

Friends remember:

Chester Seveck Dies at 91

Chester Seveck died January 16, 1981, in Fairbanks following a long illness.

Chester is well remembered by many people. Four of them who were close to him, spoke of him here.

"There are so many wonderful things that they have done together, my Mom and Chester," Mary Dirks, of Fairbanks, Chester's step-daughter said. "Such a wonderful life they lived. I will never forget. They made everybody happy. Chester and his second wife Helen had traveled so many places. He was a great guy. He did work for 66 years, 46 years of reindeer herding and 20 years with Wien. He was a lay reader at the Episcopal Church in Fairbanks. His first wife was Tillie. Chester married her in July 12, 1912, at Point Hope," Mary said. "She died. Chester married my mother Helen on May 14, 1959."

Chester's step-daughter Mae Jacobson, of Kotzebue said Chester was really active and always like to do things, liked to work and was a very happy person.

Chester's surviving wife Helen Seveck is Howard Rock's Sister. Howard Rock is the founding editor of the Tundra Times.

Frank Whaley, a pilot for Wien since 1935 was asked by the Wien brothers to help do something to get people up to Alaska and take a look out in the villages and travel here in the state. "One of the things I remember Chester talking about the most was that Wien invented tourism in Alaska. That occurred around 1950-51," said Greg Galik, Director Services Training for Wien in Anchorage.



FRANK WHALEY

"Frank took the project on and started taking pictures of the place and found Chester and Helen out there on their reindeer herd operation," Galik said. "He asked Chester and Helen if they would like to be

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Chester Seveck A long and well traveled life

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ambassadors of good will for Wien and the state.

"I remember Chester talking about his first trip to Honolulu, there they were in their parkas in Hawaii. Then they went to Europe and all over the U.S. They traveled everywhere telling people to come up to see Alaska. He was in many Wien ads and interviews. His first real look outside and he always spoke about that. He really enjoyed it."

"I can remember him as a person who really loved people. When the tourists would come off the airplane he would always be there without fail and shake everybody's hand, say hello and keep them spellbound telling stories about Eskimo life in the 1930's and 40's reindeer herding," Galik said.

"I'll always like his favorite saying which I'll never forget. 'For 30 years I herd reindeer, and now for 30 years I herd tourists. No difference.'" "He was a real nice guy, just a wonderful fellow," said Greg Galik.

The pilot, Frank Whaley retired as executive vice-president for Wien, but before retiring had introduced tourism to Alaska. With the introduction came Chester and Helen Seveck.

"I was the fifth pilot for Wien and started flying for them back in 1935 based out of Nome," Whaley said. "I flew for a number of years before I started with photography. I was

managing director of the Alaska Visitors Association for a couple of years. I went from that to promotion work and retired as assistant-vice president of Wien.

"We were associated for many years. When she



Chester Seveck sipping Saki with two Geishas in Japan.

Tundra Times File Photo

started working for Wien, I was tour Manager there. Chester worked for us each summer. He'd usually start no later than the first of May until about the 15th of September as Tour Guide..

"He would meet all flights upon arrival at Kotzebue and he managed the Native-Eskimo portion of the program in Kotzebue. This included the Eskimo blanket toss and dance, which they would put on. Chester was a pretty good dancer, one of the very best up there and he continued to dance right up until this year.

"His wife Helen also acted as an assistant tour guide and she was with him in the various dance programs and the various events they would put on for the tourists," said Whaley.

During the winter months Chester would accompany Whaley on tourist promotion activities for Wien. These included trips to Japan, Hawaii, Mexico and the lower "48" states, doing personal appearances for travel agencies and tour operators, and did a number of T.V. shows.

"We've been on a number of T.V. shows, Art Linkletter, Steve Allen, Groucho Marks, quite a number of national T.V. shows," said Whaley.

"I imagine he's been photographed as much as any Eskimo in the world, I believe," Whaley said. "He was right on deck for all the visitors at Kotzebue for all these years and always wearing colorful costumes, parkas that he and his wife wore. And everyone would line him up for a picture!"

"I did most of the photography for Wien for quite a number of years. Among other pictures are of the blanket toss, a color photo that you've seen in a poster quite often, and that was taken in Kotzebue. That picture has been used quite extensively. Both Chester and Helen show up in that blanket toss picture.

"I met Chester in about 1935 or '36. I started flying in northwestern Alaska around 1933. I met him out at a reindeer herd

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that he had charge over in the Kobuk area at that time. I used to stop in and visit him occassionally, supplying items to his reindeer camp and used to help him during the winter quite often.

He was a wonderful, wonderful guy. I've worked with him under many conditions. I made several motion pictures, all together I filmed 16 motion pictures on Alaska. Thirteen were documentaries on Eskimo Life. Some of these were made at his reindeer herd of over 5,000 animals in the Selawik area. I lived at his camp for a number of days and got to know him very well.

One thing that may be of interest, to satisfy my own

curiosity as much as anything else, reindeer herders are noted for being excellent navigators. I used to check him out. For instance, in New York City we'd be calling on tour operators, doing pretty long shows, T.V. appearances and one thing or another, and I'd come out of the building with Chester and and I'd say, "Well, Chester, which way do we go now to get back to our hotel?" And he'd take a reading from the sky and look around and invariably he could point out... "hotel back this way!" everytime! He never got confused even when he's in a big city."

"He was a wonderful, wonderful guy," Whaley said.