

TANAINA TALES

By EMILY IVANOFF BROWN

By Bill Vaudrin

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The mists of time have obscured the origins of some folklore partly because Alaska's Eskimos, Indians and Aleuts have been migratory in the past.

For example, even today the Eskimos of Bering Sound coast accept the invitations to their potlatches extended to them by Kaltag and sometimes Nulato Indians, and vice versa.

Because Alaska natives wandered far and had no written languages, their literature was oral.

Some say it is too late to retrieve any more native oral literature. This is not a correct statement. It is NOT too late as long as the native grandfolks still are living. They would gladly share their stories with others.

Why should they not be like the author of TANAINA TALES FROM ALASKA and gather folktales and folklore, too.

Our natives have the basic tools to work with already . . . a will and the English language. The people can preserve music, native games, philosophy, art, works of art, crafts, and folklore by recording them on the spot. And then the story gatherers will have the material to develop and at the same time enlarge their oral and written English usages.

As I read the stories in

TANAINA TALES FROM ALASKA, I identified several infiltrated themes and works; however, not many. Folklore never dies; like people, folklore travels into the unknown regions of Alaska.

I congratulate Bill Vaudrin, a Chippewa Indian, and Joan B. Townsend for taking time to preserve the Tanaina Indian folktales and the historical background of the Indians in the area of Iliamna. Perhaps Bill Vaudrin even found parallels to his peoples' heritage while working on the Tanaina Tales.

This book has a place in high schools and college libraries because it records an interesting and important part of Alaska's literature. The fact that it was printed as part of the prestigious THE CIVILIZATION OF AMERICAN INDIAN SERIES by the University of Oklahoma Press is noteworthy. This points up the importance of such tales and should serve as a spur for others to collect and record our stories.

The illustrations are interesting, because they are related to the historical works of Indian people who lived in the past.

As the native Alaska people receive compensation for their land, their cultural patterns will change drastically. How even more important it is, then, for us natives to do now what Mr. Vaudrin has done.