

ROGER McPHERSON PHOTO

● A photo essay

The 1978 Stick Dance

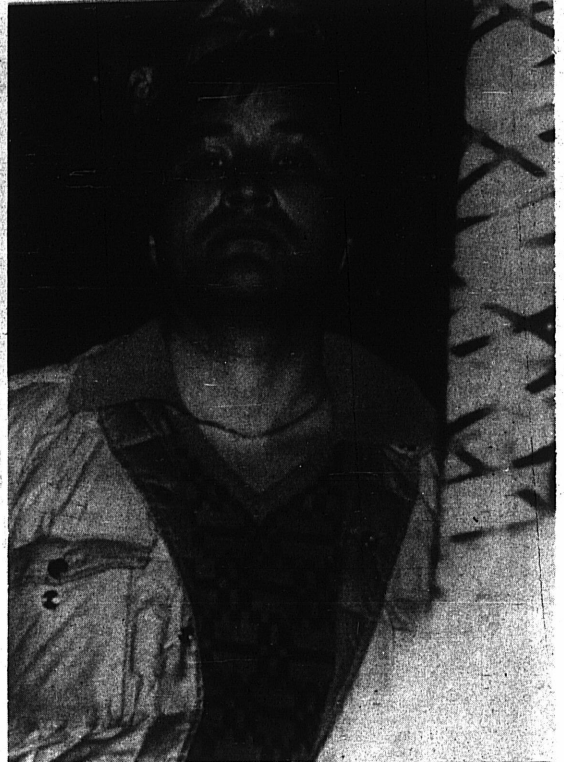
A time to remember and a time to give in the Athabascan tradition

There is tradition, and then there is tradition. For generations, the people of the lower Yukon River have looked forward each year to the Stick Dance, a ceremonial intended at once to honor the recent dead, to comfort the survivors and allow those who have lost loved ones the opportunity to express their gratitude to those who contributed to the original funeral potlatch of those who have passed away. The deceased are honored about two years after their funeral potlatch. The Stick Dance is held alternately in Kaltag and Nulato, pictured above. The actual dance around the stick is preceded by a week of intense preparation and two or more potlatches.

In the photo, upper right, Sen. John Sackett of Galena, one of the voices of Interior Alaska in the state legislature, himself an Athabascan, dances around the stick. At the beginning of the dance, wolverine and wolf pelts are tied to the stick; bolts of material are brought into the community hall and placed on the wall (right photo). All will be presented as gifts by those who wish to recognize the efforts of others who have helped during the time of grief.

In the photo, lower right, Tassie Ann Saunders, gives a speech before the Saturday evening potlatch, held the evening after the actual stick dance. She was honoring her late husband and composed special mourning songs for this Stick Dance. In the photo, lowest right, the stick is removed from the community hall the afternoon following the Stick Dance, broken up and thrown onto the still-frozen Yukon River. Below, singers chant as others dance clockwise around the stick.

ALEX TATUM PHOTO



ALEX TATUM PHOTO



ALEX TATUM PHOTO



ROGER McPHERSON PHOTO



ROGER McPHERSON PHOTO