

Masks of Anaktuvuk—

Writer Describes Famous Handcrafts

EDITORS NOTE: With this issue, we begin a column of stories by Alaska Native students attending the University of Alaska in Fairbanks. The stories cover a wide range of native experiences, culture, and traditional activities. From students such as these will emerge the native writers, poets, and journalists of tomorrow. The stories will also appear in a magazine called THEATA, which stands for Tlingit, Haida, Eskimo, Aleut, Tsimshian, and Athabaskan, all of the native groups of Alaska.

BY PATRICK HUGO
Of Anaktuvuk Pass

The skin mask of Anaktuvuk Pass are some of the most well-known handcrafts of Alaska. They are made of caribou hide with a ruff from the fur-bearing animals that the people of Anaktuvuk trap.

The faces are shaped exactly like a human being's face. The first mask was made in 1959 by a couple of young men, Zacharias Hugo and Justus Mekiana, to use for an Eskimo Dance on the New Year's holiday.

It was quite simple and made to amuse the people. At that time there were missionary teachers at Anaktuvuk Pass, and they bought the skin mask and sent the product to their families.

Soon after that other people started to buy the product until they were ordering so many the people that made them had to work on the masks most of the time to keep up with the people who ordered from them.

So the product that was made to amuse the people paid off quite well to the whole village, as well as to the two young men

who had the idea of making the skin mask.

The first time the young men made a mask, they carved a mold from a spruce tree, carving the exact features of the face of a man. They put holes just inside the eyelines, under the nose and at the ends of the mouth so they could sew the caribou skin tightly to the mold.

After they had gotten the mold ready, they scraped a piece of caribou skin and cut off the hair on the other side the best they could. Then the piece of skin was soaked in water to soften it so it be easier to sew onto the mold.

After the young men had soaked the skin for two days, they sewed it onto the mold by covering the face side with the skin, flapping the excess skin back and sewing it through the small holes they had put on the mold.

They hung it to dry three days, and after it had dried up, they cut it off the mold and cut out the eyes and the mouth. They sewed a ruff on it, thus finishing their project. The people were quite amused by the project the two young men had made.

Today the people use different kinds of dyes that make different colors, such as red bark from a willow which gives off light red, coffee grounds which give off light brown, and ashes which give off a black color.

After a while the people started making very fancy masks because everyone was making them and everyone wanted to sell what they had made.

They started making all shapes and sizes, putting on the items such as the eyebrows, men's hair, eyelashes and mustaches which come from the leg of the caribou; and the women's hair that comes from the caribou's neck where the hair is the thickest.

The ruff comes from the fur-bearing animals such as wolves, wolverines, lynx, foxes, and bears, which the people had trapped.

The prices of the masks are according to the sizes in which they are made. In 1969 the prices of the masks were for the smallest (4 by 6 inches) \$10.00, the medium (6 by 9 inches) \$12.50. Now medium-sized masks cost \$15.00. The two latest and bigger ones weren't made at that time, but now an eight by ten mask is sold for \$20.00.

The largest, 1 foot by 15 inches, is being sold at fifty dollars. The people also make masks with ears, sold for \$18.00.

Almost all adults in the village make masks because it's almost the only source of money if you live in Anaktuvuk Pass.



MADE TO AMUSE THE PEOPLE — These caribou hide and fur masks were first made to amuse the people of Anaktuvuk Pass. Now they are a major industry in the village and a

source of income for its people. Much in demand, the unusual and lifelike masks are fast spreading out to collectors around the world.

— Photo by JACQUELINE GLASGOW

Lauds SCORE-ACE Volunteers

Daniel B. Ward, Regional Director, U.S. Small Business Administration, said that free business counseling provided by SCORE/ACE volunteers is one of the primary reasons the SBA Northwest Region (Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Alaska) has achieved the Agency's second

lowest delinquency rate in the nation.

Surveys indicate some fifty per cent of the new businesses fail within two years. Surprisingly, the reason is not the lack of capital; largely the failures are because of poor management, Ward stated.

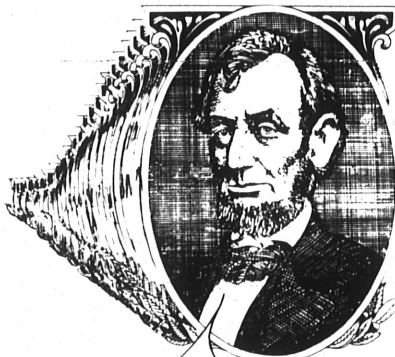
According to the Regional Director, SCORE/ACE volunteers (Service Corps of Retired and Active Executives) counsel over 300 cases in the Northwest each month.

"Money could not buy the business expertise SCORE/ACE volunteers bring the small business community free. Each volunteer has had a successful business-oriented career. There just is not a loser in the bunch," Ward said.

SBA borrowers and non-borrowers alike may receive counseling from SCORE/ACE volunteers. "In general anyone who needs help to run a small business more profitably or advice in starting a small business may take their problems to the nearest SBA office," Ward said.

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