

Report documents Barrow of the 70s

By JANE PENDER
Fairbanks Daily News Miner

Rags to riches in less than a decade may sound like everyone's dream, but from Barrow it's been a mixed blessing. Of all Alaskan communities, Barrow is the one which has felt the most impact from the North Slope oil development. Some is good, some bad, and for a good deal of it, grades aren't in yet.

The population's up, the birth rate down, and the annual death rate at seven percent is two points below the national average, but for not fully explainable reasons, the average annual death rate among North Slope Eskimos up to age 34 was four times greater than the national average during the early seventies. Most of that was attributed to accidents, according to the Public Health Service. But the suicide rate among Eskimos between 1976 and 1978 was twice the national average.

All these and more statistics come from a figure-filled book produced by the Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska. Another in the "Man in the Arctic" series, this publication is called

"Energy Development and the North Slope Inupiat." It compiles a staggering number of statistics which compare things as they were in 1970 with how they had become seven years later when the surveys were done.

Villagers were asked to list the best and worst of community conditions—as they remembered them from 1970, and as they were in 1977 when the survey was taken.

Queried in 1977, North Slope villagers remembered the villages of 1970 as being good places to live in terms of the old Eskimo values of "helping and sharing" and a less definable category called "overall village life." Remembering back, they also mentioned as good things the readily available fish and game, the low level of housing costs and thought that race relations between whites and Natives were good.

By 1977, the best aspects of village life were still "helping and sharing and overall village life." But also, jobs were much more available; the schools were better, as was health care.

Villagers also remembered the worst things about village life in 1970. They were, in order: not enough good jobs; the high level of drinking, taking drugs and fighting in villages; not enough or not good enough air transportation in and out of villages; the small, crowded houses, and the poor local shopping facilities. By 1977, villagers were alarmed about, in order: the high cost of food and clothing; the level of drinking; taking drugs and fighting; the scarcity of fish and game; poor race relations, and

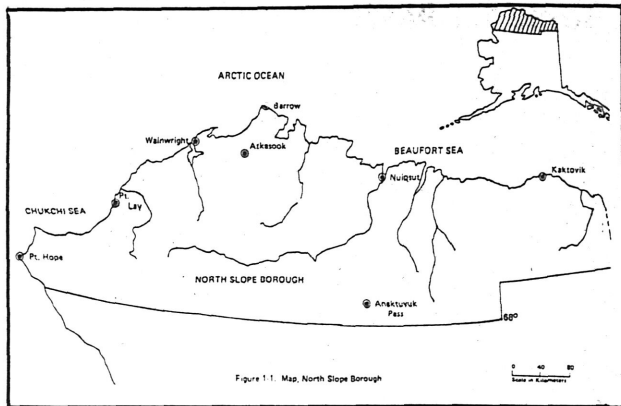


Figure 1-1. Map, North Slope Borough

local shopping facilities still weren't good enough.

But the North Slope was considerably more prosperous in 1977 than in 1970. Most families owned their own homes, and three out of four households in all villages owned snowmachines. Nearly half of all Barrow households owned cars or trucks in 1977, though few did in the smaller villages. The same was true of large appliances. "Far more households in Barrow owned refrigerators in 1977 than did households in Anaktuvuk Pass, Wainwright or Point Hope," the survey said. But television was coming in strong: about a quarter of all North Slope Eskimo households bought TV sets in 1977.

Oil money—enough to provide a tax base of more than \$5 billion in 1979 for the North

Slope Borough—provided jobs, jobs and more jobs for work-hungry Inupiat. "The Borough and the Regional Corporation provided three out of four jobs held by North Slope Eskimos," the report says. North Slope Eskimo women entered the work force in dramatically increased numbers, and in general, although some who wanted work couldn't find it, "the creation of the borough and the corporation had dramatically reduced unemployment." In 1977, very few Eskimos were working for oil companies operating at Prudhoe Bay or for Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. About 25 percent of the men said they had worked for one or the other at some time in the past, but almost no women had ever worked for them.

Still, the report notes one thing unchanged since 1970. At that time, the few jobs available came from the state and federal government. In 1970, jobs were still coming from government, though it was the North Slope Borough government instead, and the number of jobs it supplied were far more than any other government entity had supplied in the past.

The entry of women into the work force in the Arctic is re-

latively new. But in one respect, it's the same old story. On the North Slope as elsewhere in the nation, the service and clerical jobs held by women paid a lot less than the construction jobs held by the men. Women averaged \$200 to \$250 a week for their work while the men averaged \$600 for skilled jobs such as heavy equipment operators and \$500 as construction laborers.

The average annual income of Eskimo households on the North Slope in 1977 was \$22,500, up 30 percent from the 1970 average. Highest household income was in Barrow. But the report uncovered an interesting fact. Even though income increased dramatically in those seven years; the distribution of that income remained unchanged. "In 1970, the poorest 40 percent of the population got only 13 percent of total income, while the wealthiest 20 percent got 44 percent of total income."

The report also uncovered what researchers called a "phenomenon" which complicates the measurement of the work force in North Slope villages. "A significant number of adults in all months of the year reported they were unemployed and

(Continued on Page Five)

● Barrow in the 70s

(Continued from Page Four)

didn't want to work."

In examining this figure, the report speculates that perhaps men who are out of work in winter might be construction workers who know there is no work, and therefore aren't looking. On the other hand, "ten percent of adult men reported they were unemployed and didn't want work during the peak employment season in the late summer; this indicates that, for a variety of personal reasons, many North Slope men chose to spend part of 1977 without jobs."

It might be thought the reason for this would be that these men wanted to hunt. But the study reveals that fewer than 40 percent of all Eskimo adults took part in any given kind of hunting, fishing or craftmaking

(such as skin sewing) during the study year. But nearly half the men over 18 took part in spring whaling, and about the same number went sealing and hunting ducks and other waterfowl.

In fact, the study says, "Most Eskimo adults who reported hunting and fishing during our study year said they had done so largely on weekends or during evenings after work. The only exceptions were among those who had hunted whales or helped whaling crews; about half of those said this activity took most of their time during the short whaling season."

The report continues that researchers asked Eskimo adults how much time their fathers had spent hunting, fishing and working, with these results: "So, in general, it seems that the time Eskimos spend hunting and fishing has been declining over sever-

al decades, and that by 1977, with an abundance of jobs in North Slope villages, most Eskimos hunted and fished on their time off from jobs. But ... few Eskimos believed that the reduced time available for hunting and fishing prevented them from getting the meat and fish they wanted."

An interesting point many made was that most of the Eskimo households in all villages reported they had received some of their wild fish and game from other households in 1977, and about half the households reported they had loaned hunting or fishing equipment and/or money to others. The significance of this, the report says, is that this sharing value, which has always been strong in the Inupiat culture, appears to still be so, despite the many changes which have occurred.