

Inuit children who died at the World's Fair in 1892 and 1893 and who are buried at Oak Woods Cemetery

Columbia Susan Manak, 1892–1892 (the first)

In the middle of October 1892, 57 people in 12 families arrived from Labrador via schooner and railroad to take up residence in the Esquimaux Village at the World's Fair. They brought along a dozen dogs, "kyacks," a sled, and a sealskin tent, barrels of seal oil and blubber and stores of dried deer and seal meat, "green skins to be made into garments," and "a lot of walrus and fish bones to be manufactured into trinkets." All but a few of the Inuit had "adopted civilized habits." Ten of the twelve families were Christians, converted by Moravian missionaries who "have been up in Labrador freezing to death by inches each year to induce the Esquimaux to embrace religion."

About two weeks later, a baby girl was born to Simon and Sarah Manak. She was their fourth child. They named her **Columbia Susan Manak**, in tribute to her maternal grandmother and the exposition. The birth was cause for the community's rejoicing. A maternal cousin gave the infant a reindeer wishbone, "which he has treasured for many years, and to which he ascribes the phenomenal success that has always attended his efforts at fish harpooning." She was also the subject of a patronizing curiosity. The tiny girl delighted many Chicagoans, mostly women, who paid admission to view her. She won but grudging admiration from a reporter. "Miss Columbia gives the promise of being a striking brunette," the *Tribune* reported. "Her eyes will be of a soulful blue, ... and the man who called her nose anything, but 'squat' would be looking at the truth in an extremely reprehensible manner. It is not believed that her hair will curl without the aid of tongs; yet, with all these faults, Columbia is still fair to look upon."

The president of the World's Columbian Exposition Company was still more grudging. "It was a pity an American child couldn't have had the honor of being the first born on the fairgrounds," he grumbled (ignoring that no "American" families had similarly been put on display). (A few days later, L E Meacham wrote to the *Tribune* to claim that he, in fact, was the first baby born on the exposition grounds, in 1873 in a house at 63rd and Stony Island.)

Alas, Columbia Susan was born prematurely. She weakened and then died eight days later. "As soon as the parents realized she was dead," the *Inter Ocean* reported, "they struck up a weird sort of hymn in their native language." An Inuit man constructed a coffin. Having no Moravian minister at hand (the nearest congregation was in Wisconsin), the Rev Francis B Dunham of the Church of the Redeemer in Hyde Park led the funeral, conducted in a tent on the fair grounds. The coffin rested on a box covered with a polar bear pelt. The mourners began with a "weird, hymn-like chant." The Rev Mr. Dunham then delivered a prayer, followed by Abli, "the Esquimaux village minister," who read from the Bible. Abli led a prayer in the community's language and then the service concluded with a Moravian hymn, sung by the entire congregation. A hack conveyed the child's remains to Oak Woods for interment.

Other Inuit Children buried at Oak Woods

A second Inuit girl was born five days after Columbia Susan. According to the *Inter Ocean*, hers was one of the two families of “absolute heathens” from the far north of Labrador who had “neither religion nor family name.” Her father was Kufa (Kuppa) and her mother Kotukitak (Kuttukatok), “which translated means ‘Big Adam’s Apple.’” “Out of this wealth of etymology and significance,” the paper continued, “they have evolved for the helpless child and saddled on to her the name **Kotuktook**, which means ‘The Stutterer.’” Another source registered the family’s name as Cooper and the baby’s name as Evelina, after the schooner that had delivered the Inuit to the United States. A few days later, Evelina, or Kotuktook, also died, of a “sore throat.” She was likely buried in Oak Woods.

Two other Inuit children also rest here. **Peter Deer**, the one-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. George Deer, died in April 1893 of “ravages of a bad cold and the climate.” In August, 15-year-old **Aelia Teloch** drowned while playing in the Northwest Pond next to the village. “He had been popular with Fair visitors,” the *Tribune* testified, “always ready to crack his big whip, drive the reindeers, or paddle a kaiak [sic] for the people’s amusement.”

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