming from the hub of a great wheel, and government-issue pink all over. It's home-made and very plain and it has the generous character of every one who stopped by to lend a hand or leave a hand-out. No amount of oil money, no efficient computer system will ever come up with anything quite like it.

One feels quite sure people like Bishop Gleason, Fathers Jack Spils, Jack Buchanan and Frank Fallert, as well as Sisters Mary George, Ida, Alice and Eulelia, and so many, many others, would like to say: "Thanks for all the help."

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