

Land Testimonies Eloquent...

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"But at the heart of all three, however deeply buried, lies one value—survival," he said.

Nicholls pointed out the westward expansion of the United States that occurred around the close of the Civil War in 1865, that it was the time when modern civilization came in conflict with the primitive society.

The war with the plains Indians resulted.

"... These people reacted to the threat to their survival in the only way known to them," Nicholls declared. "They took up arms against those who would dispossess them, and thirty years of harsh, bitter, cruel warfare resulted.

"It was felt almost universally," he continued, "by the people of the United States at that time that these Sioux, these Cheyenne people, together with the lesser tribes, stood in the way of modern progress and they in turn, in innocent ignorance of the laws of the land and their rights of redress, bravely shed their blood upon those lands which had nurtured and sustained them in their attempt at survival against overwhelming odds.

"Finally, by the process of gradual attrition, of hunger and the overwhelming weariness of the struggle, they were gradually and arbitrarily forced onto reservations provided for them."

He said that today we again hear the phrase, 'the native stands in the way of progress, his claims hinder the development of the state.'

"... Instead of taking up arms to repel this threat to our survival, we take recourse to the law which in all clarity defines the rights of the native peoples."

Nicholls said that the Organic Act of May 17, 1884, was a clear and specific and directly to the point in defining the rights of the native people.

"In essence, it states that they shall not be disturbed in their use of the traditional hunting grounds nor shall they be dispossessed from same," he pointed out.

He went on to tell of the history of occupation of the lands by the Eskimos.

"To begin with, archaeological findings along the middle and upper Noatak River definitely fix the earliest known Eskimo culture of the area to be approximately 8,000 years old," he said.

He said that at one time, according to archaeologists, that the Arctic Slope area supported a population of 30,000 people from the McKenzie River to what is now known as Kotzebue.

Trading flourished with goods finding their way from the Copper Mine River district of Canada to eastern Siberia. The proof of this, he said, was the soapstone seal oil lamps that were in general use "until a few short years past."

Hugh Nicholls told of the new diseases non-natives brought with them and for which the Eskimos had no immunity. This resulted in a great many deaths among the native peoples.

"The decline in aboriginal

population was paralleled by a decline in sustenance resources of caribou, seal and whale, due largely to the hunting pressure created by the whaling ships," Nicholls said. "And from 1900 to the middle of the 1930s, life was indeed hard for the Eskimo—hunger and death his constant companions."

"Today, however," he continued, "we find the pendulum has begun to swing the other way and the population is once again on the increase and a plentiful supply of natural God-given sustenance at hand."

He pointed out the present day centers of permanent settlements "in the land beyond the Brooks Range are Point Hope, Point Lay, Wainwright, Barrow, Meade River, Colville River, Anaktuvuk Pass and Kaktovik."

"Ninety per cent of the food stuffs used," Nicholls declared, "by these people is primarily game, waterfowl, and fish.

"For example, Anaktuvuk Pass, with a population of 94 persons and 200 dogs, requires an annual consumption of approximately 1,000 caribou.

"Barrow with a population of 1,800 consumes on a yearly 7-whale average, 280,000 pounds gross, 150 walrus at 60,000 gross pounds, 100 oogruk at 20,000 gross pounds, 100 natchik (seals) at 7,000 gross pounds, 3,000 waterfowl, 18,000 pounds of fish, 10 polar bears at 3,000 gross pounds, and 2,000 caribou at 400,000 gross pounds.

"This is duplicated throughout the rest of the villages in proportion to the population; the principal source of food and winter clothing being, as from time immemorial, the caribou."

Nicholls told the commission and the audience that it required about 12,000 caribou annually to sustain the Arctic Slope Inupiat population adequately; that this is supplemented by the animals mentioned in addition to moose, grizzly bear, and mountain sheep depending upon where the people might happen to be at the time.

He told of the many uses of the caribou by the people as a clothing source, laces, lashings and a variety of other things.

The present head count of this animal using the Arctic Slope grazing grounds, he said, is estimated at 320,000 to 385,000. He told of the unpredictability of the caribou, its migration routes and the names of places where it is usually found.

"It may be readily seen from the picture just described that the entire Arctic Slope is the literal, actual caribou ranch of the Eskimo and from which he obtains his staff of life," he said.

In concluding, the speaker declared:

"It is for this very reason, and several others that I shall explain, that the Eskimo seeks full title to the land which has sustained him from time immemorial.

"We of the Arctic Slope wish to retain the fair percentage of the assets due the people as title holders of

the land, from natural resources as a basis for developing the economy of the Inupiat so we may take our place in this nation's society as an integral, self-sustaining group justly proud of our heritage, a credit to God, our fellow men and our country.

"We wish by having title to our lands to insure the perpetual conservation of our caribou herds by regulating the foreseeable future industries and to insure that our streams remain unpolluted by toxic wastes which, if unchecked, will deplete our fish.

"It is now time to lay to rest forever that old bugaboo that we want this land for our exclusive use. Nothing could be further from the proposed planning of the people.

"We want full title to the land we use so we may develop the natural resources to the fullest extent; providing job security for our people and to retain for the Eskimo people a fair share of the profits to be derived from these resources so as to increase the living standards of our people, to better our education system and health service and to continue development of future potentials.

"We want to develop our lands in an orderly manner to conserve our vital and essential food supplies, and only by full and complete control of the land can we be assured of the adequate care of the caribou herds, insure our streams and lakes remain uncontaminated from industrial wastes and maintain an equitable balance between natural and industrial development.

"On these points alone, the past performance of the white man speaks only too plainly of his inability or indifference in preventing stream pollution and depletion of the God-given natural sources of food.

"With the nation's highest birth rate, we must be assured of a continuing, adequate food supply and only be full control of our lands, our caribou herds, our streams, and other natural resources, can we escape the ultimate deadly trap of the social welfare state.

"Akubuk, Kyuanukpuk tavra." ("Now, I finish. Thank you very much.")