

Native Oral Literature--

Library Association Assn. Project

By MARILYN RICHARDS

The Alaska Native Oral Literature Project of the Alaska Library Association began in July of 1973.

Through a Manpower Development Training Act grant from the Alaska Federation of Natives and from additional funding from the Tanana Chiefs Conference, the project has collected over 500 stories on audio tape from over 150 sources. Nearly all of the storytellers have been over 60 years old and some were reputed to be over 100.

This vast collection of stories, histories, and songs are from the Yupik, Inupiat, Aleut and Athabascan languages. Many have not been published before. Whenever possible the stories were first obtained in the Native language accompanied later by its English translation.

According to Vera Oovi Kane-shiro, formerly of St. Lawrence Island and now working with the Native Language Workshop at the University of Alaska, the project hopes to expand to provide the public with easy accessibility to the tapes.

The master tapes will be stored in the Archives of the University of Alaska Library. State-Operated Schools has agreed to make copies of the tapes for distribution to the SOS schools and their three regional libraries.

Plans are in the offing for a series of radio programs and for a printed publication for distribution to both rural and urban areas in the state. The collection would be broadcast at least twice monthly via the Applied Technology Satellite (ATS-1), to be launched in April, to 22 villages

equipped with receivers.

There would be 13 radio programs that would include thematic, ethnological, geographical and linguistic information to enhance its audience appreciation and understanding of the series.

The stories would also be broadcast in both the Native language it was originally recorded with and its English translation. The planned publication would also include the same information.

The oral traditions have only

(Continued on Page 6)

Assn. Project . . .

(Continued from Page 5)

with rare exceptions been passed on to younger generations, and the art of oral literature is literally dying as those people who once knew the old tales grow so old that they can no longer remember well, or themselves die.

The traditions of the Native peoples of this state are non-literate and transferable in their entirety only in verbal form. The Alaska Native Oral Literature Project sees itself as both preserving a rich and disappearing cultural heritage, as well as reinforcing that heritage and providing material to aid in its retention and continuation.

Each month, more of the old people who possess the knowledge of the folklore pass away and with them is lost much of the information that would be of value to and a source of pride for younger Native Alaskans.

The Alaska Native Oral Literature Project feels it is of the utmost importance that the stories collected be returned to the people who told them to encourage the continuation of a disappearing art form.

The project's completion date is scheduled for June of this year.