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John W. Dienhart  
Whitehall 3-0122

Date: December 7, 1959

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The celebration of Christmas brought back the birthday party.

To the early Christians, it was unthinkable to celebrate one's birthday---much less the birthday of Christ. Birth meant the assumption of original sin and frequently the beginning of a life of persecution and perhaps martyrdom.

Birthday festivities, moreover, were a pagan custom. The Pharaoh of Egypt and Herod celebrated their birthdays, as the Bible relates. But it was sacrilege even to suggest that a Divine Being had a birthday.

In the 300's, however, this attitude was beginning to change. World Book Encyclopedia reports that in the year 354 the Bishop of Rome declared December 25 to be the anniversary of the birth of Christ.

But it took another pagan ritual to help establish Christmas. The ancient peoples of Europe had been accustomed to celebrating the winter solstice, when the sun seems to return to the Northern Hemisphere, in late December. The pagan feast commemorating the victory of light over darkness was simply replaced by the Christian festival honoring the "Light of Life."

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#### FILLER MATERIAL

The Christian custom of reckoning time from the birth of Christ was introduced in the 500's by a monk named Dionysius Exiguus. But World Book Encyclopedia reports that the monk made a mistake of four to six years. Scholars now believe Christ was born in 4 B.C. or 6 B.C.

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Those who would a-wassailing go on Christmas are indebted to Henry VII. World Book Encyclopedia says the English king introduced the drink of hot ale and spices from the Scandinavian countries in the 1400's. In some parts of England, trees and fields were "wassailed," or toasted, to insure a good crop.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Americans have carried baseball into many parts of the world, but they may be stopped at the door of the 49th state.

The Eskimos have their own favorite sport---blanket-tossing.

The World Book Encyclopedia reports, in its new article on Alaska, that the Eskimos stretch a large walrus hide or a blanket three or four feet above the ground.

Holding on to the edge of the blanket by special handgrips, about 20 or 30 Eskimos toss the players into the air, as high as 15 or 20 feet at each throw.

The player who can bounce the highest and keep landing on his feet is the winner.

For Alaskans who prefer less strenuous pastimes, the "Ice Pool" contest is a favorite.

The contest is held at Nenana in April or May. The winner is the person who comes closest to guessing the minute when the ice breaks up in the Nenana River.

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#### FILLER MATERIAL

Nature blows hot as well as cold in Alaska. According to The World Book Encyclopedia, the most violent volcanic eruption ever recorded occurred on the Alaska Peninsula in 1912. Mount Katmai hurled about six cubic miles of rocky matter into the air, covering most of northwestern America with gases and volcanic ash.

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A former capital of Alaska once was known as the "New World Paris." The World Book Encyclopedia reports that Sitka was a thriving city in 1806 because of the fur and shipping trades and attracted adventurers from all parts of the world.

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Fort Yukon, in northeastern Alaska, reports the state's highest--and lowest--temperatures. According to The World Book Encyclopedia, weathermen reported 100° F. in June, 1915, and -78° F.

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Alaska, once ridiculed as "Seward's Ice Box," has turned out to be stocked with more goodies than snowballs and polar bears.

When Secretary of State William Seward bought Alaska from Russia for \$7,200,000 in 1867, many American taxpayers and senators denounced it as an icy wasteland. But the new state has paid back its cost hundreds of times in the value of its resources.

The 1959 Annual Supplement of The World Book Encyclopedia says Alaska's annual production now amount to approximately 160 million dollars---more than 21 times the purchase price of the territory.

The waters off Alaska's shores are the world's richest in salmon and halibut. Forests cover 375,000 square miles---an area twice as large as the four Scandinavian countries. Oil was discovered in commercial quantities in 1957.

Only two per cent of Alaska's 586,400 square miles has been surveyed. But 31 of the 33 strategic minerals needed by the U.S. already have been found there.

Here is the approximate annual production record:

Fish	\$93,000,000
Timber	34,000,000
Minerals	24,000,000
Furs	7,000,000
Total	<u>\$158,000,000</u>

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FILLER MATERIAL

Alaska has the highest birth rate and the lowest death rate of any state, according to the 1959 Annual Supplement of The World Book Encyclopedia.

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Alaska's flag was designed by a 13-year-old schoolboy, according to The World Book Encyclopedia. The flag shows seven gold stars, representing the gold mining industry, in the shape of the Big Dipper on a field of blue. An eighth star in the corner represents the North Star, symbolizing Alaska's far-northern location.