

Historian William Oquilluk Addresses Native History Students

An Eskimo historian from Nome, William Oquilluk, recently addressed students of Alaskan Native History at Alaska Methodist University. He told of the events leading up to his decision to write the history of the Eskimo people of the Seward Peninsula and about the research behind the effort that took more than forty years to complete.

Mr. Oquilluk's book, nearly 600 pages long, will be published in late 1971. It will be illustrated with photographs of the region where different historical events took place and pictures of the remaining ancient sites, monuments, and markers placed in special areas of the Seward Peninsula and about the research.

There will be drawings executed by another Eskimo of the region who will illustrate the parts of the history that cannot be photographed. Negotiations are presently underway for release of the book, **WE ARE OF KAUWERAK, THE TRADITIONAL HISTORY OF THE KAWERAMIUT**, through the AMU press as soon as publishing arrangements can be made.

Mr. Oquilluk reported that he first began writing down the historical stories of his people when he was a young man.

The changes that had come, and were still coming to the Eskimo people were causing people to forget their history.

Sometimes they did not even have a chance to hear it. After the manuscript was started, it became necessary to travel long distances by boat, dog-team, it became necessary to travel long distances by boat, dog-team, and reindeer sled to seek out and talk to the old people who still remembered the history taught to them by their parents and grandparents.

Only the history that was the same as told by five different old people who did not know each other was put into the book.

Many years went by and the manuscript was nearly done. Then a fire destroyed the manuscript.

The job began all over again. There were five very old people left who had helped put the history together the first time. Mr. Oquilluk began again to rebuild the work that had been lost.

In 1967 the President of the Arctic Native Brotherhood sug-

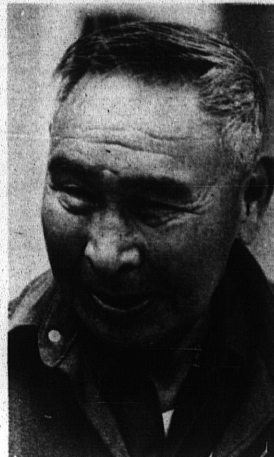
gested to Laurel L. Bland that she might be able to find a way so Mr. Oquilluk's work could be preserved, shared, and used in the education of Alaskan people.

From early 1967 a collaboration began between Mrs. Bland Barbara Trigg, Chairman of the ANB Education Committee and Mr. Oquilluk in a joint effort to bring hitherto unknown or unrecorded history of Alaskan Eskimos to the people of Alaska.

As a member of the Alaska Methodist University, beginning in September 1970, Mrs. Bland was able to aid Mr. Oquilluk to prepare a publisher's draft and to provide technical assistance in finalizing the manuscript and illustrations.

Mr. Oquilluk was born in 1896 at Pt. Hope where his Grandfather was employed by the whaling station. When he was about seven years old the family returned to Imuruk Basin.

Etorina, Mr. Oquilluk's grandfather, was responsible for transmitting the traditional history of his people to those who were under his leadership. From the



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time the family returned to Imuruk Basin until Etorina's death many years later, the grandfather carefully instructed Wil-

liam Oquilluk in the history and legends of the Kauwerak Eskimos.

In time, it became the grandson's turn to assume this responsibility. When the days of the kozghi (community house) ended, there was no longer any way to pass along the history in the old patterns of education.

Thus, the only way to discharge this duty and obligation was to write down the story of the past and preserve it for the young people who could then read it in English.

Mr. Oquilluk has another book in process. This manuscript is composed of the teaching stories that were told for entertainment in the old days.

"It is not history," Mr. Oquilluk said. "These stories tell about Eskimo ways of living and some of the things they believed. It will be interesting to read when it is finished."