

# People Liked to Stop by to Visit Kindly Ella Vernetti



**ELLA VERNETTI** — The ever kindly lady from Koyukuk, Ella Vernetti, is happily dishing out native food at the annual Fairbanks Native Association potlatch held in Fairbanks. The much revered woman passed away last month while undergoing treatment.

By MARGIE BAUMAN

Ella Vernetti was the kind of folks people just liked to stop by and see.

Made a point of it, in fact, to stop by the Vernetti Trading Post at Koyukuk and call on this hunter, trapper, businesswoman — and have a hot cup of coffee or tea in her home back of the village store.

In the nearly half of a century Ella spent in Koyukuk, she became one of the best known women up and down the Yukon. One of the busiest, too.

"I don't know how she does it," said her friend Liza Jones, left minding the store when Ella left the state several weeks ago, for heart surgery in a California Hospital.

As she spoke she was pouring still another cup of coffee for a visitor to the village, telling about how Ella ran the store, a garden the post office and cutting fish too, even at the age of 68.

Ella had been cutting fish down at Koyukuk just about a week before when she had a heart attack. Then she had to leave the village for quick medical care, first in Fairbanks and on to California. It was at Stanford Hospital in Oakland California that she died July 16 and her passing was mourned by friends and family all up and down the river.

Ella came to Koyukuk nearly 50 years ago. The year was 1925 and the young woman, fresh out of high school, planned to teach at the village school for a year, then attend the University of Washington.

But she stayed, fell in love and married the rugged prospector turned businessman Dominic Vernetti and with him raised a family and ran the Vernetti Trading Post for years.

Ella found time for trapping, hunting, and fishing. When there were no dental services available, she doubled as the village dentist, pulling teeth. And she served as midwife for the birth of just about every child in the village.

Ella was a good cook too, "a real good cook," says Jimmy Huntington, of Galena, an old friend of this gentle storekeeper.

"She fed everyone up and down the river."

"All the fliers from Fairbanks to Nome or Kotzebue would stop there overnight and then continue to Nome and Kotzebue the next day.

"And all the traveling salesmen would make a point of stopping there for a few days, to play pinochle with Dominic and have some of Ella's good cooking," he recalled.

The Vernetti Trading Post itself got going in 1923, when Dominic Vernetti built it on the banks of the Yukon. It was a busy village, with the big stern-wheelers unloading their cargo into shallower scows for trips to the villages of Bettles and Wiseman.

There were nearly 200 people living there and many visitors.

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(AIPA) Unless you decide to quit

# ELLA . . .

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"In summer it seemed like there were always houseboats all along the river," recalled another frequent visitor there.

Those days are gone, of course, at least for now.

Koyukuk is a quiet village, with many of its residents gone most of the summer at fish camp. When news of Ella's death reached them, they started home to prepare for her funeral and the many people who would attend.

And they came, said Ella's friend Poldine Carlo, of Fairbanks, from all up and down the river., from Fairbanks, Rampart, Huslia, Galena, Tanana, Ruby, Kaltag, Nulato, Hughes, Allakaket, McGrath and other parts of the state.

It was a final tribute to the Athabascan woman who was for so long one of the best loved people of Koyukuk.