

# Blatchford fights for Native allotment

by P. E. Hyslop

Tundra Times

What began as a simple claim for land has turned into fourteen years of bureaucratic squabble and Charlie Blatchford is caught in between. Picketing in front of the Federal Building in Anchorage on May 21, Blatchford explained the frustration he has endured since he filed for 160 acres under the Native Allotment Act. Yukon Island is what he wanted but the State had interests there too.

Under the Native Allotment Act of 1906, Natives can receive up to 160 acres of land if they can prove subsistence use.

Blatchford said he moved to the Homer area when he was seven,

started seal hunting and camping around the island when he was twelve. BLM approved his subsistence use of the land but the state wasn't convinced.

Blatchford is an Inupiat Eskimo who was born in Golovin, a village on the Norton Sound. His father lived completely off the land but when he and Blatchford's brother drowned when they were fishing, Blatchford and his family moved to Homer. He was only seven. Eskimos are nomadic people and Charlie said he used the Island like a nomadic hunter.

"In the white man sense I didn't use the land. I just camped on it," he said, meaning he did not live year 'round on the land.

In the normal procedures for

claim of Native land from the government, only BLM has to approve it, but the state stepped in and stopped Blatchford from receiving his claim. Like a beautifully packaged present with nothing in it, the land allotment has left Blatchford angry, disillusioned, and frustrated.

Yukon Island is a small dot in the water across from Homer. It is approximately one mile long, one mile wide. Though insignificant in size, it is rich in culture because of archeological finds on the south side of the Island, according to the Assistant Attorney General for the State Department of Natural Resources.

In 1930 an anthropologist found five "distinct cultural periods" on the south side of the island. The state wants to preserve those sites.

Blatchford says he can't find the so-called archeological finds and his attorney says the sites are under water from the 1964 earthquake. Blatchford's claim doesn't fall anywhere near the archeological claims.

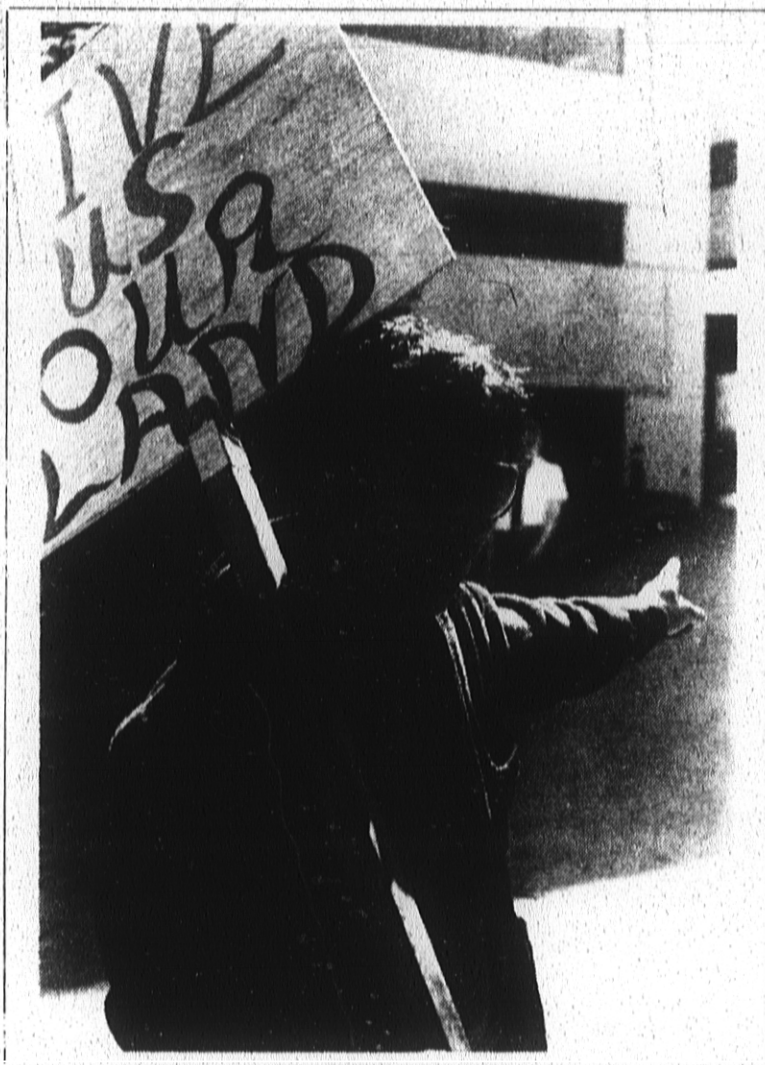
What it may lack in culture sunken beneath the sea, Yukon Island makes up in location: it falls within the state selected townsites for the Katchemak Bay Park. Hotchkin says it has potential recreation use.

What awaits Blatchford?

He has to go to a BLM hearing and convince them that he used Yukon Island for subsistence purposes and they again have to approve it. But the state might reconvene again and fifteen years of battle will begin all over again, until someone gets tired of it, said Hotchkin.

"I'll never get my land," says Blatchford. His pleas for assistance have gone unheeded by his corporation, IRA, Governor Sheffield, Senators Stevens and Murkowski.

"The system hasn't helped me one damned bit."



Charlie Blatchford gestures toward the Federal Building in Anchorage, indicating where his displeasure originates. photo by Jim Benedetto