

# How it ended . . . the final days of Howard Rock

By LAEL MORGAN

Following an operation for cancer in late 1973, Howard Rock, Tundra Times Editor, understood he could expect at best a brief reprieve from the disease. He required a blood transfusion to muster strength enough to attend the ceremony at which he was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Alaska in April of 1974 and, privately, friends shook their heads and counted the days.

But Rock was a strong and stubborn man, and he responded well to weekly chemotherapy. Only a week after the University of Alaska ceremony he began to work half days and within three weeks he was back at his desk full-time.

He changed his lifestyle but little. After working hours it was his custom to hold forth at the front table of Tommy's Elbow room, where he liked to sip bourbon with a splash of water (called a "Howard" in his honor) and visit with his many, varied friends.

During the treatment he usually limited himself to one "Howard an evening and filled the gap with a gentle Olie or two, but friends knew they could still count on him for the same lively conversation.

National recognition of Rock's work came after his first illness and he enjoyed it. Books and newspapers began to credit him as a moving force behind the Native Land Claims movement. Banquet invitations rained in and he ran out of wall space in his cramped little office on which to hang new awards.

The Alaska Native Foundation asked him to write a chapter of the Native Land Claims text book and he enjoyed doing it. He started a book of his own. He was voted Alaskan Man of the Year. And when a Pulitzer Prize nomination landed on his desk one morning he said matter-of-factly to a friend and typesetter, Lee Alder, "Well, there it is!"

He began to travel outside the state more often on missions for the Indian Arts and Crafts Board of the Department of Interior. He pursued an old dream of establishing an Institute for Alaskan Native Arts, located potential funding and was about to help incorporate the project.

He was invited to a cultural exchange in Nova Scotia and enjoyed the visit mightily. He made a nostalgic journey back to his Native village of Point Hope and attended a Whale Feast.

His greatest satisfaction, though, was wrestling his weekly newspaper into shape. For the first time since its founding the Tundra Times was in the black and the staff looked solid. Student journalist Sue Gamache began mastering Rock's one "man" operation --writing stories, dummymy and pasting up the paper--and he was proud of her.

He landed a Ford Foundation grant to do a study on education and drafted Lael Morgan, a friend and former staffer, to fill the assignment. And other writers began turning in highly professional copy on a fairly regular basis.

Deadline days became less hectic. Things were going so well, in fact, that no one particularly noticed when Rock began to slow down. He was still at Tommy's but he didn't stay as late. With Ms. Gamache taking over more and more editorial duties, it seemed natural that he would leave the office a little earlier in the afternoon.

But on April 2 Rock left an uncharacteristic note on Lee Alder's composing machine:

"Lee--The way I feel now I don't think I will be much help getting the paper together. Three doctors looked me over and put me under some sort of observation. Nothing too serious I think, but whatever else ails me has weakened me further. So I can't make the trip to San Francisco (for the Arts and Crafts Board) DARN IT!

"I'll try to put the front page together and whatever else I can do, I'll try it.

"TUD-DEM, Rock, the Editor."

Those who saw him Friday, April 16, noticed nothing unusual, but the following Monday, the day before deadline, he appeared in the office early with scarcely enough strength to talk.

Still he didn't want to go home and he refused to go to the hospital. He had a regular appointment for a check-up on Tuesday, he said. That would be time enough.

Staffers kept him up-to-date on the progress of the paper and

on future assignments. He was still at his desk when they left at 9 that night, but he told them not to worry.

Next morning, impeccably dressed but dangerously weak, he went for his regular appointment at Bassett Army Hospital and, rather against his better judgment, let the doctor admit him for further tests. Next morning when staffers phoned to ask if there was anything he wanted, he dispatched a nurse with the message, "The only thing Mr. Rock says he wants is out."

He refused all pain killer until April 17, fearing it would cloud his mind. Visitors were not encouraged, lest they worry about the great amount of weight he was losing.

"Stop crying and go back to work," he told one distraught reporter, not unkindly. He didn't want hovering sympathy and his newspaper was still all important.

At the beginning of the last week his breathing was labored and he slept most of the time. Friends guessed he would fight on until Tuesday, the next deadline

day, and he did--until the Tundra Times was ready for press.

Death came at 11:40 P.M., quietly and with dignity. Former Tundra Times reporter Tom Richards, Jr. and Rock's niece, Mary Dirks, who were with him, said he drew two incredibly long breaths and let them out slowly and peacefully, then there was nothing more.

After paying respects, friends headed for Tommy's Elbow Room and each ordered a "Howard" or two. Rock's chair was empty but the presence was still happily there.

## NANA merges with 10 village firms

By MARGIE BAUMAN  
FAIRBANKS—NANA Regional Corporation and 10 affiliated village firms have officially merged into a single corporation, braving a new trail of economic possibility and survival for land claims firms in Alaska.

Interior Secretary Thomas Kleppe approved the plan of merger in Washington D.C. April 12 and the state followed with approval of the revised articles of incorporation on April 16, said Al Adams, executive vice president of NANA.

The basis of the merger move, initiated over a year ago by NANA, is unified ownership to provide economic strength and better land management. NANA stockholders and those holding stock in ten village firms within the region gave the plan solid support March 29, approving it by a 68 per cent margin.

"It was not a foregone conclusion," one NANA spokesman told the Tundra Times. "We worked hard. We had to get at least 51 per cent 'yes' vote." Such a margin isn't all that easy, to be sure. NANA's bylaws do not demand more than 33 per cent representation for a quorum at the annual meeting and in 1975, less than 50 per cent of the stockholders turned out for it.

Still, the mood for merger was apparent this year and the annual meeting was packed.

Of the area's 11 village firms, only the Kikiktatruk Inupiat Corporation of Kotzebue will not join in the merger. The KIC

board voted previously to go it alone.

Having put almost all the eggs in the proverbial basket, however, NANA is expected to take more caution than ever in business ventures for the merged firm.

"I expect that we will be a little more conservative, because if NANA falls everything goes,"

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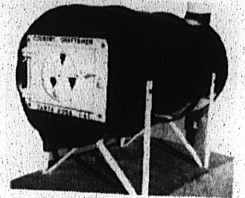
## NSB is running out of gasoline

It seems ironic that the North Slope Borough, which sits on one of the largest known oil reserves in the world, is running out of gasoline. Here's the notice posted on the bulletin board of its handsome new office:

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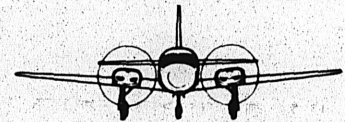
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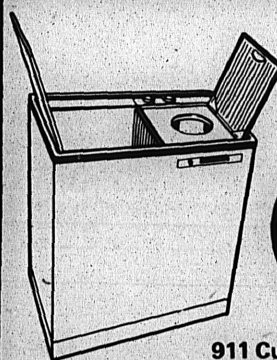
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