

'Peace and Friendship' Potlatch in Anchorage

Special from
BETZI WOODMAN

A UNIQUE potlatch, dedicated to the acceptance of peace and friendship, will be held in Anchorage Sunday (Nov. 2) at the log meeting house of the Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship.

"HOST CLAN" is the group of children in the Religious Education department of the Fellowship. "Guest Clans" will be members of the adult congregation. The potlatch will follow the regular 10:30 a.m. service.

THE EVENT stems from a study program in which the children learn about religious beliefs and their backgrounds of other denominations and cul-

tures.

THIS GENERAL program of understanding the ways of others is part of a curriculum followed in most Unitarian-Universalist church groups throughout the nation. Each church relates its studies to the local situation.

BELIEVING in the importance of understanding fellow Alaskans, the Anchorage Fellowship Sunday School elected to begin with the Southeastern people.

THE CHILDREN have been fortunate to have knowledgeable consultants in their study. Frank Mercer, Tlingit whose totem carving skills are well-known,

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Peace Potlatch . . .

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met with the children regularly on Sunday mornings. Assisting in the latter portion of the planning and study has been George Hall, former Superintendent of Mount McKinley National Park and for ten years historian for the Park Service in Sitka.

DURING his years in Sitka, Hall became closely acquainted with Indian culture and beliefs and he is sharing this knowledge with the Fellowship children.

ALTHOUGH those giving the potlatch are young and unrelated to Native Indians of Southeast Alaska, these youngsters are planning their "friendship party" along authentic lines. Ranging from first grade to junior high school ages, the children have made small dancing jackets with fur collars and other ornamentation in traditional styles, the tall-crowned hats with honors rings and a crest piece for the wall.

IN PREPARING the costumes and other items, the children learned about designs and colors used by the Indians and the reasons for their use. They also have some understanding of the effects on the lives of the people made by the Tlingit culture.

IN ADDITION, they have

learned of the various kinds of potlatches or reasons for giving them. They selected this "dedication of things done" theme as a proper culmination of their studies.

MUSIC for Sunday's potlatch will be authentic. Taped by Hall during festivities in Southeastern Alaska, the music will precede the story telling, also patterned on tradition. Hall will wear his treasured Chilkat blanket for the event.

THE CLIMAX will come with the hosts' offering of peace and friendship and the ensuing acceptance, noted by symbolic eagle down tufts placed in the "forelock," by the invited guests.

THE GIFT of food will be distributed for guests to take home with them—again in the old manner.

LARRY BEEDE and Susan (Mrs. M. Walter) Johnson have also worked with the Religious Education department on this project. They and Hall are gratified at the children's response and understanding of the study and the way they entered into the deeper meaning of the potlatch preparations.