



LEE SEAGONDOLLAR, EDITOR

1840 N. Cottonwood Loop, Wasilla, AK 99654-4269

Tel. (907) 376-2711 or e-mail: bearsup@mtaonline.net

WE MOURN THE PASSING OF SIR KNIGHT WALTER SOBOLEFF



**Sir Knight Walter Soboleff in April 2011
communicating degrees at the Valley of
Juneau Scottish Rite Spring Reunion**

Sir Knight Walter A. Soboleff passed away May 22, 2011 at his home in Juneau. Walter had turned 102 years old on November 14, 2010. Walter was born in Killisnoo in 1908 as Kha'jaq'tii (One Slain in Battle), his tribal art collected over his many years would be that of the Raven moiety and Dog Salmon clan in the Tlingit nation. Soboleff liked to compare his birth in Killisnoo as the year the Tongass National Forest celebrated its first birthday. Walter grew up in Tenakee, just ten steps from the U.S. Government School. He loved every class there and once stated, "I loved the red school, its smell in the rain, the sound of the bell and writing on my slate in English and Tlingit ... and I remember the biggest lesson I ever learned in the chapel there,

"Take care of the old person you are going to become." At 5 years old, he began boarding at Sitka's Sheldon Jackson School. At 10, he interpreted for a visiting doctor during the 1918 flu epidemic. He had a thirst for knowledge and civic duty. He admired the Gettysburg Address and would recite it in Tlingit. His favorite lesson was a speech by Abraham Lincoln, one of his heroes. Other early role models were his father, who died when Walter was 12, his mother; Booker T. Washington; and Rudyard Kipling. Another influence was Tlingit Rev. George Benson, who made a written Bible translation of which only the gospel of John is known to exist today.

FROM THE EDITOR

I would like to encourage all Sir Knights to submit articles, letters, pictures, or comments for inclusion in this supplement. Articles need to be submitted to me by the 25th of the month for the next issue (July 25th for September issue).

In 1925, while a freshman at Sheldon Jackson High School, Soboleff took his first real job, working 10 hours a day at a Hood Bay fish cannery for 25 cents an hour. He would continue working at a fish plant in Killisnoo in the summers. The work was hard, with no modern machinery like today. "You had to work hard, you couldn't just sit and earn money," Soboleff said in a past interview. "We were coming into Western culture and cash economy, working part-time and the other time prepare food for the winter." He received a scholarship in 1933 to the University of Dubuque in Iowa, earning a bachelor's degree in education in 1937 and graduate degree in divinity in 1940. In the summer, he'd return to Alaska and work on the seine boats out of Sitka or the cold storage. The price of salmon then included humpies selling for 4 cents a fish, dog salmon for 5 cents, and red salmon for 35 cents. Soboleff once said "You could buy something for a dollar in those days." After college and ordainment, he married Haida sweetheart Genevieve Ross and settled in Juneau as pastor of the Memorial Presbyterian Church - now Northern Light United Church - in 1940, broadcasting half of the service over the radio each Sunday morning. He would also do news in Tlingit for the town and short meditations out to the fishermen. His Tlingit congregation soon grew to include all racial and ethnic groups. Ministry travel via the vessels Princeton Hall, Anna Jackman, and "an assortment of fishing boats if needed," included many small villages, lighthouse stations, and logging camps in Southeast Alaska. Soboleff loved the boats and the routes he took and the people he met. He said the time seemed to go by so fast and he learned more than he taught. Walter was preceded in death by wife Genevieve in January 1986. Walter remarried in 1999 to Tshimshian Stella Alice Atkinson, who passed in April 2008. Five years ago Soboleff said he stopped driving because he figured he should stop while he was ahead and because there was no place he needed to go in a hurry. When asked, at that time, what he wanted for his birthday, he smiled and thought about the big wild game stews he grew up on, but in typical Soboleff sincerity he asked for no more wars. "What do people fight about?" "Isn't this a civilized world? Nobody wins." Walter questioned why races did not like each other and had experienced it in Alaska growing up and saw it throughout the world. "People just can't grow up," he once said. "The world needs a good philosophy of life. My philosophy of life is tolerance, it doesn't hurt you." "Respect People. Respect yourself, too, and other people will respect you." Walter loved Masonry and was active to the end of his life. He was a Past Master of Mt. Juneau-Gastineaux Lodge #21, an honored Scottish Rite Mason and a life member of Anchorage York Rite Masons since 1985.