

Book Review

An Ethnohistory of the Chisana River Basin. By Norman Alexander Easton. National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, 2021.

Reviewed by Polly Hyslop

I found this book interesting because I was born in Northway, Alaska, and I am related to Bessie John and her brother Tommy John, the Upper Tanana scholars in this book. I have known Norm since he started research in the Upper Tanana nearly thirty years ago. I heard that Norm was adopted by our late auntie Bessie John, and I believe that. Because of this, Norm is my clan cousin, so he is family. Norm spent most, if not all, of his career in the Upper Tanana and has researched and lived among the people. While this book carries the work of former researchers, Norm's addition of the Native scholars and their stories strengthens the research. Norm allows the people of the Upper Tanana to tell their stories. We read their stories throughout the book. As a Native person, I am drawn to the stories, and not so much to the academic language. The Elders are the scholars in this book. I like that he did not change the words for Tommy John and Bessie John—when reading the words, I can hear them speaking. It brings a joy and sadness at the same time, as they have since passed to the other side.

Norm did an exemplary job of creating an historical account of the Dineh in the Chisana River Basin. While Norm uses scholarly references, his writing style is appropriate for both scholars and lay people to read. As a Native researcher, I believe it is important that Native people have access to the book and that it be readable. This book should be used in the classroom, both high school and university. It is a compact and accurate history.

The book has many good qualities for visual learners and readers—photos, maps, illustrations. If there were any changes, I would suggest that the reference to our clan be changed as it relates to our clan merging into another clan. The

Neesüü clan is very much a separate, but intertwined clan to Nalcine. We have not merged into the Nalcine clan. In addition, the last part of the book has census records from the 1929–1940s that are very inaccurate. As one Elder in Northway says, “they should be burned” because of the confusion regarding kinship. Native kinship includes brothers and sisters who are really first cousins.

Overall, this is an excellent ethnohistory of the Chisana River Basin. Norm has given us a gift and for that I say, *Tsin’ji choh*.

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