

# Mary Curtis, Northwest matriarch, is dead at 91

By MARGIE BAUMAN

Mary Curtis would stand before her friends and relatives at the Friends Church quarterly meeting, playing "In the Sweet Bye and Bye" on her harmonica, as the congregation sang the old gospel song.

At 91, she had hardly missed a quarterly meeting or Sunday service of her church in over 40 years and her death late Saturday at the Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage marked another milestone in the history of Northwest Alaska.

Funeral services were scheduled for Thursday afternoon at the Friends Church in Kotzebue.

"More than half the population of Northwest Alaska is somehow related to her, and some in Barrow and Nome too," John Heffle, of North Pole, recalled this week.

Heffle is married to Eva Curtis, one of Mary's nearly two dozen grandchildren, and for years he too had called her "Ahnah" (Grandmother). When Mary Curtis got her first telephone at home in Kotzebue about two weeks ago, the first long distance call she placed was to the Heffles at North Pole, to say hello.

"Everyone knew Mary Curtis and everyone loved her," Heffle



MARY CURTIS

in such poor health the last couple of years," he said.

Mary Curtis was born on October 7, 1887 in the Noatak village area north of Kotzebue.

She lived in the Kotzebue area most of her life and with her husband, the late Jack Curtis, had seven children. Daughter Annie Kenworthy and sons Dick and John Curtis still live in Kotzebue. Daughter Maggie Swanson and sons Bobby, George and Richard Curtis are deceased.

She also leaves more than 20 grandchildren, some 150 great grandchildren and numerous great-great grandchildren.

said. "No matter what some people would do, she'd turn the other cheek. For years, every day she would have lunch with her sister (Lena Sours of Kotzebue) and they'd always argue, but if one wouldn't show up for lunch, the other would worry and go after her."

"Grandma lived a real good life. The sad part is that she was