

# TRADITIONAL 'QASEQEQ' BUILT BY TUNUNAK

## Ancient Style Log, Sod Community Center Revived by Villagers

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Must our rich and valuable Eskimo culture be the complete victim of the saying, "All things must pass?" It is obvious that its chance of survival into modern times is almost nothing to one, at the rate efforts are being taken to preserve it. What is more, we are lacking too many of the records needed to prove that this and that did exist or happen in the past.

Also, we know from our personal experience that the last decade has been most destructive to our Eskimo Native culture. This 10-year destructive period has so badly crippled our traditional way of living that it has demolished our need for the dog teams, kayaks, sod houses and other parts of our way of life.

To some who block this process of destruction, an idea was introduced to rebuild an already totally demolished traditional Native community sod house in the village of Tununak.

The construction that followed last summer was an historical event. The project was undertaken with the funds, with hourly paid Native employees and a Native film crew to document the progress with sound and color.

The qaseqeq, a traditional Eskimo Native community multi-purposed sod house, once the center of all village activities, is a rapidly vanishing scene from our Alaskan Native villages. The Tununak qaseqeq, now over a century old, has been being destroyed by old age for the last four years.

Like anything else in our slowly modernizing Native villages its vanishing process was natural and no one seemed to care that it would disappear forever.

Perhaps just a year or two more of this self-destruction would have left Tununak with no interest whatsoever in rebuilding or preserving its most valuable evidence of the Native cultural heritage.

Although, prior to this article, no efforts have been made to consult the public outside of Tununak about the project, we have had some overwhelming praise from many individual Alaskans. To the benefit of our self-consideration for the Native cultural values, this accomplishment has given us more ideas about the preservation of some of our existing Native items.

The idea of preserving the the Tununak qaseqeq originated with our school board members. From this stage it was then introduced to the village council where it was discussed as to what progressive steps were to be tried.

For many past generations, our Native custom has let us help one another without the need to demand for the reward for any job accomplished. But rebuilding of our qaseqeq had to be done according to the demands of modern living.

The discussion of the idea was concluded to do the project with the hardest problem toward the completion of this plan which was then still considered as only a dream.

Presentation of the plan to Operation Mainstream and the Office of Economic Opportunity

was pretty well considered. These two sources granted the village the sum of \$3,500 to work the project into completion. And the motion picture coverage was provided by Skyriver.

Rebuilding of the qaseqeq commenced in July with 11 Native employees and the film crew of two Natives. The work involved the complete replacement of the old wooden structures from the foundation to the roof.

Progress on this project was rather slow going since the techniques and the tools used were that of our Native tradition. The logs for the structure were towed in by boat from as far as 20 miles up north.

Some logs to be used for the layer between the frame and its dirt covering were painstakingly split in half with axes and the Natives made wooden wedges. In spite of this slow process, the work was completed months after the starting date.

The traditional grand opening celebration took place Oct. 25. The celebration began with the feast for all the villagers, including some invitations for our neighboring villages Toksook and Mekoryuk.

Many varieties of Native food, ranging from aquataq (Native Eskimo ice cream) to boiled seal meat, were served with the addition of store goods.

The feast was followed by our all-time favorite activity, the Eskimo dance. Along with introduction to the Eskimo dancing in our new qaseqeq, the audience was informed of the future use and preservation of the qaseqeq in years to come. The dances were overwhelmingly enjoyed by participants of the young and old generations.

The Skyriver motion picture crew that provided the coverage was there to record all the action with a 16mm sound movie camera. This movie will soon be available for public viewing, under the category of documentary.

Until then, we the Tununak villagers would like to express our most sincere thanks to the following people and firms for their concern and cooperation toward making the preservation of the Tununak qaseqeq possible.

The Tununak school board head, Dick Lincoln and fellow board members for the idea, Tununak village council president Andrew Chikoyak and fellow council members for their willingness and concern to accept the idea and back it up.

Operation Mainstream and the Office of Economic Opportunity for their generous donation of \$3,500, John Angarak for his assistance on the communication between the village council and Operation Mainstream, the qaseqeq employees, Jimmy Inakak, George Kanilak, Victor Kanilak, George Hooper, Oscar Usueam, Jack Anganak, Tommy Anganak, Paul Carl, Jents Lynn, Billy Lynn and Tommy Kusayak for their time and effort and the Skyriver film crew of Andrew and Joe Chikoyak for full coverage of the qaseqeq project.

Thank you all for the job well done. You all have participated in the greatest first step toward the preservation of rich valuable Native culture.



THE TEA BREAK of the Qaseqeq employees seen through the new entrance.



PAINSTAKING PROCESS of splitting of logs involved two men with the axes and some wooden wedges to accomplished the job.

## Olanna Elected

Mr. Melvin Olanna was elected president of the Experimental Arts & Crafts Center at the recent monthly meeting (November 21st).

Mr. Olanna, a well known artist with studios in Anchorage, works primarily in sculpture, jewelry, and graphic arts. He has been active in the development of the Experimental Arts and Crafts Center and contributed many innovative ideas to the program planning.

Mrs. Olanna, born in Shishmaref, studied at the University of Alaska and the Institute of American Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Mrs. Saradell Ard Frederick, professor of art at the Alaska Methodist University, was elected vice-president. Mrs. Francine Lastufka was re-elected secretary-treasurer.

Mr. Ronald Senungetuk, professor of art at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, was elected to the Board of Directors.

Mr. Senungetuk is an outstanding art educator and artist, a former Fulbright scholar and a graduate of the School for the Rochester Institute of Technology.



THE ORIGINAL fire pit below and the main entrance above modified to serve as the place for the oil heater and the passage for the chimney.