

## ***A Book Review—***

# **A Monument to the People of Yakutat**

By **WALLY OLSON**

**UNDER MOUNT SAINT ELIAS: The History and Culture of the Yakutat Tlingit** by Frederica deLaguna. Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology. Vol. 7 Washington, D.C. 1972. (In Three Volumes)

There are several features about this three-volume work that make it a marvellous monument to the People of Yakutat. First, it is their work but designed and executed by Dr. deLaguna. It was their cooperation, comments and information that made it possible. They added information that no one else could provide. Secondly, it is thorough.

When problems arise concerning the interpretation or translation of names and places, she has researched the problem in its entirety, oftentimes going back to various journals, linguists or others who may assist.

It is thorough not only in time, but in covering the culture as it was. For example, the last hundred pages are transcriptions and translations of their songs done by an ethnomusicologist.

But with a real respect for the people and an ethical commitment, she indicates that these are valuable possessions of the Yakutat people and belong to them.

This reviewer has been given to understand that all of the tapes have been preserved at Yakutat. Finally, it is written with an open and objective attitude. One comes away from reading this work with

a realistic respect for the people. She does not cover up their faults or shortcomings nor does she naively idealize them; she puts everything in its proper perspective.

This is an ethnography as it should be. This is the kind of anthropology that can truly be respected. Today, when people want to become "two day experts" on the cultures of the Native Peoples of Alaska by spending two days, two months or two years in research, this work stands head and shoulders above anything such people have produced.

Dr. deLaguna has been working on the archeology and anthropology of the People of Alaska since the 1930's and combines her skill and training in this masterpiece.

The three volumes may be out of print now, but this reviewer would suggest that all libraries in the State try to purchase a set. It is not only the definitive work on Yakutat and a pleasure to read, but shows what people can produce if they cooperate and do a complete study.

The people of Yakutat now have a great resource for handing on their cultural heritage to the young people who come after them. It would be marvellous if all the areas of Alaska could produce similar works. But until something better appears, this study will stand as perhaps the finest description of any place in Alaska.