

Preserving records goes from attics to archives

Representatives from more than 20 Native organizations crowded Alaska Federation of Native's Convention's first workshop on preservation of tribal records at the Egan Center during AFN's recent convention.

Speakers told participants how to apply for grants to set up records management and preservation programs. Alaska State Historical Records Advisory Board (ASHRAB), which sponsored the workshop, reviews grants for the federal granting agency, the National Historic Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). Both ASHRAB and the NHPRC have a special interest in tribal and Native organization records. The Association of Village Council Presidents, the Doyon Foundation, and the Alaska Native Foundation received NHPRC grants.

Program moderator, Joaquin Estus, a Tlingit, invited the speakers to explain

why it is vital for Native organizations to be thinking about preserving their records.

Kathy Mayo, director of Doyon Foundation, told the group how the foundation has begun to set up its archives. Doyon received a planning grant from NHPRC and hopes to train a shareholder as an archivist. Doyon's determination to organize and preserve its records grew out of frustration over spending too much time and money searching in attics and crowded storage lockers for crucial documents, says Mayo.

Bob Anderson, a Chippewa and an attorney in Alaska with the Native American Rights Fund, explained the critical importance of documents for making an effective legal case. The sovereignty and subsistence cases which his office handles are strengthened by the inclusion of written records as evidence. He said letters, notes taken at council meetings, agendas

of meetings held, resolutions — all help prove the claim of a village to being the traditional representative of the local community; that oral tradition is not enough.

Barbara Sweetland Smith, who organized the first survey of Native organization records 12 years ago for the Alaska Native Foundation, reports that six organizations and several Native leaders have placed their records in archives. But there are hundreds of records out there being lost each year, she says. Smith fears future generations will not be able to find out what happened in the 1960's when Native leaders were finally able to come together to fight for their rights. They will not know why certain organizations were formed and succeeded and why others failed.

Organizations which placed their records in an archival repository, or are working at identifying and saving their permanent

records include the Doyon Foundation and Doyon, Ltd., Fairbanks Native Association, Tlingit-Haida Central Council, Bering Straits Native Association, RurAl Cap, CEDC, and individuals James Curry and I.S. Weissbrodt, attorneys for THCC, the estate of Roger Lang, Elizabeth and Roy Peratrovich, Howard Rock, Ellen Hope Hays and

Andrew Hope.

Jania Garcia, a Haida trained as an archivist, provided information on how to get technical and financial help, as well as short-term training.

For information on grant proposals contact Virginia Newton, Archivist, State of Alaska, 141 Willoughby, Juneau, AK 99801-1720 or call (907) 465-2975.