



ANDREW GRANT II—Tiny Andrew Grant II of Minto is dancing with his elders from the village of Minto at the annual FNA potlatch at the Lathrop High School gym last Saturday.

Festivities began with plenty of native foods. About 3,000 people attended the gala affair.

—MADELYN SHULMAN Photo

Oodles of Native Foods—

3,000 Enjoy Gala FNA Potlatch

By MADELYN SHULMAN
Staff Writer

Spring came on Saturday night and with it—the Potlatch. At least three thousand native people, young and old from villages near and far gathered at Lathrop H.S. to greet friends and acquaintances unseen during the long, frozen Alaskan winter.

They gathered, on a day when spring seemed near, with the many feet of snow piled on Fairbanks slowly melting in drops falling from rooftops. They came early, to wait in the endless line inside the high school—old people in traditional dress, youngsters in jeans and miniskirts (the midi has never caught

on in Alaska.)

They waited, it seemed for hours, to reach trays of moose, salmon, fish, bear and reindeer. Some chicken and ham for the “gussuks.” Eskimo ice cream, purple and resplendent with wild berries. We saw no muktuk, an item many missed.

To add to it, local women made macaroni and potato salad, and homemade bread.

From far and wide the native people came, from many towns and villages. Few children though. FNA limited the crowd to those over 14 this year and the few children belonged to the dance groups from the villages. Many non-native Alaskans came, join-

ing native friends.

They stood on line and greeted friends and talked—about land claims, about the long, hard,

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3,000 at Potlatch...

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snow-filled winter this year, about a possible flood—and enjoyed the sun and balmy temperatures in Fairbanks.

Later, the dancers came. Old and young. The group from Minto brought the youngest dancer to the Potlatch—tiny Andrew Grant II, resplendent in his orange feathered regalia and dancing with the best of the old folks.

From Tanacross-Northway, the dancers are led by aged Chief Andrew Isaac, traditional head of the Crow Band. He tells the crowd that he didn't expect to make it here tonight.

Indeed, the Chief spent the winter in and out of the Alaska Native Hospital in Anchorage with a heart condition which kept him there for many months.

Yet, on Saturday night, Chief Isaac beat the large round drum and led the colorful dancers of Tanacross and Northway. Truly, the spring brings its small miracles.

From the children, one could see the old traditions being passed on. The Amaouak family elders introduced their three young granddaughters, lovely in blue traditional dresses, into their dancing.

Along with the grandparents from Stevens Village and Tanacross came the children, proudly dancing in the way of their fathers and grandfathers.

Yet, tragedy almost struck the potlatch during the blanket toss. Several girls soared high near the roofbeams of Lathrop

gymnasium.

Then, a man began jumping, the tossers missed and a man who happened to be in the way is still in Basset Army Hospital with a possible fractured neck.

His name is Henry Graham, victim of blanket tossers who weren't skilled or quick enough. Perhaps, not just willing hands but skillful ones are necessary for the toss—to hold to the edges of the giant skin blanket.

So, they came from all over. Not as many politicians as last year—an election year. Yet, the mayor of Fairbanks, Julian C. Rice, stood by in amazement as Sam Kito "auctioned" a feather headband and proclaimed him the "buyer." It was presented to him as a gift. The new BIA Area Director, Morris Thompson, was there with his wife. They hail from nearby Tanana and to them it was like being home.

At the end, dog musher George Attla of Huslia was richer by one trip to Hawaii.

He won the Fairbanks Native Association raffle grand prize (or he can take \$2300 if he doesn't want the trip), an event which should sweeten his loss to Harold Greenway in the North American Sled Dog Championship on Sunday. (He placed second.)

Till next year, and another Potlatch, all went home, leaving Lathrop high school gymnasium empty and echoing the shouts, laughter and applause of Indians, Eskimos and other Alaskans.