

88-49-165

Ivory carving in Kotzebue reported by Rosie Ramoth.

Jeff Kennedy, moderator

Fairbanks, Alaska

1978

Series: Potlatch series

Unidentified songs

Rosie Ramoth describes ivory carving in northwest Alaska as an art that is remaining a talent of an older generation. Today an ivory carver is viewed as a master. Classes are held to train adolescents carving. More often than not when the training is over the interest is too. There are a few exceptions but the commercial concerns have found that the older established artists are the only people in the business of ivory carving. This is viewed by the masters of the art as unfortunate, but unavoidable. This only adds to the many setbacks which are being encountered by these artists. Kotzebue is situated such that it is necessary they must import their ivory from other villages. Because of this and other complications from the recent marine mammal act there is a shortage of ivory. The mammal act makes the selling, purchasing and trading of raw ivory legal only between Native Alaskans. This has caused a reduction of ivory available to the carver who is used to buying raw ivory from local store owners. One local trader is Mabel Wahl. She said she thinks the mammal act affects carving adversely. No one in business who handles ivory to supply the local carvers. Most of the carvers do not hunt. They have no way of getting ivory except to buy it somewhere. It is difficult to buy a tusk at a time. They have to buy from Diomedea or Wales. She didn't think they got enough from Pt. Hope for sale. Ramoth said the carver has to find his own source of ivory and then faces an intricate situation. He has to have a list of supplies and a supply of money when the ivory is available or hunt walrus himself. Ramoth spoke to a local carver, John Evok, Sr. He carves bone and wood, also. Evok said you can't get raw ivory anywhere. He said it is easy to sell his carvings, but it is even easier to sell the raw ivory. Ramoth said raw ivory sells for five or six dollars a pound. Two walrus tusks can now sell for 150 dollars, but double their value when they are put on the market as finished products. Ramoth said a balance must be reached between the conservation of the walrus and the conservation of Eskimo art.

Public service announcement

Song by Buffy Sainte-Marie

Jeff Kennedy said they would like to get some Alaska Native music. He asked if the Native American child has the right to be taught in the language spoken at home. He said the federal government says yes and provides money for instruction in Native languages. In August Athabaskan students lost that right because someone failed to meet a deadline. The Fairbanks

Native Association (FNA) blames the school district and is suing the school district. The executive director of FNA, Georgiana Lincoln, gives the Native association's side of the story. Lincoln said the lawsuit began because they received notification from the American for Indian opportunity, LaDonna Harris, about some money available through Title 7 Office of Education for Bilingual Programs. This had already been submitted or notification sent to school districts. They tried to find out where they could get the forms to submit. The school district said they would get them the forms. They worked on the proposal and got it finalized. They thought they had submitted it to the proper channels. They went to principal of Lathrop High School. The parent committee chose the lower Koyukon dialect. They chose that because of the number of boarding students coming into Fairbanks coming from that region. They presented this and it was approved. The superintendent said it had to be approved by the school board. They were told they had a good chance of obtaining the funds. The school board would not listen to them because they needed 24 hour notification. She talked about the difficulties she encountered with the school board. She thought the pipeline impact funds could be used for the program. She talked about the effect of incoming students. Lincoln said there are instructors available to teach in the lower Koyukon dialect. She said the older people want to see their young people continue their Native culture.

Song by Buffy Sainte-Marie