



M. R. (MUKTUK) MARSTON—Champion of native rights—told the Tundra Times that the men who worked together to get the native claims settlement through Congress “did a better job” than he thought they would. “I have great hopes for the future,” he said. “. . . there’s a golden sunrise coming for the native people. . .”

‘Muktuk’ Marston— *For Natives at Constitution Convention*

By NORMA BOWKETT
Staff Writer

The man who organized the Eskimo Scouts during World War II and sought to convey land titles to natives during the Alaska Constitutional Convention in the mid 1950s, when few were interested in native land rights, expressed his pleasure today over the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Act of 1971.

“I think it’s delightful,” said Col. M.R. (Muktuk) Marston, reached at his home in Ancho-

rage by telephone. “After 103 years the native association put through a good organization and got an answer.”

At the convention Marston proposed an amendment which would give natives title to the lands on which they resided and those on which they had hunting and fishing camps.

Then, the Constitutional Convention record reveals, Marston made the following comments in support of his proposal:

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'Muktuk,' Friend of Natives...

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"... this is the reason I came to this convention. I waited two months to get here and I hope you will keep your minds and hearts open for a few minutes..."

"Delegate Peratrovich has talked about this, and the delegate I talked to during the lunch time says this has come up at every Indian or Native convention he has attended. It comes up because it is never settled

and every morning here we pray to the God above to guide us and direct us and I wish that His ambassador, Jesus, were here this afternoon and would show you the way to vote on this question."

Marston read paragraphs from a letter he had received from George Lockwood, an Eskimo whose home was at Unalakleet, to dramatize the plight of the natives.

"I have something to bring up myself in connection with our land problems, mostly of our fishing camps and our homes," Lockwood wrote. "Around here in Unalakleet, and also around outlying villages, we have fishing camps, from way back without anything to show in papers, claims or clear titles. . . I have not fished at my camp site for three seasons because some outfit is working in it. I would suggest strongly we need to have our fishing camps rights and settle it..."

"We don't have any clear title for our homes. . ." Lockwood continued, "we have been put aside as Natives too long. We young people would like to see our children grow up as any average American living citizen, living with equal rights as white men."

"This is the plea that has been coming across the desk of the white man ever since he came to this country," Marston told the delegates to the convention.

His amendment had nothing to do with aboriginal rights, he said, but merely cleared title for the Alaska native's camp site and home site.

"I have told you the story and it is up to you," he said. "Let your conscience be your guide."

But a number of the delegates were concerned that Marston's amendment would convey the entire public domain to the natives, and Marston's amendment failed by a vote of 16-34.

It would be another 16 years before natives would secure their land rights. During this time Marston spoke out for their cause at every opportunity.

Some ten years ago, for example, he came to the aid of the 138 Eskimos who went out and took ducks and appeared before an arresting officer, demanding to be arrested and turning in their own guns in protest of the arrest of two Barrow men who had been arrested for shooting ducks and geese for subsistence, out of season, as they have always done.

Declaring that natives hunting for food were exercising their traditional rights, Marston or-

ganized a drive to collect guns for the weaponless Eskimo hunters.

Today he sees a "golden sunrise coming for the native people—especially the Eskimo."

He doesn't agree with people who are worried about the natives having 40 million acres. "I'm very happy," he said. "I want to get it out of federal hands. The enemy is the federal government. If we don't get it the federal government would have the whole state as a wilderness area."

"Natives," he said. "That's us!"

There will be problems in implementing the settlement, he said, but "if the natives can make a worse mess than the white man has, I'd like to see it. The federal government has spent millions of dollars from far away Washington, D.C., and natives are still living in hovels."

One of his dreams now is that Alaskans will develop an agricultural base for their economy. Over the past ten years he has done experimental farming at North River, just back of Unalakleet, cultivating one acre of land.

He estimates that his land has produced 10 acres of potatoes to the acre.

Now, he said, he has asked Kent Anderson, the manager of Covenant High School of Unalakleet, who has been farming Marston's land for him, to put 50 acres of land under cultivation.

"I've been looking for a dirt farmer with missionary zeal and have found him in Kent Anderson," Marston said.

His farm, he believes, will supply all of Norton Sound and Nome with potatoes and will create hundreds of jobs for people.

And, he said, when the rest of the world will be in need of food, Alaska natives can "farm the ground, fish the rivers, lakes and ocean—full of fish—and be in fish 'n chips."

In fact, "Fish 'n Chips" is the title of a chapter he has added to the revised version of his book, "Men of the Tundra," which he has just completed.

This past week, during the fur rendezvous in Anchorage, Marston served as Grand Marshall of the annual Fur Rendezvous Parade.

He still works in real estate in Anchorage, does some writing, and works with the federation of natives there.

"You know Harry Carter, executive director of the Alaska Federation of Natives?" he asked. "He's a very influential fellow. I like working with him."