

"I may not agree with a word you say but I will defend unto death your right to say it." — Voltaire



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The Wildwood Affair

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Something of a controversy has developed over the Alaska Federation of Natives acquisition of the Wildwood Air Force Base, and Senator William L. (Willie) Hensley's proposal that the facility take the place of Mt. Edgecumbe as a high school for Native youngsters. The following is a letter of reply by Senator Hensley to Sitka Sentinel editorial on Hensley's proposal. The Sentinel editorial is printed elsewhere in this issue of the Tundra Times.)

April 13, 1972

Editor
Sitka Sentinel
Sitka, Alaska 99835

Dear Editor:

I have just read your editorial of April 10, 1972, regarding the position of the AFN on its desire to see the Mt. Edgecumbe school operations transferred to Wildwood. I hope you will give me the courtesy of a reply to your readers.

Let me first say that I cannot disagree with you in that the goal of the State should be to provide education for rural students in areas near home or in their community. As a matter of fact, this is the objective of the Department of Education, the State Operated Schools, and the AFN. The Bureau of Indian Affairs is quite willing, as the agreement between the BIA and the State indicates, to allow the Department of Education to lead the way in terms of what directions the State education programs should take. You may be aware that several millions of dollars have been provided through the sale of bonds for the construction of schools in rural Alaska; but the funding nowhere meets the need for secondary classroom space in rural areas of the State.

I think you are not unaware that the concepts in secondary education for rural students in Alaska has changed substantially since 1966. At that time, it was absurd to certain educational and political leaders of the State that it would be proper and beneficial, from an educational standpoint, to have regional high schools, even in a community such as Bethel with 2,000 people. Now, the State is coming around to the view that there should be village high schools holding perhaps 70 students, inasmuch as they are discovering that the cost of providing for dormitory facilities is increasingly expensive — \$4,000.00 per student.

Consequently, in 1967, the decision to redistribute close to \$10 million of Federal funds that were to go into Mt. Edgecumbe is an outdated decision, in that we were providing plans for dormitories to be built in Fairbanks, Anchorage, Sitka, and one or two other urban locations. As you are probably aware, the leadership of the Tanana Chiefs Conference recently suggested that perhaps it was not a wise decision to build a large dormitory for Interior students to attend school in Fairbanks and live in a large dormitory.

Likewise, it is my understanding that several Southeastern Legislators are rather concerned about the fact that the Sitka dormitory is proceeding along; and these Legislators, apparently reacting to their constituents, see no real necessity for a dormitory in Sitka for Southeastern students since most communities have their own high schools. It is unlikely that many parents from the North will want to continue sending students to Sitka for a high school education.

For your information, even the delegate from Southeastern Alaska to the Alaska Federation of Natives Board of Directors agreed that it is high time that Mt. Edgecumbe be phased out, and soon. Furthermore, in discussing the Mt. Edgecumbe school with certain Southeastern Legislators, they agreed that they would not have their own children attend school in such a facility. The BIA could not, in fact, tell me the age of the facility, although they did know that the Island was transferred to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the mid-forties.

We, in AFN, view Wildwood as a transitional period of education for rural Alaska students, inasmuch as we fully intend to push for additional high schools in various parts of the State so it will not be necessary to have such locations at Wildwood for young teenagers who should be educated closer to their communities and close to their parents. However, the facilities at Wildwood are far and above superior to those at Mt. Edgecumbe.

The opportunities for attendance at the Community College at Kenai; the educational benefits of being close to the population center of the State; the opportunities for the development of a new curriculum for the students; and the opportunities to get away

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Olin Dies from Brutal Beating Wounds

ANCHORAGE — Thirty year old Attla Olin struggled for more than two years to recover from a brutal beating in downtown Anchorage which left him partially paralyzed, blinded and unable to speak.

It appeared he was well on the road to recovery, when he died suddenly Thursday, April 13, at an Anchorage Nursing Home.

Olin was on his way home from a date with a girl friend on a cold day in April, 1970 when he was attacked, robbed and beaten into unconsciousness.

Friends who found him thought he was overcome by drink and took him home. It was only the next day, when he did not show up for work at the on-the-job training program of the Federal Aviation Agency that someone checked his room at YMCA and found him still unconscious.

Six weeks later, Olin woke up in the Alaska Native Medical Center, blinded and unable to speak because of brain damage, but the young man from Koyukuk began recovering from the blows, very slowly.

Around January of 1971, he was admitted to the Glenmore Nursing Home in Anchorage for further treatment.

His sister, Mrs. Elisa Jones of Fairbanks, visited him two days before his death and thought "he was really improved."

Shortly after that visit, Olin began convulsing and never came out of it. An autopsy showed that death was apparently due to the original blows to his head.

"He had been doing just fine," said Mrs. Jones.

The staff of the nursing home had also noticed a marked improvement. "Olin was coming along quite well," said Dr. Glenn

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Poem— Strange Woods

Already the woods is grey with dusk.

The branches rise, sway with the breeze.

A bird calls; a moose track in the soft earth.

I have seen none of this before.

Everything seems to say:

"You are a stranger here."

I believe this road, with the run of weeds

Down the middle, leads to the slough.

I snared rabbits there last winter.

Willow shoots were like spikes in the snow.

This evening, I was searching for the lake.

"Where the road crosses the top of the hill,

Look out across the spruce.

The lake is off to the right,

Lying deep in the valley."

But I saw no sign of water;

And the geese will be flying soon.

And tramping through the brush, I would have been lost.

Not even a trace of a running stream.

But there's a damp smell — like a swamp —

In the air.

I watched all the way back from the hilltop.

Not a game bird in the trees; nor a rabbit in the brush.

Once I heard an unknown animal cry.

I walked deeper into the woods . . . nothing.

This evening everything seems to call me a stranger.

By ROBERT N. ZIMMERMAN

Sitka Sentinel Editorial

The proposal of Rep. Willie Hensley to use the surplus Wildwood Air Force Station as a replacement for the Mt. Edgecumbe school has us a little confused.

If Mr. Hensley's views are representative of a sizable segment of the Alaska Federation of Natives, it would indicate Native thinking on education is bogged down in a rut.

No one can deny that the Mt. Edgecumbe school has shortcomings. But to suppose that they could be alleviated by transferring the location of the school to Kenai evades the basic problem.

The transfer of the Wildwood Station to the AFN for use as an educational facility presented the Natives with a great opportunity. To use it merely to replace an existing school would be unimaginative, to say the least. Mr. Hensley proposed, and the AFN Board of Directors agreed, that the Native Association should explore the possibility of taking over administration of the proposed Wildwood school under contract with the BIA.

If the BIA is "intrigued with the idea," as Mr. Hensley suggests, then the BIA should be equally receptive to the same proposal applied to Mt. Edgecumbe.

Aside from that you have on the one hand an established educational plant converted from a surplus military base, and on the other a surplus military base that hasn't yet been converted. Sitka has the edge as far as higher educational opportunities are concerned and has the additional advantage of a Native Health Service Hospital.

Our concern about Mr. Hensley's proposal to move the boarding school is based on more than these factors.

The Mt. Edgecumbe experience should have proved conclusively that surplus military bases are poor material for conversion to boarding schools. And more importantly, the concept of a segregated boarding school for Natives, regardless of location, has generally been discredited educationally as anything but a last resort.

Substantial progress is being made in Alaska to get Natives and other public school-age students in outlying areas into high schools closer to their homes.

The regional high school plan for Sitka, for instance is moving into high gear. Bids are expected to be called by June 1 this year on the \$2,055,000 housing facility near Sitka High School for the Southeast area Natives who are to attend the integrated school. The State Department of education has entered a contract for design of the \$1,450,000 expansion of Sitka High School to provide the additional classroom space that will be required.

The facilities at Mt. Edgecumbe are run down, to be sure, but Mr. Hensley should recognize that the reason that funds to upgrade them were cut off was to speed the transition to regional or local schools for Native children.

Maybe it hasn't had that effect, but surely the AFN should

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