

88-49-161

Native arts activities in Alaska

Moses Wassillie, recorder

Jeff Kennedy, moderator

Fairbanks, Alaska

1978

Series: Potlatch series

Jeff Kennedy said the program would have highlights about presentations about Native art programs in Alaska. The presentations occurred on May 18 in Anchorage during the Conference on Alaska Native Arts. Art professor Glenn Simpson told the conference that the university now stresses instruction in western European traditional art. Simpson said as their program expands the consensus of their faculty the addition of courses such as the history of Alaska Native art are very logical directions to go. They are geographically equipped to specialize in programs like this which are very unique. He believes they should be specializing as does Mike Krauss. Simpson said it is obvious that they should expand into areas that are unique to their interests and locality.

Jeff Kennedy said that Roger Kunnuk comments that the system accounts inadequately for Alaska Native art teachers. Kunnuk said he considers himself a qualified teacher but he does not have the papers that say he is a teacher. They are tired of Native teachers supplying instruction and not getting paid. He is a Native artist, but others get paid more than he does. He said Native artists are professional instructors and do not get paid the full amount as instructors.

Jeff Kennedy said Deborah Neidemeyer coordinates the Village Art Program out of the Rural Educational Affairs Office at the University of Alaska. Neidemeyer said the idea is to go to the villages and get artists or crafts people to teach other people in the village what they know. Many of the teachers are elders. They look for people who can teach any aspect of the material culture. They recognize dance and music as art but they are just dealing with material culture the first year. They define art as broad as fish nets, sculptural carving, fish hooks, fish wheels, snowshoes, sleds and also beadwork and skin sewing. Anything that is material art. They ran four classes this semester. They covered a lot of topics and not just limited to the name of the class. They also brought in two artists for the Festival of Native Arts. One was Willie Cherepanov and the other was Billy Lincoln. They had demonstrations. The Village Art Program is also concerned about documenting dying forms of art through photography or film. They also keep a record of who the Natives artists are. They go out to the villages to see if the villages are interested in an art course and to see if anyone is interested in teaching it. They verify that the person teaching is a qualified artist. She talked about the length of the classes. They provide some materials. The courses are often team taught. In Arctic Village they invited the entire village. Four people taught a variety of skills. They don't require anything of the teachers except

that they be good artists and hopefully good teachers. So far they have been traditional forms but they are open to innovative forms. They don't have money for travel for instructors. She talked about how instructors are chosen. They ask the coordinators to take a picture of the instructor's work so they have a record. They keep a list of the students.

The inviting in dance song from Barrow; Myra Robert of Venetie sings songs of tribute (Folkways Records)

Jeff Kennedy said Richard Burmeister coordinates the teaching of Native Arts in the Nome public schools. The program operates with funds provided by the Indian Education Act and Title 7. Nome was listed as the number one program in Indian Education. Burmeister hopes his graduates will go on to study at the University of Alaska Extension Center in Arts and Crafts or to Indian Art School in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Burmeister sees his role as finding what the people want and providing it for them. Burmeister said the administration in the school district allows a parent board to make the decisions. Their administration is open minded. There is also a student board. They are the ones that are making the decisions about projects. It is his job to make sure that it is functioning. The students may request something. They are dealing with arts, crafts, and culture (cultural heritage). They can deal with fine arts such as print making, welded sculpture, soap stone carving, basket making, baleen baskets, and skin processing. This year they are starting out with their own reindeer herd through the help of Larry Davis. They deal with any aspect that the students want to learn or the parents want them to learn. Harry Koozaata, from Gambell, is the instructor at the high school. Fred Armstrong from Buckland teaches dogsled construction. In the grammar schools Tamara Berg from the Golovin area is working with students. They had a representative from the Indian Education Board visit them. The visitor asked Burmeister to work with other Indian education programs around the state.

Song by Peter LaFarge

Jeff Kennedy said Karl Heinmiller, Jr. directs the Haines Indian Arts, Inc., a non-profit corporation started by his father. Heinmiller said the number of people that work fluctuates especially seasonally. There are about 76 percent Native people and 25 percent white people working there. Most of the Native people are also commercial fisherman so they fish during the summer and carve for them during the winter. They sell directly out of their shop. Everything goes back into the company. As soon as some of the people have been trained they leave the non-profit and go work in other areas. A lot of them have been successful locally such as Nathan Jackson. There are between eight and twelve working now depending on the time of year. The Indian Education program in Haines was starting to grow very rapidly. The first year they were sending their carvers into the school to teach to carve. He talked about some of the carvers. He talked about their dance group. They have been performing for tourists in the summer and it carries on the art work in the winter. He talked about the costs of travel for the group. He talked about the use of the Chilkoot Center for the Performing Arts. It was created in 1967 and is used by them and the Arts Council. They received a grant last year for operation. They are trying to do more of the art in public buildings. This provides more opportunities for them to do larger things. He talked about the effort of the Little World Museum of Man. They have been asked to build a tribal house for their display. They gave them the plans for the house they did in Haines. They were commissioned to do the art work for the house. They were sent wood to do the carving.

They have done works throughout the state. He talked about the totem pole they did located in Kake. In the last year they have been expanding the media that they work in. They have done silver engraving of the old style, sculpture in wood, some work in soapstone and talc, and expansion into the graphic field. For the tourist trade they have taken almost all of the designs they used and made them into silk screens. This will be the first season that they have had a lot of prints for sale.