

May have been 117 years old —

Matilda Oscar, Yup'ik Matriach passes on May 18

Matilda Oscar, the Yup'ik matriarch known as Grandmother Matilda to 65 grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren, died on Sunday, May 18, in Anchorage.

Grandmother Matilda may have been 117 years of age at the time of her death. Born sometime between 1862 and 1874, she recalled the arrival of Moravian missionaries to Bethel in 1875. It was the missionaries who decided she would celebrate her birthday on July 1.

Grandmother Matilda raised Oscar Kawagley, Calista Corporation President, from age two when her daughter died of a ruptured appendix. She taught Kawagley the traditional Yup'ik way of living, but also encouraged and supported him to seek education.

"The white man's way of life is here to stay. You must prepare yourself for it and learn to live in their world also," Kawagley recalled as being frequent advice from her.

Although she was the eldest resident of Anchorage and among the most senior of Alaska's citizens at the time, Grandmother Matilda attended the Tundra Times Banquet last October. She was enthusiastically



MATILDA OSCAR

applauded by guests when she appeared at the Sheraton Anchorage Hotel to hear her grandchildren dedicate the Howard Rock

Ballroom in the Calista-owned hotel.

Grandmother Matilda leaves a son, Jesse Oscar, and daughter, Martha Sara, both of Bethel; grandsons Oscar Kawagley, now living in Anchorage, and Nils Sara, Luther Oscar, Alexander Oscar and Amuel Oscar, all of Bethel; and granddaughters Florence Johnson and Rose Modderman of Anchorage, and Marita Snodgrass, Martha Jack, Alice Crisswell, Fanny Oscar and Carrie Anvil, all of Bethel, and Amelia of New York.

She is also survived by 43 great-grandchildren and by 11 great-great-grandchildren.

Funeral services and burial were held in Bethel. She was a life-long member of the Moravian Church.