

Alaska Native Language Center News

For half a century or more, John Fredson, who died in about 1947, was a leading figure in the Gwich'in community. He was one of the first Gwich'in people to acquire a formal education and led the movement to have a reservation established around the town of Arctic Village. In 1923, Fredson recounted to the linguist Edward Sapir a series of legends and personal accounts which have now been retranscribed, translated, and published by the Alaska Native Language Center in a series of six booklets.

The stories, told in the traditional style, range from sacred myths about the creation of the world and how things came to be as they are, to reminiscences of Fredson's travels in the Gwich'in region during the first years of the twentieth century. Fascinating and nostalgic to today's reader are the descriptions of life in Fort Yukon and Arctic Village in those days, including one story about the month-long Christmas celebration held at Fort Yukon, and another about a winter trip made by Fredson, a missionary, a physician, and a guide from Fort Yukon to Arctic Village by dogsled.

Sapir wrote down Fredson's stories in phonetic spelling. In 1973 Katherine Peter of ANLC retranscribed the stories into the modern Gwich'in spelling system. The booklets also have English translations prepared from Sapir's rough translations. It is possible that somewhere there still exist the old phonograph recordings that Sapir made of Fredson's story-telling, and ANLC staff hope to track them down someday. For the present, the stories are available in booklet form from The Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Alaska 99701, for \$5.00 per set, including the translations.