

# MAHYUQQIAK--LAST QUEEN OF UNALAKLEET

By EMILY IVANOFF BROWN

**NOTE:** Mahyuqqiak Myles Gonangnan, the subject of this story by Emily Ivanoff Brown, passed away in September 1971 at the age of 80. She left sons, daughters and numerous grandchildren at Unalakleet and Anchorage.

If an Eskimo could turn the years of history back a hundred times and lived in Unalakleet he would probably find himself to be a subject of the last reigning queen of the village, Mahyuqqiak, daughter of our last chief Nashoolook.

At her birth, her father named her Mahyuqqiak, which means a path to the heights. Later, she came to identify this physical concept with the gospel of the new faith she accepted—the Christian gospel.

Without malice, she recalled the day Rev. Axel Karlson arrived in her village.

"With the first missionary at Unalakleet, our Eskimo way of life changed," she recalled. "And my father saved his life when his men came to kill him."

During her long life, Mahyuqqiak had four husbands. She would often reminisce about the happiest times of her life with her family and husband, whom she called "Mr. Myles."

Mr. Myles was her third husband. Together, they had three daughters and four sons, Mrs. Archie Wheeler, Mrs. Ella Jensen, Laura Melgren and Collins, her only living son, survive her.

"I love him very much" she always said when she spoke of Collins. He and his wife Betty have two boys and a daughter, a girl named Mahyuqqiak.

Mahyuqqiak's first husband was Isaac Newman of St. Michaels, the adopted son of the former manager of Alaska Commercial Company. Her oldest daughter, Martha, married Peter Nanouk and they have eight children. A son, Henry, is deceased. At the latest count this Eskimo matriarch has 56 grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Many stories are told of Mrs. Mary Sinrock of Mary's Igloo, Mahyuqqiak's mother-in-law through her second marriage to Charles Anishawluk. In the year 1900 Mrs. Sinrock gave part of her reindeer herd as a gift to the stranded sailors of a whaling boat which wrecked at Barrow.

The herders drove the reindeer herd from Seward Peninsula to Barrow and when they arrived there the whole herd was butchered and fed to the starving men. This is why the people there spoke of "Queen Mary Sinrock."

In later years Mary moved to Unalakleet where Mahyuqqiak married Mary's son Charles. They had a child but both the father and baby died.

At this time, reindeer already prevailed at Unalakleet and the Lapp herders were transferred



**LAST QUEEN AT UNALAKLEET;** Shortly before she died Mahyuqqiak Myles Gonangnan reminisced about her long life and the days

before the missionary's coming changed Eskimo life in her village.

to that village to teach the Eskimos how to become herdsmen.

After her second husband died, Mahyuqqiak learned the methods of making Lapp boots. She furnished many mail carriers with warm reindeer legging Lapp boots. One of these hardy mushers became her third husband, Mr. Myles, one of the men who would have a part in transporting the precious diphtheria vaccine to Nome from Nenana in 1923.

In that year, the precious vaccine went from village to village via dog team trying to avert an epidemic in Nome. When Mr. Anagick brought the package in from Kaltag, Alaska, Mr. Myles rushed his team to Shaktoolik, 28 miles West of Unalakleet on the Bering Sea Coast.

From Shaktoolik, Henry Ivanof relayed the vital package to Mr. Leonard Seppela at Bonanza, Alaska. Later that year, all the participants in the rescue mission received gold medallions from the President of the United States to signify their bravery.

Shortly before her death, Mahyuqqiak had the gold medallion and planned to hand it down to one of her grandchildren.

During her long life, Mahyuqqiak was an active participant in the work of her Covenant church. She served as deaconess, president of the sewing circle and in a number of non-Church positions to help all kinds of people.

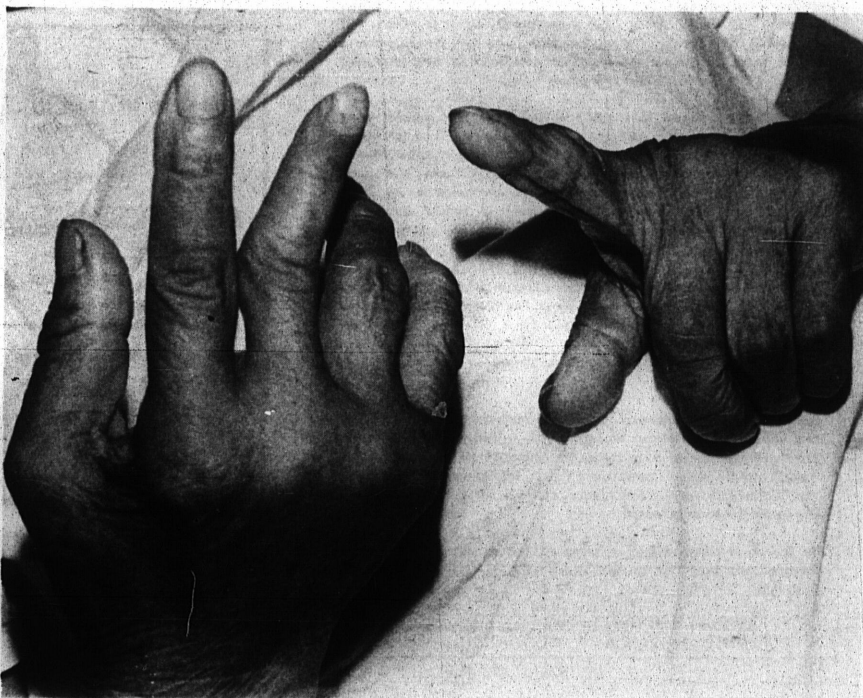
She directed the Eskimo Mother's Club sales as an auctioneer almost every year, with humor and in the interesting way. During elections, the Ma-

yor would ask her to open the meetings with a prayer.

Once, the lasso entangled securely around her middle finger while she was driving a deer and left it detached from her hand. She bandaged it herself,

without a splint. The result was a stiff finger.

One of the funny stories Mahyuqqiak related to us was how she taught the Catholic orphan students how to pray at supper. These children were on



**STORY TELLING;** With her hands, Mahyuqqiak told the stories of her childhood and the many incidents of her life at Unalakleet. On one

nand, a crooked finger is her souvenir of an accident with a lasso which detached the finger. She repaired the injury herself.

their way to St. Mary's school on the Yukon River.

Not knowing the children were Catholics, when they sat down at the table Mahyuqqiak said, "We ask God to bless the food first, this way."

She put her own hands together in locked fashion. At this moment, her own stiff finger pointed skyward and she wasn't aware of it. She directed the children to close their eyes. Then she prayed.

After saying Amen, Mahyuqqiak checked each child and found that every one of them had pointed his middle finger upward, imitating hers. Trying not to laugh, she explained her handicapped finger to the children. Then, she left the table and laughed.

In later life, Mahyuqqiak campaigned for a republican Senator of Washington, D.C., Howard Pollock, though she was a sincere democrat. "We all strive to be loyal to our government for one goal and one country," she replied to the offer.

Mahyuqqiak, Mrs. Myles Gonangnan, fulfilled her duty to others as a leader of her community. Her unselfish attitude will be remembered by her friends children.

Although her rightful heritage as a princess did not become a reality, the meaning of her Eskimo name, a path to the heights, led other people upward.