

**Native Genuine Markers Symbolic—**

# Arts and Crafts Merchandise Tags Carry History

One of the best courses in Alaska Native history can be gotten from reading tags on the merchandise from Alaska Native Arts and Crafts. The Markers were originally developed to certify the items as genuine Alaska made. Now ANAC has gone a delightful step further to explain the history of the art:

**ESKIMO CARVED IVORY BILLIKENS**

"Billikens are interested creatures—

Happy and gay in all their features

From pointed head to curly toes

They're carved of ivory, by Eskimos.

Diomedes, Shishmaref, Cape Price of Wales.

They'll bring on a smile—it never fails.

This bilikien is a good luck charm

Intended to keep you from harm

Just rub his belly twice a day And you, like he, will be happy and gay." —M.L. Mc.

The rhymed lines of a former school girl clerk of ANAC briefly tell the story of Billikien, one of the most popular of Alaskan souvenirs.

In spite of the controversy, most of the stories told about billikens point toward their Alaskan advent sometime between the turn of the century and the year 1913. Often associated with their appearance is the year 1910. The first Eskimo billikens appear to have been carved either at Nome or Little Diomedes Island.

Stories are also told of trading for billikens with ivory carvers on the Siberian side of the Bering Sea. Billikien's arrival in Alaska must have been comparatively recent, since no evidence to the contrary has been reported from the excavations of old village sites. The early Eskimo people had "good fortune" pieces, but as far as known at this time, none were billikens.

**KUSKOKWIM WOOD FACE DOLLS**

Numerous streams tumbling from the glaciers on the western side of Alaska's Mt. McKinley join in the low lands to form the slow, moving, wide and meandering Kuskokwim River.

The low areas of this tundra country surround the river town of Bethel. Continuing on to where the Kuskokwim flows into the Bering Sea there is a great marsh land, the nesting grounds for millions of migratory water fowl and a home for mink, muskrat and other fur bearers.

It is from the Eskimo homes on this lower Kuskokwim drainage area that such authentic Alaskan dolls, as you now possess, are handcrafted.

Most of the dolls are very individual in nature and the following description will never do for all of them.

The father has a part in this craft. He secures the skins and carves the faces. But it must be mentioned that some of the Eskimo mothers and daughters are just as accomplished at sculpting the driftwood faces as spinning sinew or sewing the skin clothing. This wood is usually spruce, alder or cotton wood.

The ruff of the parka hood may be composed of wolf, fox, land otter or wolverine. The parka itself will more than likely be made of muskrat or rabbit, but may be reindeer fawn or squirrel.

The small tail trimmings and fur tufts which appear on the women's parkas relate back to the time when the Eskimo

people believed them to be a means of escaping from evil spirits.

Pants and mukluks are usually sewed of seal skin. The crimped soles of the mukluks are formed of soft winter bleached seal or hard waterproof skin of the bearded seal (oogruk).

The hands drawn up inside the sleeves of the parka often do not show. Occasionally a doll will have skin-mittened, wooden or even bird claw hands.

A word of caution should be added in that the seal skin and other products used in the crafting of this Kuskokwim doll is a delicacy in the life of any moth. Unless the doll is constantly moved about, stored in moth crystals or mothproofed, it will very likely be damaged by these pests.

**CEREMONIAL MASKS**

Generally speaking, masks worn by the Alaskan Eskimo

may be grouped under two heads. Those worn by any active tribal participant in a festival or ceremony and those worn only by the shaman.

The basis for mask wearing stems from the belief during mankind's early days that animate things had a dual existence, possessing the ability to alternate man and animal form as they wished. The manlike form was termed the "inua."

It represented the thinking side of the animal. At death this spiritual or thinking part departed from the body and became its shade. Therefore, during the various people's ceremonies, spring festivals and preparations for the hunt, the participants would wear a mask representing that particular totem or animal crest which they desired to propitiate.

During the dance and associated ceremonies, the wearer would become imbued with the

spirit of the animal represented and according to the fancy of legend, they became the spiritual representation of the beast, the bird of the animal of the sea symbolized by their mask.

The second group of masks, rather than being totemic and common to the individual village participant, were the property of the shaman. To better understand masks of this group, it should be realized Eskimo held that everything inanimate, as well as animate, was possessed of a shade.

The shaman gave form objectivity to these shades by creating masks to more realistically represent them.

The shamans' interpretation of a perplexed tribal member's dream for example, would necessitate the invention of a highly imaginative and often grotesque semi-human being, whose mask would serve as a mythical resi-

dence of the shade.

A description chant, song or story was not sufficient to enlighten the confusion of the dreamer. It was necessary to create a mask—a visual, materialistic symbol to substitute for the less easily understood word explanations.

Eskimo masks from the Arctic and Northern Bering Sea are carved of driftwood and skeletal whalebone, and are usually in the form of a human countenance.

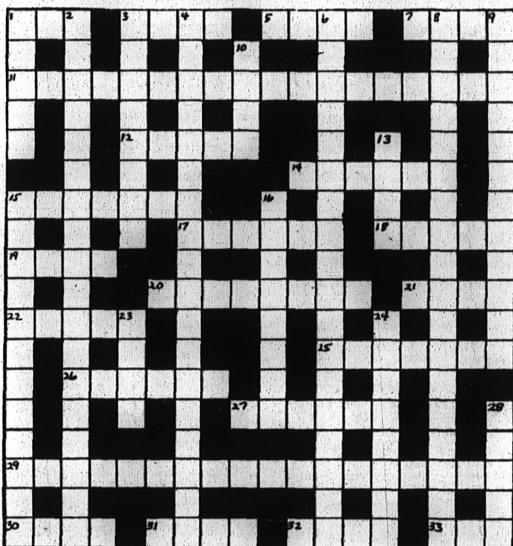
Masks of the delta villages between the Yukon and Kuskokwim River and along the adjacent islands are more elaborate.

They visually portray a primitive supernaturalism with the central mask figure representing the spirit body—while surrounding it are the major appendages of some creature represent-

(Continued on page 8)

**Crossword Puzzle**  
Qanereyarat Qeraruataaleriit  
(No. 7)

This bilingual crossword puzzle is designed for those who are literate in the new Yupik writing system developed by the Eskimo Language Workshop at the University of Alaska in College. The answers are in Yuk Eskimo. The correct answers to this puzzle will appear next week. Piluqaqina.



Across  
Akitmun

Down  
Acitmun

- |                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. your husband                   | 1. He opens his eyes, wakes up.               |
| 3. a little                       | 2. There was a lake.                          |
| 5. place, land                    | 3. drinking place, fountain                   |
| 7. its skin                       | 4. It had been their landing strip, airfield. |
| 11. He wouldn't care to see them. | 6. They were going to (about to) listen.      |
| 12. bluff                         | 8. He didn't build a bathhouse.               |
| 14. her cooking pot               | 9. He sure was afraid.                        |
| 15. two big bones                 | 10. river                                     |
| 17. foreign object in the eye     | 13. asking for permission                     |
| 18. Beg!                          | 15. We read. (past tense)                     |
| 19. Look here! Behold!            | 16. I'm making sourdough.                     |
| 20. my child                      | 23. aunt, father's sister                     |
| 21. leg                           | 24. in his own world                          |
| 22. He sharpened it.              | 28. here                                      |
| 25. shadow                        |   |
| 26. He digs it.                   |   |
| 27. his arm                       |   |
| 29. I don't care for coffee.      |   |
| 30. Quit! Stop!                   |   |
| 31. name                          |   |
| 32. his father (var.)             |   |
| 33. surface                       |   |

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