


"I may not agree with a word you say but I will defend unto death your right to say it." — Voltaire

Tundra Times



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The Tradition of Whaling Festival

"It is very beautiful and impressive that a village like this honors its hunters in that manner." This is what a visitor to Point Hope said to the editor as the whaling celebration unfolded on the first day of its three-day duration.

"This is super fantastic," remarked lanky Charlie Suter using his well known manner of speech. Charlie is the friend of the editor for quite a few years. They had gone to witness the recent ancient rite. "It is very impressive," Charlie added.

And so it was. The Qaqrug (the whaling festival) was as impressive as it always was. Even with touches of modern innovations, the event was soul-stirring as ever. Its ancient origin and intent could be felt even through the aroma of hot coffee mixed with distinctive scent of traditional Mekiaq (whale meat cured in approximately 12 days until its taste becomes tangy). It was served to the successful whaling captains and their crews along with scores of villagers and visitors.

The umiaks (whaling skinboats) had been pulled up a few minutes earlier from the hummocked sea ice on to the northside grounds of the Qaqmaqtuug whaling society. (Ungasaqsikaag, the southside society, did not get a single whale this year. The two societies are, more or less, friendly whaling rivals). The unique crafts were elevated on the flat sleds set up on their sides according to tradition. The sleds had been used to haul the umiaks to favorable sites where bowhead whales were likely to surface on their way migrating toward the Canadian Arctic. The umiak paddles were set up along the outward flare of the gunwhale of the open boats giving the whaling crafts a dramatic distinction only to be seen at such events. Poles were raised at the bows of the three successful umiaks. The weapons were set at the ready. American flags were strung up on each of the poles. At the center pole, the Alaska flag was furled beneath the nation's flag.

Donald Oktollik, the village Episcopalian priest, came forward and gave blessing to the whaling captains and their crews and then to the villagers and visitors. It was reverent and dignified. The crews were served Mekiaq along with coffee, tea and doughnuts both Eskimo and Western style. Then the crowd was given the signal to help itself on the rest of the generous provisions of food.

That first day of the festival was brief, long enough to give the people time to eat, but the scene had been set for the following two days of feasting and light-hearted fellowship.

At the end of the ritual, the editor's nephew walked through the crowd along with a blond, youngish man who said, "Howard, I love your village. It is so unique and pleasant. And the people — they are so friendly and real." He paused. "And what I have just seen — it is so beautiful and impressive. It is beautiful that a village like this honors its hunters in that manner."

The speaker of the sage evaluation of the Point Hope ritual was none other than John Denver, the famous entertainer. Denver was with several people at the village filming a movie.

At the end of the two days of the three-day celebration, Charlie Suter and the editor boarded a plane to return to Fairbanks, Charlie to his pipeliner impacted general delivery letter job in the U.S. Post Office and the editor to his job with this newspaper.

Charlie reflected, "Howard, that whaling festival was super great."

Letters from Here and There

Regarding Fuel Shortages

United States Senate
Committee on Commerce
Washington, D.C. 20510
June 23, 1975

Donald S. Dorsey
Manager & General Supt.
Alaskan Operations
ANICA, Inc.
1306 Second Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98101

Dear Donald:

Thank you very much for your recent letter regarding fuel shortages in several areas of Alaska, due to new housing construction. I have long been aware of this problem, and have worked in the past in attempt to help alleviate this situation.

I can certainly understand your frustration, and your desire to see steps taken to solve this problem. I have contacted the agencies involved in this matter, and ask that they make themselves aware of this problem, and do whatever they can to help alleviate it. You can be assured that I will do whatever I can to be of assistance in this matter. When I receive a reply from these agencies, I will be

back in contact with you.

With best wishes,

Cordially,

Ted Stevens
United States Senator

Fuel Shortage Problems

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515
June 19, 1975

Mr. Donald S. Dorsey
Manager
Alaskan Operations
ANICA, Inc.

1306 Second Avenue, Rm. 408
Seattle, Washington

Dear Mr. Dorsey:

Thank you for providing me with a copy of your letter addressed to John Moore, regarding the anticipated fuel supply problems to the villages this coming winter.

The letter was well done, and I hope, will jar the executive branch into a coordinated effort to alleviate the problem.

I have contacted Commissioner Thompson urging him to act quickly on developing a plan.

Thank you for bringing your

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Historic Film— The Shadow Catcher



"PRAYER TO THE GREAT MYSTERY — SIOUX" — A photo taken by "the shadow catcher," Edward S. Curtis, in the early 1900's. Curtis and his historic pictorial record of the Indians he loved are the subjects of the documentary **THE SHADOW CATCHER**, tonight at 8:00 p.m. on channel 9 in Fairbanks. The show will be seen in Anchorage and Bethel on PBS stations soon.

By MARC OLSON

Historic films and photographs of Indian life in the west and northwest United States will be seen in Fairbanks this week, and in the Bethel and Anchorage areas in the near future. The presentation should be of interest to Alaska Natives.

"The Shadow Catcher," a special PBS documentary, is a historic record of American Indian culture, from the early 1900's films and journals of a man obsessed with catching the past before it slipped away.

"The Shadow Catcher," will be seen in Fairbanks on KUAC channel 9, on Wednesday, July 9 at 8:00 p.m. (tonight), and again on Saturday, July 12, at 10:30 p.m.

The documentary is the biography of Edward S. Curtis, who spent more than 30 years photographing the North American Indians because he was convinced that their memories and traditions would soon disappear forever.

The Indians called Curtis "the shadow catcher" because they understood his dependence upon light and shadow to make images with his camera.

Using a box camera and 14 by 17-inch glass plates, Curtis photographed Indian tribes in

New Mexico, Arizona, California, and Canada in the period between 1896 and 1930. In 1899 he was invited to join a major scientific expedition to the Bering Sea as one of the official photographers.

Over the years, he took 40,000 photographs, recorded some 10,000 songs on early phonograph equipment, and used a hand cranked movie camera to produce a film entitled In the Land of the Head Hunters.

He used motion pictures, still a primitive process, because he wanted to portray the Indian Culture and spirit as he saw it and dispell the popular misconceptions about Indian life. His work is the most extensive and ambitious anthropological project ever undertaken.

Footage from In the Land of the Head Hunters, still pictures, and a sound track containing original Indian music is used to recreate the culture Curtis saw in his years among the Indians.

"The Shadow Catcher" has been praised by such publications as the Village Voice, New York Post, and New York Times. Through its look into Indian life as it was in America many years ago The Shadow Catcher should provide insight into Native American culture today.