

# Native American languages part of Minnesota heritage

By JUDY VICK  
University of Minnesota  
News Service Writer

Minnesota is a Dokota (Sioux) word meaning sky-blue water, or more literally, reflection of the sky in the water.

Manitoba is an Ojibway (Shippewa) word meaning straits of the spirit. Minne-tonka, Mendota, Bemidji, Biwabik, Winnibigoshish, Wayzata—words from both these Native American (American Indian) languages are part of the daily life of all who live in this sky-blue water land and are used in daily conversation by many of the approximately 33,000 American Indian people in the state.

Yet until several years ago neither of the Native languages of

this area were formally taught in schools.

In 1969, when the American Indian studies department at the University of Minnesota was established, classes in Ojibway language were begun and in 1973, the Dakota language program was started. These languages are now also taught in some public schools which serve a relatively high number of American Indian students.

Members of the American Indian studies faculty at the University have been active in working for state legislation to establish such bilingual and bicultural programs throughout the state.

In order to understand the culture of a people you need to know their language—the

primary reason for offering the courses, according to Rose Barstow, Ojibway teacher, and Carolyn Schommer, Dakota teacher.

"Minnesota is the ancient homeland of the Dakota and therefore I think the teaching of the language is important from a historical viewpoint," said Chris Cavender, assistant professor of education and history at Macalester College. But is also a living and viable language," he said.

Cavender is a member of the Dakota program advisory board which includes people from the community and the faculty.

Barstow and Schommer, like the other three people who teach Ojibway and Dakota at the

University, are not college graduates with the usual teaching credentials. Instead they learned their subject as they grew up in Indian communities and have taken intensive training to prepare themselves as teaching specialists in the University system. The linguist working with the program is Timothy Dunnigan, a non-Indian associate professor who has a doctor of philosophy degree in anthropology.

Linguists and Indians who know their languages realize the absurdity of some suggestions by non-Indian people that one course in Indian language would suffice. Dakota is as difficult from Ojibway as English is from Chinese. Each comes from a different linguistic family. Ojibway is from the Algonkian language group and Dakota is from the Siouan language group.

About half of the students enrolled in the University course are Indian and the classes are offered at beginning, intermediate and advanced levels.

As many different dialects as possible are offered and each teacher is from a different geographical area. Barstow is from the Mille Lacs reservation and the other Ojibway teacher, Angeline Northbird, is from the community of Ponemah on the Red Lake reservation. Schommer is from the Upper Sioux community at Granite Falls, Minn.; Marie DeCorah is a Santee Sioux from Niobrara, Neb., and Becky Flute, who also teaches Dakota, is from Sisseton, S.D.

Unlike many University classes, the language classes do not use the lecture-test format. Because Ojibway and Dakota are primarily spoken languages which were not written down until the coming of the white man, vocal participation is emphasized.

"Mere class attendance is not enough to learn the language," Barstow says. "Students must overcome their fear of making mistakes in front of others or 'sounding silly.' Shy students have to work especially hard."

In both classes, students are strongly encouraged to avoid English and to speak in the language they are learning at all

times. They are also encouraged to go out into the Indian communities and practice.

Culture is incorporated into the classes as Schommer teaches her students the complex system of naming Dakota children and Barstow spends one day each week on culture—some days on Indian culture and some on non-Indian cultures represented by the students in her class.

One of the most difficult things for many non-Indian students to learn is that the language is an integral part of the culture; that concepts from the Indian view of the world cannot always be readily translated into Judeo-Christian ideas or modern English words.

With the difficult sound patterns of the Dakota language and words such as minibashkiminasiganibad-agwingweiganibitosijigan-iwishkobakwezigan (which means blueberry pie in Ojibway) Indian languages may appear difficult for non-Indians to learn.

"It's probably more difficult to learn a new musical scale than to learn new sound patterns in a language," Dunnigan said.

"If they have an interest, they get it real easy," Barstow said. "If they are there just for the credits, they don't learn."

"Non-Indians usually enroll first out of curiosity or because they need to meet their college's second language requirement," she said, but some of them develop a real interest.

"My greatest hope is that young Indians will learn the language so they can learn the truth about themselves from their elders. One of the things I try to bring into this introductory course is identity—for the non-Indians, as well as the Indians. That's why we spend some days on German or Scandinavian culture. I love all my students. They are beautiful, every one of them."

## \$1.9 million for Alakanuk school

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) has hired an Anchorage architectural firm to design a new elementary school for Alakanuk. The school may be built next summer.

Senator Gravel, D-Alaska, expects Congress to approve \$1.9 million to allow the school to be built next year.

The present school at Alakanuk is falling into the Yukon River.

Plans for the new school call for a building with five classrooms, a kindergarten room, a service building, a place to store water and oil, and a place for the teachers to live.

## BIA study on supply cost to coastal Alaska

A Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) study is now underway to find out what it costs to supply small villages on Alaska's northwest coast.

The report will help the BIA decide if it should continue the kind of service now provided by the ship North Star III, or look for another way to get food, fuel and many other things to the villages.

Senator Mike Gravel, D-Alaska, wants the shipping service to continue because "it is a vital service which is the life-support system for the many villages which are cut off from population centers." He will support a request for funds to continue the supply program.

A study last year by the BIA said the program should be continued, but said that the North Star III will last only four or five more years.

The BIA is now studying the entire program. Their report will help the President's office decide what to do about the North Star III.

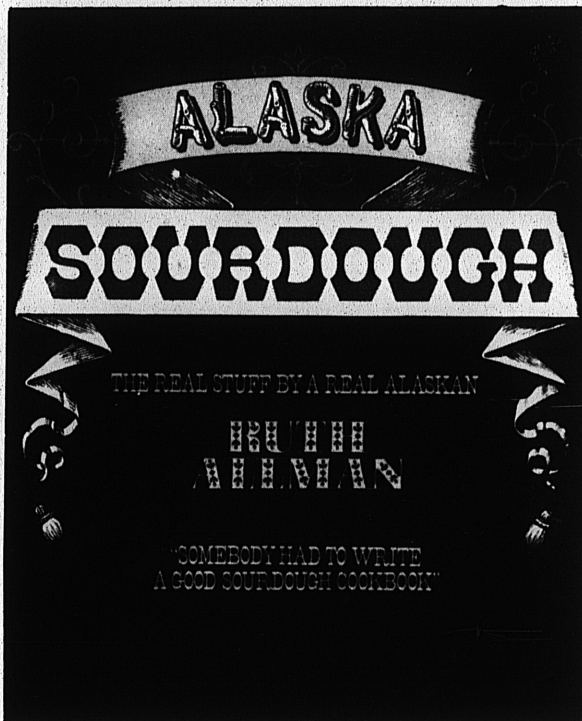


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### PUBLIC NOTICE

#### DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

The 1975-76 second revision of the Alaska State Plan for Drug Abuse Prevention is available for examination and comment. Please contact the State Office of Drug Abuse, Pouch H-01D, Juneau, Alaska 99811 if you are interested in receiving a copy of the plan. Francis S. L. Williamson  
Commissioner



## New cookbook "Alaska Sourdough" published

Pioneers and armies march on their stomachs and, according to author Ruth Allman, sourdough was the substance that fueled the pioneering spirit.

Ms. Allman's new cookbook, ALASKA SOURDOUGH, says the fermented dough used as a leaven in making bread was mentioned in Wycliff's 14th century translation of the Bible. The same substance was later called Chuck Wagon Bread in the Southwest, Spook Bread in Kentucky and other local names in German, Africa and frontier areas throughout the world.

But sourdough needed Alaska to give its name a special class of people, the rugged pioneers, the real "Sourdoughs."

Ms. Allman reports that sourdough's portability and popular flavor made it an ideal staple on the Alaska frontier and helped make it a common

denominator among the pioneers. And, she concedes, the leaven gained special popularity as a vast improvement over baking powder—widely rumored to be an anaphrodisiac.

But ALASKA SOURDOUGH, just released by Alaska Northwest Publishing Company, is essentially a book on how to make, store and use sourdough. Ms. Allman, a lifelong resident of Alaska, includes almost 100 recipes that cover all the basics, hotcakes, bread, cakes, other desserts and syrups and sauces.

For good measure, she throws in a recipe for sourdough beer but warns that it produces one sourdough flavor she cannot recommend. It's the only one.

ALASKA SOURDOUGH, 190 pages, is available from fine bookstores or from the publisher, Box 4-EEE, Anchorage, Alaska 99509. Single copies are \$4.95.

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