

Walrus Carnival at Savoonga . . .

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St. Lawrence Island and the U.S.S.R. in earlier days.

As recently as 1947 hunters from the island met their Siberian counterparts in skin boats in the middle of the sea between the two land areas. But since then no Eskimo hunters from the Russian side have been seen by the Alaska hunters, though the St. Lawrence men venture as far westward in quest of the walrus as ever.

It is believed that the Russians have moved many of the Siberian Eskimos from their villages to the largest settlement in the area, Provideniya, and set them to work in industries more sophisticated than hunting. (Provideniya is the terminal point mentioned in the application of Alaska Airlines, now on file with the Civil Aeronautics Board, for certifi-

cation of an air route between Nome and Siberia.)

Senator Gruening, who visited the St. Lawrence Island villages in the course of investigations of what needs to be done to improve the conditions under which Alaska Natives live, was impressed with the fact that the answers for such remote and relatively unspoiled communities as Gambell and Savoonga should probably be quite different than for villages on the Alaska mainland where there is a more persistent influence of the white man's culture and way of life.

Village educational, health and living conditions should be improved, Senator Gruening said, without any effort to turn the Eskimo toward a new economy based on cash wages and new pursuits. This is

possible on St. Lawrence Island and perhaps in a few other locations such as Nunivak Island and the high Arctic because the walrus and other animals on which the people have always based their way of life are still abundant and contacts with so-called "civilization" are infrequent and slight.

The senator said he was impressed with the obvious fact that the people in the St. Lawrence villages are happier than most of their fellow-Americans, although they do not have much in the way of material wealth or even comfort. In three days on the island the senator did not hear one complaint or see one evidence of jealousy of one person or group for any other.

"The Eskimo," Senator Gruening said, "possesses all the attributes we say we admire but which so few of us exhibit. He is cheerful, patient, honest, hard working, generous and kind. There are no finer people anywhere."

The senator did discover a few conditions which need improvement. All improve shortcomings of the white man's government rather than any lack on the part of the Eskimo inhabitants. The senator said he would move immediately to try to obtain for Savoonga without further delay:

1) A new school building. A total of 125 pupils in grades one through eight are attending classes in split shifts in a 20-year-old two and one-half room wooden school building;

2) A village water supply. Efforts to drive a well have failed, with the result that villagers must melt ice to obtain water in the winter and must bring a supply from a distant creek in the summer. All must be boiled;

3) Efficient equipment for clearing snow from the air strip. The old "cat" provided by the Division of Aviation of the State of Alaska cannot cope with snow falls as heavy as those experienced during the recent winter, which caused air service to be curtailed for nearly a month. Though this is a state rather than a federal problem, Senator Gruening said he would urge Governor Walter J. Hickel to take appropriate action;

4) A public health nurse. There are no resident doctors or nurses on St. Lawrence Island, which means that — 850 men, women and children are without health care except for occasional itinerant nurse visits. In accidents or other emergencies patients must be

airlifted to Nome or Kotzebue, and sometimes the weather does not permit this. Senator Gruening proposed that local girls from each village might be trained as nurses and stationed at Savoonga and Gambell the rear round.

Savoonga is a young village, having been started only in 1917 as a reindeer herding station. All of the people there came from Gambell. Because their average age is lower, the people of Savoonga are causing something of a population explosion, although rapid increases are evident in both villages.

Birth control advice and devices are made available by the government, but there are some problems. The "pill" is considered not the answer among people such as the St. Lawrence Island Eskimos because of the rigid requirement for daily use to be effective in preventing unwanted pregnancies. The intrauterine device or "IUD" is effective, but because of the long interval between visits by doctors or nurses qualified to insert them a mother often finds herself pregnant again without intent following the birth of a wanted child.

Civilization on St. Lawrence Island is quite old. There are archeological evidences that people lived on the island 2,000 years ago. An ancient village site, Kookoolik, exists five miles east of Savoonga.

The Walrus Carnival included contests in snow shoe racing, women's kick ball, dog team racing, blanket tossing, retrieving seal and tug of war.

In the last event, a team of seven burly airmen from the Air Force station at Northeast Cape was finally dragged across the marker line by seven relatively slight Eskimos who must have averaged 25 pounds lighter per man, this despite the fact the airmen had a slight downhill pull. It was explained that the airmen were slightly out of condition through being indoors all winter. Others said the Eskimos always win the tug of war, as their hands get very strong from their hunting and hauling exploits.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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Wrangell Sends Two Delegates To Convention

April 28, two delegates, Patricia Prather, President of Wrangell's Chapter, and Zona Landstrom, accompanied by their Advisor, Mrs. C. Sturdevant, flew to the State Convention in Juneau.

The weather was perfect. The delegation arrived in Juneau in time to do a little shopping before going to the Breakwater Motel where they stayed with delegates from the other Chapters. Approximately eighty members and advisors came to the Convention from Ketchikan, Sitka, Juneau, Douglas, Nome, Anchorage, Cordova, Bethel, Dillingham, Eielson, Fairbanks, Fort Richardson, Glennallen, Haines, Homer, HOONAH, Wm. E. Beltz Vocational Schools.

The Convention opened with a Get-acquainted Brunch at 8:30 AM. Meetings of the morning began soon after the voting delegates meeting. The welcoming address was given by Karen Edmondson, President, and Mr. Harvey King, Principal, Juneau-Douglas High School. The response was by Patricia Prather.

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