

Fairbanks elders . sessions taped discuss culture . and photographed

The Fairbanks Native Association's Johnson O'Malley-Native Culture Program sponsored its second annual Elders Conference in October. Thirty-one elderly Natives who now live in the Fairbanks area spent the better part of the two-day conference discussing a wide range of topics. The elders were divided into five groups based primarily on where each had spent most of his/her life. There was a group of Athabascans from Minto, Athabaskan groups from the Lower, Middle and Upper Yukon River areas and a group of Inupiat Eskimos. JOM staff members acted as facilitators during the Conference.

Each elders group talked about many interesting things. There were stories about river travel, house building, hunting, early chiefs, summer camps and much more. All of the sessions were recorded on tape and well photographed. The information that our elders have given us will be used in the Native Culture's program of youth education.

Friday afternoon the elders gathered together to evaluate the Conference and discuss future plans. There was agreement among everyone that collecting traditional experiences was important. Several elders brought

up that the best way of teaching a culture was to have students spend time in the village or at camp. It was also brought up that young people should be made aware of the past and of their culture but that they need to realize that they'll never be able to go back and live it like their grandparents. They can use their culture to help them survive in today's world and that the elders were wanting to help them.

Friday evening the elders were entertained while waiting for the Potlatch with Native music and song. Traditional Eskimo and Athabaskan drum-

ming and dancing shared the evening with old-time fiddling music. Throughout the Conference the Native Culture staff prepared traditional soups and other foods for the participants. Lots of good food was donated for the Potlatch also and the elders enjoyed beaver, bear, caribou, king salmon and



Gene Numnick shares an Inupiat story with his group during the JOM Elders Conference.
Photo by S.V. Cowdrey



Ellen Frank, Matthew Titus, Mary Dick and Lucy Frank sing Athabaskan songs at the JOM Elders

Conference as Nancy Mailard and Oliver Amouak took on.
Photo by S.V. Cowdrey

muktuk. Helen Simpkin gave each elder some ch'echoyoo' or stomach fat from her moose.

Fry bread and Native ice cream topped the eating off. Not only the elders but the kids and their parents who came to share the evening went home full and happy.

The JOM Native Culture Program recognizes the need for the Native children in the Fairbanks area to learn about their heritage and culture. We have actively sought advice from the area elders through Conferences such as has been described and through monthly Elders Gatherings held at our office for invited elders and school children. Our Native Culture Advisors make present-

ations to school children and community groups, we publish "Yesterday Still Lives III" as an insert in the New River Times which highlights the various cultures found in the Interior. We provide storytelling at the Noel Wien Library and we have an active summer program where high-school students research various aspects of their culture. Booklets that have been published by our program and which are available are: Yesterday Still Lives I and Yoogha Dona. For more information, contact the Native Culture Office at 310 1/2 First Ave., Fairbanks.