

FIRST TANACROSS CLAIM 1917

More Research Reveals Initial Claim Made Fifty-two Years Ago

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The earliest claim made in the Tanacross area was in 1917, and not 1950 as was previously reported.

The Tundra Times was informed that a 1917 claim was filed by a trader named Newton on behalf of the Tanacross natives.

Newton reportedly had the natives mark hunting trails, fishing sites, trap lines, village sites, burial grounds, and other lands relating to historical use on a map of the area.

Chief Andrew Isaac of Tanacross indicated that the map was registered with the Territorial Commissioner for the Upper Tanana, John Hajdukovich. This claim, Isaac said, extended from Delta Junction to the Canadian border and included all the villages in that area.

A letter from the late Senator E.L. Bartlett to Chief Isaac, in

which the Senator said that he had located an old claim, is in the possession of the Tanacross village.

The Senator said that he discovered an unsigned copy of an old Tanacross claim. It is believed that this was a copy of the claim filed in 1934 by Tanacross. This claim is reported to have been dismissed by the Interior Department, which said the claim was too large.

Tundra Times research revealed the existence of another early claim, made in 1946. Chief Isaac said that a man, who identified himself as Judge Goldstein from the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Native Legal Service, came to Tanacross and had the villagers mark maps.

All lands claimed through historic use and occupancy by the Tanacross area natives were included in this claim. Judge Gold-

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stein told the villagers that a road would soon be built through the area and the claim was made for their protection.

Judge Goldstein later traveled to Tetlin and drew up their claim, which is now the Tetlin Reservation.

The road was built. Judge Goldstein, and the Native Legal Services, were never heard from again in the Tanacross area.

Other claims, of which four were made between 1950 and 1967, have also been ignored. In the entire 50 year history of the Tanacross Land Claims, no final determination was ever made.

Despite correspondence with the members of the Alaska Congressional Delegation, Governor Miller, and Interior Secretary Walter J. Hickel, no action has yet been taken to expedite a determination on the claim.

In May of 1969, Senator Mike Gravel requested Bert Silcock, Alaska Director of the Bureau of Land Management to meet with the Tanacross natives.

Chief Isaac and Tanacross Council members say that they have not been informed by Silcock of his willingness to attend any meeting.

The Tanacross land issue was further complicated recently when the state notified Abraham Luke of Dot Lake that it would place a lien on his native allotment, foreclose, and sell it. The state said it was justified in this action due to non-payment of back taxes.

A 70 year old federal law, allowing for granting of native allotments, states that allotments are held in trust by the federal government and are non-taxable.

Luke sought legal recourse through the Fairbanks BIA Realty Office. Final determination is still pending.

National publicity on the Tanacross claim came Sunday when the news team of Mike Wallace and Paul Lowenwater filmed a story from the village. The television commentators, from the Columbia Broadcasting System, were alerted to the issue from a story in the Tundra Times.

One of the questions asked by the CBS team was in regard to use of the land if the Indians were to gain title.

To this, Chief Isaac replied, "Everybody still uses the land. They used it long before the White people came to Alaska."

He said, "This road (the Alaska Highway) went right through our hunting and fishing places. After they did that, people came and placed up signs: 'No Trespassing, Private Property.'"

"How are we going to feed ourselves?"

Chief Isaac stated, "I have got an idea of what the Indian is going to use the land for. If the state took the land, what would they do with it? They can sell it, rent it, lease it, and make money from it.

"We will lease it, rent it, sell it, and make money from it. Why can't the native people make money off their own land?"