



LAST TO SEE FATHER—Claire Okpeaha of Barrow, the last person to see Will Rogers and Wiley Post alive, talked to Will Rogers, Jr. during Rogers' visit to Barrow. Okpeaha ran 12 miles to report the fatal crash in 1935. Rogers is looking at a photo of Okpeaha in Charles Brower's book, "Fifty Years Below Zero."

Will Rogers, Jr. Visits Northwestern Villages

The magic of the name "Will Rogers" is not diminished by the addition of a "junior" tacked on the end of it—at least not in Alaska where the son of a famous

father lassoed his way into the hearts of the people wherever he went.

Rogers is visiting Alaska this week in a combination fact-finding and people-meeting trip. Traveling with him is Warren Tiffany, Alaska education director for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Making the trip Sunday and Monday to Wainwright and Barrow were Wally Craig, BIA director in Fairbanks; and Dan Edwards, BIA social worker. A Tundra Times reporter accompanied the party, along with the pilot Bob Johnston.

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"Hi! I'm Bill Rogers," he would say as he stuck out his hand to shake with whoever happened to be around. Then he uncoiled his rope and began to demonstrate the very thing that made his father famous.

He had hardly stepped off the plane at Wainwright before he had a rope spinning around an Eskimo child. It was

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ROGERS VISITS NORTHWESTERN VILLAGES...

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Sunday and he had to repeat the demonstration several times before he could get inside the school where refreshments were waiting.

He met with Wainwright village council members and told them about his mission as a special assistant to the commissioner of Indian affairs.

"I want to know how we can help you," he told them. "Tell me what you need and I will try to tell your story to the men in Washington."

Besides listening, Rogers asked a good many questions and had some comments for the village people. He was very anxious to know how they felt about land claims, land ownership, and their schools.

"Get yourselves a good lawyer, and don't let anyone push you around," he said in discussing the land claims. Rogers proudly told them that he too was part native and had shared in the \$385 which

was his father's part of the Cherokee claim.

He was told that the village school at Wainwright has 90 students and the children have to be taught in split sessions because there just isn't enough space available in the school.

"We'll get you a bigger school," Rogers promised them, "but you'll have to be patient, the war in Vietnam is costing a lot of money."

From Wainwright the party flew over the monument erected to Will Rogers and Wiley Post who crashed there 32 years ago. At Barrow a plane was waiting to take the group to the monument itself but it was getting late and Mr. Rogers said he would rather stay in Barrow. (He saw the monument in 1955 while making a movie on the life of Will Rogers).

In Barrow he visited the school, met the teachers and attended a reception of the local native leaders, held in

the new BIA school. Among those present was Claire Okpeaha, the last man to see Will Rogers and Wiley Post alive.

Okpeaha carried on a brief conversation with Will Rogers, Jr., through an interpreter, April Akpik. During the reception the guest again got out his rope and gave a demonstration of twirling.

Roger explained that roping is the only circus skill that originated in the New World. Most of the tricks now seen in circuses, he added, were invented by his father.

After the reception, Rogers went to another reception at the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory where he met scientists from various universities studying the peoples of the north.

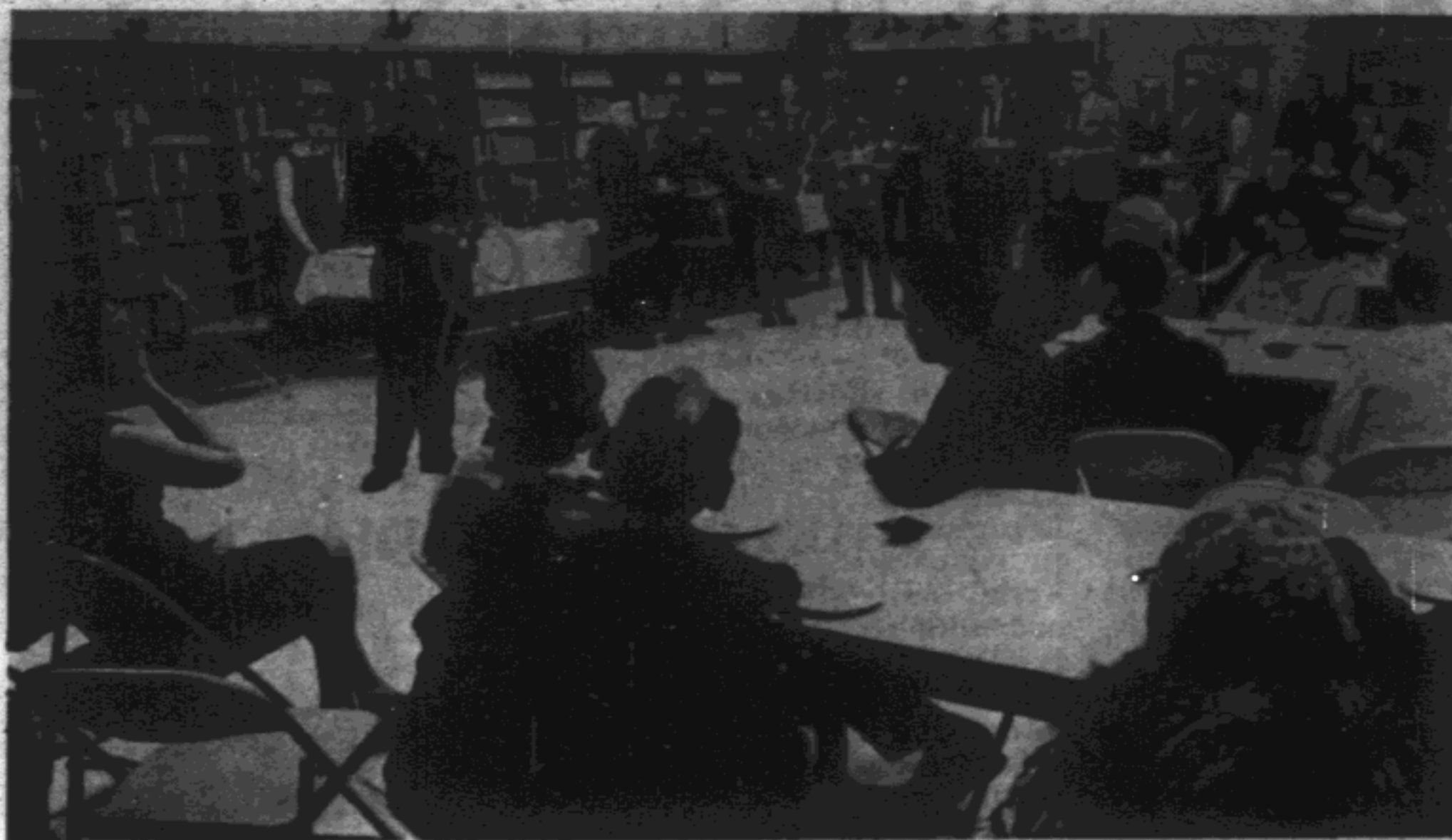
Rogers had planned to visit Anaktuvuk Pass on the way to Fairbanks but the weather was not cooperative.

In Fairbanks Monday afternoon he met with BIA officials and then visited the University of Alaska where he watched the ivory carvers at work in the arts and crafts center. He also spent nearly an hour meeting with native students.

This was followed by a talk with the experienced teachers who were meeting in another building. His evening was spent with a press conference, a reception by Fairbanks Native Association and coffee at the home of President and Mrs. William R. Wood.

He caught the late plane to Anchorage where he got a welcome sleep before his next conferences began Tuesday morning. After Anchorage he hopes to visit Bethel before returning to Washington.

Will Rogers, Jr. Visits Alaskan Communities



IN BARROW SCHOOL—Above, Will Rogers, Jr. demonstrates roping and talks to Native residents and BIA schoolteachers in the Barrow school. Below, the Barrow schoolchildren show their reactions to Rogers' visit.



ROPING DEMONSTRATION—Will Rogers, Jr. demonstrates fancy rope twirling to an unidentified Wainwright youngster. Rogers commented that the art was rapidly dying, and only about a half dozen experts were left in the skill his father made famous.



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Photos by
Jimmy Bedford

"I'M NEVER going to wash my hand again," exclaims Esther Analoak from Nome after shaking hands with Will Rogers, Jr. at the Fairbanks Native Association reception.



BARROW FAMILY—April Akpik and family talk to Will Rogers, Jr. during his visit to Barrow. Rogers talked to Native people in various communities to obtain information to help the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and to explain BIA policies to the people in the communities.



WAINWRIGHT WATER SUPPLY—Will Rogers, Jr. was fascinated by the ice blocks used to provide the water supply for the Wainwright school, and asked that this photo be taken as a souvenir.



AT UNIVERSITY—Will Rogers, Jr. talks to art instructor Ron Senungetuk from Wales as student Jesse Koyuk from King Island Village looks on. Senungetuk teaches students to combine Native art with modern products and helps them obtain the business education necessary to use this skill to earn a living.