

Ned Nusunginya--

Famed Dogteam Mail Carrier Dies

"I remember him carrying the mail. As a little boy in Point Hope, I remember the dog team coming in with mail." This was the memory Howard Rock had of Ned Nusunginya.

There were many, many others who remembered Ned Nusunginya last week in Barrow. They came from all over Alaska — from Barter Island, Wainwright, Pt. Hope, Fairbanks — to pay homage to a man as legendary as Alaska, as big in heart as its landscape.

Born in 1898, Ned was one of the state's last dog mushers to carry mail by dog sled, traveling miles and miles of frozen tundra, from Barrow to Kotzebue, and at least once, all the way to Unalakleet.

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On one occasion he contracted to take the famed Norwegian explorer, Roald Amundsen to Kotzebue. The story is told that as they ventured forward, they began to hit bad weather.

Ned's experience warned him that they should stop for awhile but Amundsen insisted they go on.

Go on they did, with the result that when the worst of the storm hit, Amundsen, nearly frozen and exhausted, begged Nusunginya to halt.

Ned said, "No, you wanted to go on and that's what we're going to do now." When they reached their destination, Amundsen asked Ned to go further with him but Ned said, quite firmly, "No, I've had enough of you."

Ned's exploits, unlike many men's, did not stop with the adventures of his youth. He was always a man to take on a new challenge.

About 1960, the man who had lived a very rough and outdoor life, made an unusual decision. He decided to enter the ministry. Already in his sixties, he entered the Far North Bible School, an itinerant school, with his teacher traveling all the way to Nome to give Ned instruction. Ned supplemented this with correspondence courses.

Rev. Paul Bills, Assembly of God minister in Nome, described Ned as "a good student. He loved to study."

His studies led him to be appointed as preacher on Barter Island and a short time afterwards, the presbytery of his church conferred ordination upon him, waiving a few of the formal education requirements. He was now a full-fledged minister to his own people. He served in Point Hope, as well as Barter Island.

Ned Nusunginya died last week in Barrow, but the memory of the man will remain as long as there is an Alaska.