

Winter Traditions and Celebrations: Past and Present

There are many traditions and celebrations that occur during our long winter months here in Alaska. This information provides a great opportunity to introduce Alaska Native cultures into your classroom in one way or another.

Russian Orthodox Christmas (Starring - Caroling) January 7th **By Mable Brandon**

Starring, an ancient Russian Orthodox Christian custom, originated in the Ukraine. Starting on January 7, (Russian Christmas) a group of people would start off following a person carrying a pole made of wood, with a star on top - an icon in the center of the star - with a candle in the front. When they came to a house they would stop and stand facing the star. The star holder twirled the star while the rest of the group sang the theme song or trotarion.

The religious significance behind the ritual represents the three wise men following the star. The twirling of the star reminded them of eternity.

When the Russian priests came to Alaska they brought the custom to the Native people they converted. The Natives of the Bristol Bay area modified it to suit their needs.

By January 7, excitement builds; a group from the village starts off carrying a big star. They go from house to house, village to village. The people invite them into their homes. The group faces the person twirling the star and starts singing carols. After the caroling the starring group is asked to sit down to a special meal or partake from food laid out, smorgasbord style; presents might be passed out. When the group is ready to leave, they invite the people from the house to join them and the ritual is repeated until late into the night.

The Native star is made out of available material such as wood, wire, garland, Christmas tree ornaments, etc. It is approximately three feet in diameter. In the center is a religious icon. Directly in back of the icon is a small pole with which to hold the star.