

# Alaska Needs Better Exhibit At New York World's Fair

Chappaqua, New York

February 12, 1965

Dear Mr. Rock:

Before the New York World's Fair reopens in 1965 I hope the Tundra Times can bring some pressure to bear on the State of Alaska's World's Fair commission to improve the job they've done in presenting Alaska to the world.

When one realizes that New York is a crossroads of the world and that millions of people will get their first impression of this great country through what they see at the Fair it seems most important that all exhibitions should be of the finest caliber to represent this country's best interests.

I visited the Fair several times last summer and came away enthralled by some of the beautiful and tasteful exhibits — such as the elegant Spanish Pavilion — but I was distressed and disappointed by the cheap, commercial exhibit of the largest and — to those who have seen it — the most magnificent State in the Union; Alaska!

For those who may never have the opportunity to learn more of Alaska than what they see at the Fair, what kind of impression will they carry away from an exhibit that greets them with 'Eskimo Pies' from a phony igloo at the entrance — leads visitors past counters of imitation ivory trinkets, junk jewelry and T-shirts stamped 'Alaska' — past counters full of information about tourists accommodations, bush pilots and hunting and fishing guides (as though that were all that happens in Alaska) — past a murky, unimaginative base-relief map extolling (by a recording) Alaska's chief commerce centers — past a huge electric display to impress the public with the commercial possibilities (not a peep from the Fish and Wildlife Service) of the controversial Rampart Dam — with electric arrows flashing proposed routes of power hundreds of miles to the 'Lower 48.'

Finally, at the rear of this exhibit, I came to a sign pointing through a gate to 'The Eskimo Village (or "Native Village," I don't remember which not that it matters). I paid the small fee, thinking to myself, "Ah, at last! A chance to see a little of the REAL Alaska." But, alas, there was no village, only a stand with a few examples of native craft, a stockade-like enclosure hung with some moth-eaten wolf (?) skins, a couple of totem poles and some pungent pens containing a motley collection of huskies, a black bear cub and — of all things — a racoon (all miserable in the humid summer heat.)

Where were some great panoramic murals — in color — showing the great breadth and majesty of Alaska's shores and mountain ranges . . . ? Some artistic exhibits showing all the rich variety of native population, its history, its commerce — past as well as present . . . ? Where was the color movie — or, better yet, the real thing — of native dancers accompanied by the joyous sounds of their songs and instruments . . . ? Where was an exhibit of some of the Eskimo inventions so popular in America such as an ancient and modern 'parka'?

And, last but not least, where in all the posters and periodicals shown was the TUNDRA TIMES?

One bright spot in the Alaska exhibit was most neglected . . . A young Indian sitting beside one of the totem poles. Opening a conversation I learned that he was a Tlingit from Haines — a talented young artist who has won scholarships and awards for the fine work he has done in many fields, including textiles (using as inspiration the handsome art forms of his ancestors). Why were not some of his cultural achievements on display?

The New York World's Fair is not just a midway. Alaska deserves a far better showing.

Sincerely,

/s/ MARY BRYAN FORSYTH