

**Alaska State Library
Historical Collections**

Guide to Collection

Silook, Paul

Paul Silook Papers, 1934-1938

MS 276

1 box
.4 linear ft.

Processed by: Jason Russell, Oct. 2013
Updated by: Jacki Swearingen, Aug. 2014

ACQUISITION: The collection was donated by Fred Olson, grandson of Frederick Zeusler, and Jean Ann Olson, Frederick Zeusler's daughter. The items are from the personal papers of Frederick Zeusler. Acc. # 2013-036.

ACCESS: The collection is unrestricted.

COPYRIGHT: Request for permission to publish or reproduce material from the collection should be discussed with the Librarian.

PROCESSING: This collection has been described at the item level. Log books and inserts placed in archival housing. For more information related to Paul Silook see MS 162 and MS 163.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Paul Silook, also known as Koneak, was born at Gambell, St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, sometime in September 1892. Largely taught by watching others, Paul Silook grew up trading for supplies, fishing for Auklets, and hunting for seal, walrus, and other local wildlife. As an adult he apprenticed to a reindeer herder for less than a year, worked as an assistant teacher and later as translator, transcriber, boat captain, and general handyman. He married Miriam shortly before 1919. They had 7 living children, a miscarriage, and a still-born. At age 73 he managed to kill his first whale. (Leighton & Leighton, 1983)

Paul Silook is best known for his anthropological work on St. Lawrence Island. Paul Silook gathered data on the Bering Strait and northern Alaska from 1912 to around 1945. After he became a man by shooting his first polar bear, and before 1922, Paul Silook first began assisting Otto Geist in his archaeological field-work on St. Lawrence Island. During these years Paul Silook assisted other researchers and scientists such as Henry Collins, and Froelich Rainey. Paul Silook was an avid recorder of the stories, traditions, and life and times of his village as well as those around him. His granddaughter, Suzie Silook, reported that he wrote “over 1,000 pages. All the rituals, how they were conducted, how animal spirits were treated ... He wrote a 200 page autobiography for Alex Leighton at Cornell, he did most of the ethnographic detail work for Otto Geist at the University of Alaska” (Dunham, 1997, p. E5). During the Great Depression he wrote to Henry Collins at the Smithsonian expressing his desire to keep the St. Lawrence Island excavations going without the expense of continued chartered flights to Alaska, stating, “If I am satisfactory to you ... you would not have to send a white man” (p. E5). The offer was not considered. His collections can be found at the Natural History Museum of the Smithsonian Institution, the University of Alaska Fairbanks's Alaska and Polar Regions Collections, and the Alaska State Historical Library.

Information from:

Dunham, M. (1997, January 12). Silook's Legacy. *Anchorage Daily News*, pp. E1, E5.

Leighton, A. H., & Leighton, D. C. (1983). Koneak's Story. In *Eskimo Recollections of Their Life Experiences. Northwest Anthropological Research Notes*, 17(1/2), 107-199.

[This biography can be found at the Alaska State Library Historical Collections. Call Number: E78.N77N67]

SCOPE AND CONTENTS NOTE

Paul Silook, gave these manuscript volumes to Frederick Zeusler. The collection includes six journals, two inserts from Journal six, and four letters written by Paul Silook to Frederick Zeusler.

This collection is organized into two series.

Series 1 consists of four letters written by Paul Silook to Frederick Zeusler. Each letter makes reference to carvings sent out to Frederick Zeusler by either Paul Silook or his father. Three of the four letters are dated. Letter one is dated 1934. Letter two is not dated, and marked as a note. Letter three is dated 1935. Letter four is dated 1936.

Series 2 consists of six journals and two inserts from Journal six. Journal one is a daily diary written by Paul Silook detailing the life and times of the people of Angoon living on St. Lawrence Island from June 30th 1937 to January 1st 1938. Several of the diary entries made reference to occurrences happening in the neighboring village of Savoonga. During this time the journal covers Paul Silook: carving, working at the ‘teacherage’ doing odd jobs, including repair and construction work on buildings, translating for Ms. Bannan, as well as Mr. and Miss Hinckley, and performing general maintenance. He also assisted missionaries, went to old village sites, including Inokyageh, with his family, and Froelich Rainey to search for artifacts. Journal two is an unfinished copy of Journal one. Journal two goes from July 1st to Sept. 11th. Journals three through six consist of the Yup’ik stories, traditions, and ceremonies written in English and collected by Paul Silook from the people of Gambell.

INVENTORY

Series 1: Correspondences from Paul Silook to Frederick Zeusler.

Folder 1 of 1

Letter 1

Dated September 22, 1934, Paul Silook talks about: mailing out a salt and pepper shaker to Frederick Zeusler, future carvings to be done, the deaths of several sick people, the birth of one or two more babies, the need for more envelopes and letter paper, and a note (possibly letter 2) that was meant to be sent out.

Letter 2

Not dated, Paul Silook mentions sending out: a set of salt and pepper shakers, and a paper weight with a carved sled on it that was made by his father, Donial Ooitillin. Paul Silook states that his father would like a box of cigars for it.

Letter 3

Dated October 1, 1935, Paul Silook acknowledges receipt of a package containing candy and pencils. He goes on to state that he has sent out a paper weight with a bear head on it. Paul Silook expresses that he would like five yards of calico for his daughter, or 20-25 yards if possible for all of the women in his family.

The letter mentions that the winter was not a good one. The hunting was poor, and several people died from the flu. Several whaling boats from Siberia had motor trouble that necessitated a stopover in Angoon for repairs. Lastly, Paul Silook makes mention of the ship *Tahu* that stopped by in June. He mentions that several people thought it was the ship *Chelau*.

Letter 4

Dated October 8, 1936, Paul Silook thanks Frederick Zeusler for the cloth. He is only able to send out one set of salt and pepper shakers, an “extra” for a sample, and a sled runner. He goes on to state that only a few walrus were killed, which lead to a shortage of food to eat and store for the winter, including ivory to carve. Paul Silook stated that he will try to go to Savoonga to secure more ivory, and possibly more artifacts for Frederick Zeusler. He mentions that he has

adopted a boy from his brother, named Michael. He asks for several hand pipes, a few cigars, and some of Frederick Zeusler's old clothes.

Series 2: A personal diary, a partial copy of same diary, and four journals detailing Yup'ik stories, traditions, and ceremonies.

Journal 1: A daily diary written by Paul Silook detailing the life and times of the people of Angoon living on St. Lawrence Island from June 30th 1937 to January 1st 1938. Several of the diary entries made reference to occurrences happening in the neighboring village of Savoonga. During this time the journal covers Paul Silook: carving, working at the "teacherage" doing odd jobs, including repair and construction work on buildings, translating for Ms. Bannan, as well as Mr. and Miss Hinckley, and performing general maintenance. He also assisted missionaries, went to old village sites, including Inokyageh, with his family, and Froelich Rainey to search for artifacts.

Journal 2: An unfinished copy of Journal one, which starts on July 1st and goes to Sept. 11th.

Journal 3: Details Yup'ik stories, traditions, and ceremonies.

Page 2-4: The Origin of puffins

Page 5-7: Origin of sea-lion

Page 8-10: Why we have clear and cloudy day

Page 11-14: How summer came

Page 15-16: How death came into the world

Page 17-22 and 24-25: Living

Page 23-23: Why the owl have spots and the crow black

Page 26-29: Houses or Ningloos

Page 30-32: Winter Sleeping quarters

Page 32-33: Winter Heating

Page 33-34: Summer sleeping room

Ceremonies

Page 35-44: Moon worship

Page 45-56: Killing a whale

Page 57-60: Ceremony taken after whaling

Page 61-63: Sacrifice

Page 64-69: Sickness

Page 70-71: How the man became a sorcerer

Page 72-83: Ceremony of the dead

Page 83-84: Ceremony of a murderer

Page 85-87: Religion about some animals

Page 88-91: Polar Bear

Page 92-94: Trapping

Page 95-96: Animals that are allowed not to be killed

Page 97: Tools

Page 98: What the children believe about the mountain

Journal 4: Details Yup'ik stories, traditions, and ceremonies.

- Page 2-22: Adventure story
- Page 23-31: Siberian Stories
- Page 32-42: Adventure of two children. Drifted off in a canoe and landed at the place where killer whales are lived.
- Page 43-62: Ivanga's lost sister
- Page 63-66: How the first reindeer was obtained
- Page 66-72: Sovenk (the oomeluk of Savoonga)
- Page 73-78: An old woman who become an athlete
- Page 79-80: Shares of dividing a whale
- Page 81-82: Why some of the old igloos facing toward sea
- Page 82-93: The crow and the devils
- Page 94-98: The Eskimo piper
- Page 99-113: The girls and the giant
- Page 114-121: Adventure of a boy

Journal 5: Details Yup'ik stories, traditions, and ceremonies.

Fairy Tales

- Page 2-13: An orphan boy who became a wealthy man
- Page 13-22: The fox and the crow
- Page 23-30: Ivana the oomeluk (chief)
- Page 31-33: The origin of thunder
- Page 34-38: The origin of King Islanders
- Page 39-44: White Geese
- Page 45-55: Something about heaven
- Page 56-65: The girl who was captured by these killer whales
- Page 66-80: The orphan who married a polar bear
- Page 81-86: How a fox killed a giant
- Page 87-98: Man who married His daughter
- Page 99-100: Untitled account of relative who was taught songs by whales
- Page 101-114: A last wife whom the eagle rob
- Page 115-121: Story of the people's belief about how a person is murdered by another person by urging some spirit to cause their death, or by poisoning them.

Journal 6: Details Yup'ik stories, traditions, and ceremonies.

- Page 1: Cover with sticker on it saying, "Articles written by Eskimos for Gambell."
- Page 2-10: Hunting
- Page 10-13: Whale hunting
- Page 14-17: The preparing of the food
- Page 18: The main diet
- Page 19-25: Plants
- Page 26-28: Houses
- Page 29-30: The people
- Page 31-35: Medicine man
- Page 36-37: The age of the village

Page 38: Creation and flood
Page 39-45: The old time wedding
Page 46: Divorce
Page 47-50: Religion
Page 51-52: Language
Page 53-61: Children's winter games
Page 62-63: Tag
Page 63-64: Norm game
Page 65-67: Spring games
Page 67-69: Sling shot
Page 69-71: High flyer
Page 70: Illustration
Page 72-73: Indoor games
Page 74: Oiling the bodies
Page 75-85: Funeral
Page 86-89: Dances
Page 89-94: Songs
Page 95-96: Two folded inserts. Dated July 19, 1937, the two pages are titled "Ceremonies of different kinds. Marlick or exchanging things."

Adventure stories

Page 97-100: [Adrift on sea ice]
Page 101-103: [A journey on ice]
Page 104: [Walking across the Bering Strait]
Page 105-118: Adventure of a woman
Page 119-124: A poor hunter who become the most hunter in town
Page 125: Why we built the Sunday school