

# Editor's Testimony Before the Authentic Native Articles of Handicrafts and Clothing Hearing

## A Written Testimony

My name is Howard Rock and I was born at Point Hope, Alaska. At the present time I am the editor of the statewide Native newspaper, Tundra Times. I am also one of five commissioners of the Department of the Interior's Indian Arts and Crafts Board. Since the Board has submitted a paper on the Authentic Native Articles of Handicrafts and Clothing through our office in Washington, D.C., I am submitting this testimony as an artist and as the editor of Tundra Times.

I feel privileged to be able to include my testimony in writing before the Authentic Native Articles of Handicrafts and Clothing hearing conducted jointly by the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Federal Register published the 50 C.F.R. 216.23 last June 3, 1974. I am seriously concerned about the cutoff date of December 21, 1972 after which no new Native made items may be originated; and two, the list of items made from such marine mammals as whale, walrus and seal.

## THE CUTOFF DATE

I consider the cutoff date as a serious invasion into the creative abilities of Native Alaska artisans who for years have had to tap into the past for inspirations and incentives to create attractive objects in their arts and crafts as well as their clothing. I say this because I am an artist myself. If the cutoff date involved the artisans of the Alaskan Arctic areas, I am, indeed, involved along with them. I have carved ivory items as did, and does, my fellow artisans in Alaska. Along with them, I have never been restricted to certain designs and I have hungered to create new designs as did my fellow artisans.

The restrictive date of December 21, 1972 can well be a stifling one on the creative endeavors of our Alaskan artisans. It would tend to kill off the present creative era which had begun to enjoy a better outlook. Through skillfully designed products, an atmosphere of encouragement to the gifted artisans had begun to emerge. The date would certainly restrict the progress of this newly-developed situation which might even be called a renaissance period. The artisans are enjoying and experiencing a period of creative era and easy atmosphere in which to work. The restrictive date of that December almost two years ago will certainly cool the creativity which can easily be the beginning of a devolution of a progressive period.

As an artist who works mostly with oils and brushes, I feel a close kinship to my fellow artisans that even though they work with different media, they would feel as I would if my art were to be restricted to my certain period of my artistic endeavors.

The restrictive date, and I say this with all sincerity, can be a definite devolution period for the Native artisans of Alaska. Feeling as I do about it, I would ask that it be deleted from the 216.23 altogether. And, too, it cannot serve as a device to conserve animals from which the artisans get their materials because those animals' visitations to certain areas in the Arctic is only a short time, sometimes involving only a month long period out of a

year. Such an animal is oogruk (bearded seal) and so is the walrus, at least at Point Hope. The hunting period for the Bowhead whale at this village is scarcely a month and a half out of a year. The hunting period for the common seal is different lasting some eight months out of a year and this animal teems in great numbers in the Arctic. It can be pretty much available during that length of time depending, of course, on hunting conditions. It can also be pretty much unavailable when hunting conditions are not favorable.

Some marine mammals hunted for centuries in the Arctic and subarctic areas of Alaska seemed to be naturally conserved by lengths of seasonal migrations and adverse weather conditions. Bowhead whale hunting at Point Hope is roughly a month and a half; oogruk, scarcely a month; walrus about a month long, if that, and these hunting periods are out of year's duration. One can't hunt these animals by the hundreds, at Point Hope at least, because of the limiting factors of nature itself.

And, too, the Point Hope hunters themselves do not tend to overkill because of limited storage spaces provided by traditional sigloqs (underground meat caches). When these storage spaces are taxed to the limit, the hunters refrain from taking any more animals because of sure spoilage and by following the ages old Eskimo saying, "Do not kill the animal you do not need."

Perhaps the 216.23 should have been written after much more consultation with the Native people themselves. With this input, perhaps there would never be a cutoff date included in the measure. There would never be an onerous restriction that would actually sever traditions — the sources of creative incentives. From my viewpoint, the list and the cutoff date are ill-considered and burdensome that can degrade, or actually kill, the creative processes as far as the "Authentic Native Articles of Handicrafts and Clothing" is concerned. They should be drastically changed or deleted altogether.

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