

## **Community Life / Native Lives & Traditions**

### **Rise of the Alaska Native Brotherhood**

**By Tricia Brown**

The Alaska Native Brotherhood was born in 1912, when a dozen Native men first gathered in Juneau at the offices of the superintendent of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Alaska. The group included Tlingit, Tsimshian and Haida men who stood for the preservation of Native culture, and against discrimination of any kind. They would carry on this fight without any outside funding during a time when the Native Alaskans did not hold American citizenship and were barred from certain restaurants, bars, and theaters. “We cater to white trade only,” a sign proclaimed. Others were worse: “No Indians or dogs allowed here.” The ANB swore to make change.

Chartered in Sitka that year, the ANB and its counterpart, the Alaska Native Sisterhood, would mature to become one of the most powerful groups in the territory and state. The ANB stands today as the oldest intertribal organization in the United States.

In Article 1 of the ANB Charter, the founders spelled out their objectives in creating the fraternity: “The purpose of this organization shall be to assist and encourage the Native in his advancement from his Native state to his place among the cultivated races of the world, to oppose, to discourage, and to overcome the narrow injustice of race prejudice, to commemorate the fine qualities of the Native races of North America, to preserve their history, lore, art and virtues, to cultivate the morality, education, commerce and civil government of Alaska, to improve individual and municipal health and laboring conditions and to create a true respect in Natives and in other persons with whom they deal for the letter and spirit of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and laws of the United States.”

The founders were twelve Christian Native men who had been educated at the Sheldon Jackson Training School, a Presbyterian mission school that later became a liberal arts college. The charter group included Peter Simpson, Sitka (originally from Metlakatla);

Ralph Young, Sitka; Chester Worthington, Wrangell; James C. Johnson, Klawock; Paul Liberty, Sitka; Seward Kunz, Juneau; Frank Mercer, Juneau (originally from Klukwan); Frank Price, Sitka; George Field, Klawok; Eli Katanook, Angoon; James Watson, Juneau; and William Hobson, Angoon. Marie Orson of Klukwan served as the organization's secretary and Andrew Wanamaker of Sitka was named Honorary Founder.

In 1914, the Sitka founders built a meeting place overlooking the harbor. The ANB Camp No. 1 Hall, now on the National Register of Historic Places, is still an active meeting place for ANB as well as other social events.

Throughout the 20th century, the ANB and ANS would spread to other towns and villages, and scores of other camps would arise. Annual conventions brought members together, further strengthening their power as consumers, voters and political candidates.

Though the organization largely represented Southeast Alaska, when their voices reached national lawmakers, their cause concerned the rights of Natives throughout the state. One of their first challenges was seeking citizenship for Native Alaskans, which they finally achieved in 1924.

Through the years, leaders emerged from within generations of families such as the Hope, Williams, and Paul families. Among the ANB's many influential leaders was Roy Peratrovich (1908-1989), originally from Klawock. A former territorial and state legislator, Peratrovich was selected as ANB's Grand President for five consecutive years, from 1940 to 1945. Later, he served on the organization's executive committee and was honored as President Emeritus. With his wife, Elizabeth, who was Grand President of the ANS in 1945, Peratrovich and others campaigned for the passage of Alaska's anti-discrimination bill, which passed that year. Elizabeth's speech before the Alaska legislature is still remembered for its brilliance and plainly stated truths. She died in 1958, however her work in civil rights has been remembered annually since 1988, when the state designated every February 16 as Elizabeth Peratrovich Day.

In the decades that followed, Roy Peratrovich's letters to the editor and public speeches kept the ANB's remarkable history in the minds of all Alaskans, especially during the early 1970s, when debates over Native land claims were on the table.

In a December 1971 letter to the *Anchorage Daily News*, Peratrovich challenged another writer's notion that the ANB was merely a social organization. He countered with details of its distinguished history.

"In the early 1920s, this organization fought for the Native people of Alaska to be recognized as citizens," Peratrovich wrote, "not only of the territory but the United States of America. This, of course, was realized in 1924 when Congress passed an act making all Indians citizens. This also included the right to vote. In this instance the Alaska Native Brotherhood financed a lawsuit when an Indian woman was denied the right to vote. Fortunately, the courts were fair and we were upheld.

"The ANB fought for the rights of our Indian children to attend public schools. In Juneau when 11 of our Indian children were dismissed from public school because of their Indian ancestry the Alaska Native Brotherhood went to court and forced the school system to admit Indians.

"The organization was successful in having the workman's compensation law extended to all Natives in Alaska. It fought for the right of Natives to receive the aid to dependent children. The organization was successful in bringing about the extension of the old age pension to the Natives of Alaska. It was successful in having the Indian Reorganization Act amended to include Alaska. This was done in 1936. It was also successful in obtaining a large appropriation for Native hospitals in Alaska.

"Through the efforts of this organization, Alaska now has one of the best anti-discrimination bills of any state. This organization fought for this over a period of years."

In 1977, as he addressed the organization's 65th annual convention, Peratrovich recounted the accomplishments of the founding fathers when ANB was young:

“My first observation of our leaders performing on our behalf was during the early '30s while working on a missionary boat called *The Princeton*,” Peratrovich remembered. “We stopped off in Juneau for a few days. Unbeknownst to me, a bill was up before the Legislature which would have prohibited the sale of liquor to our Indian people. I heard about our leaders appearing before the Legislature, and I went to the legislative chambers to hear their testimony. Mind you, these men were the products of the teachings of Christianity at Sheldon Jackson School. They were taught to look down upon the partaking of alcoholic beverages and smoking as being very sinful. As strongly as they were opposed to the use of alcoholic beverages, they opposed the legislation because it would take away a part of our rights as citizens of the territory. They testified before the Territorial Legislature and called upon lawmakers to extend that privilege to our Indian people. In other words, although they were opposed to this, they argued that this is a right that should be extended to all citizens. The bill was defeated, and as a result, we can get just as drunk as our White brothers. These men fought for principles and continued to do so until they passed away from our midst.”

In December 1971, with the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, twelve in-state regional business corporations and multiple Native village corporations were formed to manage money and land that Alaska Natives received in the settlement. In addition, regional nonprofits were established to address health and other social concerns for Natives across the state. In the aftermath, the membership of ANB and ANS did not lose their usefulness or desire to serve their people. More recent efforts include helping to restore the Chief Shakes Community House in Wrangell, supporting totem preservation and education, and assisting in the passage of the Alaska Historic Preservation Act.

**((Include as sidebar:))**

**Birth years of the Alaska Native Brotherhood founders, per 1910 and 1920 Federal Census records:**

George Field, Klawok, born November 1871

Peter Simpson, Sitka (originally from Metlakatla), born July 1870 in Canada

Ralph Young, Sitka, born 1878

Chester Worthington, Wrangell, born July 1873

James C. Johnson, Klawock, born March 1886  
Paul Liberty, Sitka, born August 1883  
Seward Kunz, Juneau, born 1880  
Frank Mercer, Juneau (originally from Klukwan), born about 1876  
Frank Price, Sitka, born June 1886  
Eli Katanook, Angoon, born May 1886  
James Watson, Juneau, born 1877  
William Hobson, Angoon, born June 1890  
Honorary founder: Andrew Wanamaker, born January 1884

#### **LINKS:**

##### **Alaska Native Brotherhood:**

<http://www.anbgrandcamp.org>

##### **Alaskool:**

“A Close Look at the ANB”:

[http://www.alaskool.org/projects/ANCSA/ARTICLES/ADN/Close\\_Look\\_at\\_ANB.htm](http://www.alaskool.org/projects/ANCSA/ARTICLES/ADN/Close_Look_at_ANB.htm)

History of The Alaska Native Brotherhood:

[http://www.alaskool.org/projects/native\\_gov/documents/anb/anb\\_2.htm#HISTORY](http://www.alaskool.org/projects/native_gov/documents/anb/anb_2.htm#HISTORY)

##### **ANB Camp No. 1 Hall, National Register of Historic places:**

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/feature/indian/2005/alaska.htm>

##### ***New York Times*, Peratrovich obituary:**

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=950DEED9123BF933A25751C0A96F948260>

##### **Account of 1945 Territorial Senate debate and Elizabeth Peratrovich speech:**

<http://www.geocities.com/alaskanativebaskets/Elizabeth.Peratrovich.html>

#### **VISIT THE LIBRARY FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

Alaska’s libraries include plenty of audio, visual, and written material about the Alaska Native Brotherhood and its work. Visit your local library or go online to see what’s available in holdings all over the state. Take these simple steps:

1. Access **SLED** (State Library Electronic Doorway) at <http://sled.alaska.edu/library.html>.
2. Click on the listing for **ALNCat** (the Alaska Library Network Catalog) to view the Basic Search window. Go to the Keyword field, and type in **ALASKA NATIVE BROTHERHOOD** or **ALASKA NATIVE SISTERHOOD**.

## **MORE READING:**

Alaska Native Brotherhood. *The Alaska Fisherman*. Serial publication. Juneau, Alaska: Alaska Native Brotherhood, 1923-1932.

Alaska Native Brotherhood. *The Voice of Brotherhood*. Serial publication. Juneau, Alaska: C.E. Peck, 1954-1976.

Alaska Native Brotherhood. *Raven's Bones Journal*. Serial publication. Juneau, Alaska: ANB Camp No. 2, 1993-

Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood, Inc. *A History of the Founders and Past Grand Presidents of Alaska Native Brotherhood, Grand Camp, including Photographs of Each Member, 1912-1987*. Alaska: Alaska Native Brotherhood, 1984.

Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood, Inc. Alaska Native Brotherhood, Alaska Native Sisterhood 82nd annual Grand Camp Convention, October 24-29, 1994, Andrew Hope Building, ANB Hall, Juneau, Alaska. *Native Protocol and Dignity: Honor and Respect for One Another*. Alaska: The Camp, 1994.

Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood, Inc. *Minutes of Proceedings - Alaska Native Brother & Sisterhood, Grand Camp*. Serial publication. Alaska: The Camp, 1912-

Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood, Inc. *75th Diamond Jubilee Grand Camp, November 9th - 14th, 1987, Sitka, Alaska*. Sitka, Alaska: The Camp, 1987.

Hope, Andrew. *Founders of the Alaska Native Brotherhood*. Special Limited 1st edition. Sitka, Alaska: Hope, 1975.

## **ARCHIVAL MATERIAL:**

**Alaska Native Organizations Photograph Collection, 1912-1971.** Alaska State Library. The individual and group portraits in this collection span the years from 1912-1971 and portray the wide scope of interests and activities of Alaska Natives. Most of the individuals are identified. Collection includes the 1912 founding fathers of the Alaska Native Brotherhood and a copy of the Constitution of the Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood, 1963. Also included is the press release from 1962 when a group of Eskimo youths, trained in electronics for defense jobs, met with President John F. Kennedy.

**Andrew Hope/Ellen Hope Hays Collection, 1947-1984.** University of Alaska Anchorage Archives and Special Collections. Andrew Hope (1896-1968) was one of the organizers of the Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood; President of the Brotherhood for several terms; and president of the Tlingit-Haida Association (1940-1966). Ellen Hope Hays, his daughter, has been active in Native and public organizations. The collection consists of papers relating to Andrew Hope and Ellen Hope Hays'

activities in Native and community organizations and affairs. The papers are arranged by organization.

**Elizabeth and Roy Peratrovich Papers, 1939-1988.** University of Alaska Anchorage Archives and Special Collections. Elizabeth (Wanamaker) Peratrovich was born on July 4, 1911, in Petersburg, Alaska. She attended Sheldon Jackson School, Ketchikan High School, and the Western College of Education in Bellingham, Washington. Roy Peratrovich was born in 1908 in Klawock, Alaska, and graduated from Ketchikan High School. Elizabeth and Roy Peratrovich were married in 1931 in Bellingham, Washington. They returned to Klawock, Alaska, and lived there for several years before moving to Juneau. Roy Peratrovich worked in the fishery business (1931-1936) before becoming involved in government affairs (1936-1941) and achieving the position of Mayor of Klawock. Thereafter he held various positions in the territorial government (1941-1946). Elizabeth Peratrovich worked for a number of years in the Territorial Treasurer's office, the Territorial Legislature, and the Juneau Credit Association. Roy and Elizabeth Peratrovich were very active in the Alaska Native Brotherhood and the Alaska Native Sisterhood respectively. They were central figures in securing the passage of the Anti-Discrimination Act by the Alaska Territorial Legislature in 1945. Elizabeth Peratrovich died in 1958. In 1983, Roy Peratrovich was made Grand President Emeritus of the Alaska Native Brotherhood for his work in the organization and on behalf of Alaskan Natives. In May, 1988, the State Legislature officially designated February 16 as Elizabeth Peratrovich Day.

The collection consists of copies of papers relating to the efforts of Elizabeth and Roy Peratrovich to end discrimination against natives in Alaska. Included are correspondence between Roy Peratrovich, Ernest Gruening, and various territorial, state, and federal officials in regard to discrimination against natives by the military in Alaska during WWII; the passage of the Anti-Discrimination Act; summaries of civil rights laws of various states; newspaper articles concerning Elizabeth and Roy Peratrovich, Native rights in Alaska, the Native Claims Settlement Act, and the Alaska Native Brotherhood; as well as other papers.

**Peratrovich Family Papers, 1939-1988.** Peratrovich family, Roy Scott Peratrovich, Sr. Alaska State Library. Papers collected by Roy Peratrovich, Sr., include news clippings, correspondence, draft legislation, and his speeches and writings relating to native rights and interests in Alaska. Subjects include the landmark anti-discrimination law providing for equal accommodation privileges to all citizens (1945 Session Laws on Alaska, Chapter 2), the establishment in 1988 of Elizabeth Wanamaker Peratrovich Day (February 16), and activities of the Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood.

**William L. Paul Papers, 1938-1970.** Seattle: University of Washington, Archives and Manuscripts Division. Correspondence, case files, subject files, speeches and writings, conference and convention materials, minutes, reports, newsletters, pleadings, photographs, maps, personal documents, ephemera, clippings, and financial records documenting Paul's involvement with the Alaska Native Brotherhood and the Central Council of Tlingit & Haida Indians of Alaska. Subgroups have been established for: Alaska Federation of Natives, Alaska Native Brotherhood, Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, National Congress of American Indians, Northwest Indian

Economic Development Association, Sheldon Jackson College, the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the U.S. Dept. of the Interior. Major correspondents include: Edward L. Bartlett, John Borbridge, Andrew Hope, Frank G. Johnson, Frances Paul, Frederick Paul, Cyrus E. Peck, Frank Peratrovich, Roy Peratrovich, I.S. Weissbrodt, James E. Curry, and Walter Soboleff.

**Candy Waugaman Photograph Collection, 1890s-present.** Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks. Includes Juneau businesses, hotels, residences, individuals and groups, such as the Alaska Native Brotherhood and Diamond Drill Crew (Chickaloon) and soldiers at Excursion Inlet and other locations during World War II. Includes photo of old Juneau Courthouse (site of current State Office Building), ca. 1910, and the first Alaska State Legislature.