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Pot Lariat

Grant Land
demanded for women

Verse and worse

Poor lawmakers: State poem a lost cause

Senators recently got a look at a bill suggesting an official state poem. Unfortunately, the poem — "Great Land" by Brady D. Jackson II — has neither literary merit nor emotional appeal.

The senators wisely shunned "Great Land," but they could do all Alaskans an even bigger favor by banning, evermore, the very concept of an official state poem.

Virtually all the monumental poems written about Alaska are pure drivel. The few that transcend drivel reach only the level of mindless pap. Poets who attempt to capture Denali's majesty and the sweeping grandeur of the Yukon River can't do so without resorting to crumbling clichés and wilted images.

Inevitably the result is a huge, rhyming, ramshackle monster that sounds like something Robert Service might have written with a bad hangover.

Writers of serious repute haven't done well with the mega-Alaska genre either — not in a hundred years. Look at Bret Harte's "An Arctic Vision" which celebrates the purchase of Alaska. It begins:

*All ye icebergs make salaam
You belong to Uncle Sam.
And above the wild ducks' clamour,
In his own peculiar grammar...*

After these egregious couplets, who would read further?

Poetry soothes the soul and refreshes the mind. By all means, let's have more of it. But please, no more pseudo-Service verse masquerading as art. Maybe we need a state muffin (Minnesota has one — blueberry), but we don't need a state poem.

QUOTABLE

"We know we don't have a system in place that can withstand sustained cold. We've said, 'Either give us the money to fix the thing or we're going to have winter disasters.'"

— Kotzebue city manager Mike Scott, explaining his request for state disaster aid to fix the city's frozen water/sewer system.

"In the eastern Interior — Northway, Tetlin and Tok — they consistently winter after winter get hit with 60- or 70-below weather and we never have these kind of problems."

— Mike Irwin, aide to Gov. Cowper, reacting to Kotzebue's disaster-aid request.

"I think it's criminal that the legislature should water down these bills. Things go through so many committees here you could turn an elephant into a snake."

— State Rep. Richard Foster, D-Nome, commenting on how the House transformed a resolution endorsing the recriminalization of marijuana into a measure endorsing the public's right to vote on the issue.

February 21, 1990

Dear Senator Pouchot,

Upon reading a quote in the Anchorage Daily News, February 20, 1990, that you said a state poem had not been selected, I wondered if a contest had been open for submittals and I missed the announcement.

Enclosed is my submission for consideration. I am a published poet and have lived in Alaska since January 9, 1989. My husband and I drove here from Colorado Springs, Colorado, and my literary agent is promoting a book written on that adventure titled, "The Icy Hand of Alaska Beckoned." However, it is not as of this writing under contract.

Respectfully,

Maureen Staton-Morgan

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Enc: Poem "Alaska's A Bonfire Of Hope"

Called 3.14.90 —

Explained "no contest"
Thank you for poem.

ALASKA'S A BONFIRE OF HOPE

*Cast all your thoughts into the bonfire of hope,
where hearts are warmed and nature is cherished,
beyond the boundaries of man's limitations,
and ride the dream to envision a land of . . .*

*Patterns of tracks across new fallen snow
on craggy cliffs where Dall sheep herds roam;
where moose, fox, and snowy owls hide vigilantly
amid cover of dense forests and berry bushes.
And, a rustling sound near the trail signals danger
when spring has awakened a sleepy, hungry bear.*

*Sun catching waters encircling Beluga whales who
in frolic fling their tail in the glisten of
Turnagain Arm then turn for open sea. Perhaps,
you can sense the freedom of the lofty eagle
with fanned wings gliding the course of ranges
of ice-capped mountains and stream crossed
valleys to the home of the wolf.*

*Full sail upon highest tides of glacier blue,
befriended by the aquatic abundance; quietly
rock a lullaby under the fiery midnight sun
while nestled on a vessel of curious adventure.*

*Ah, an unwavering capture by the bonfire flame
mesmerizes a searching soul who dreams a dream of
satisfaction for mankind and sets Alaska as his goal.*

Maureen Staton-Morgan

Bills ask for Alaska state poem, nickname and Marmot Day

By BRIAN S. AKRE
The Associated Press

JUNEAU — Does a state with an official bird, fish, flag, flower, fossil, gem, marine mammal, mineral, sport, tree, seal and song need another state symbol?

Some Alaskans think so. Bills to establish an official poem, nickname and marmot are before those guardians of Alaska officialdom, the state legislature.

Rep. Curt Menard, D-Wasilla, says Alaska should also designate Feb. 2 as Marmot Day to compete with Groundhog Day and the world's most famous mar-

mot, Pennsylvania's Punxsutawney Phil.

"Everyone says Alaska is different and we don't think like the Lower 48 thinks," Menard said Monday. "We shouldn't have to bow to Punxsutawney Phil."

Marmot is the name given to a group of gnawing and burrowing rodents, including the groundhog or woodchuck, which are distinguished by their coarse fur and short, bushy tail.

The measure would designate the "senior hoary marmot" at the Alaska Zoo in Anchorage as the official state marmot. Menard con-

cedes it's a cheap attempt to steal some publicity from Pennsylvania.

On Feb. 2, "the official state marmot is encouraged to look for its shadow and thus advise whether winter will be with us for six more weeks — or longer," says Menard's House Bill 488.

The aim of Marmot Day is "to remind us during the dark days of the year that winter does not last forever," the bill says.

The proposal for an official state poem comes courtesy of Sen. Jan Faiks, R-Anchorage, who says she in-

troduced it at the request of a constituent poet, Brady D. Jackson II. Senate Bill 379 calls for establishment of Jackson's poem, "Great Land," as the state's own.

Written as if the state itself were speaking, the poem tells of a land that holds "in my bowels the riches of kings." It relates a version of history that is less than flattering.

"You came first in numbers with traps in hand,
Stole the rich furs of my seas and my land.

You came back with ships of nets by the ton,

Plundered my shores where the king salmon run.
Returning in hoards, with picks in your hand,

Scraping my outsidies, then scarring my land.
To dig for my gold you wanted so bad,

Left families, friends and good manners you had."

Don't expect Alaska's school children to be reciting that soon. The bill is expected to die without a hearing in the Senate State Affairs Committee.

"I don't think we need to move that bill," said Sen. Pat Pourchot, D-Anchorage

and the committee chairman. "It doesn't jump out at me as something that is of particularly high literary quality."

"The Great Land" also is what Rep. Peter Goll, D-Haines, wants designated as Alaska's nickname. Alaska is the only state without an official nickname, according to the World Almanac and Book of Facts.

If Goll's House Bill 492 passes, Alaska may have to change its license plates. They carry the state's unofficial nickname, "The Last Frontier."

*Asch. Daily News
Jan. Feb. 18, 1980*