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WORK OF THE BUREAU OF EDUCATION
FOR THE NATIVES OF ALASKA

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WORK OF THE BUREAU OF EDUCATION FOR THE NATIVES OF ALASKA.

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The administration of the work of the Bureau of Education in Alaska involves great difficulties, arising principally from the remoteness of most of the schools, the enormous distances between the schools, the meager means of communication, and the severity of the climate.

In addition to maintaining schools for the children belonging to the aboriginal races of Alaska, the bureau aids entire native communities by extending medical relief, by maintaining sanitary methods of living, by fostering the commercial enterprises of the natives, by promoting the reindeer industry, and by relieving destitution.

The field force in Alaska in 1922 included 5 superintendents, 144 teachers, 8 physicians, 14 nurses, 5 nurses in training, 16 hospital attendants, and 7 herders in charge of reindeer belonging to the Government. Seventy schools were in operation, with an enrollment of 3,679. Orphanages were maintained at Kanakanak and Tyonek for the care of children left destitute by the epidemic of influenza which prevailed in those regions.

In the Alaskan native community the school is the center of all activity—social, industrial, and civic. The teacher is guide, leader, and everything else the community may demand. To be teacher in the narrow schoolroom sense is by no means all of the teacher's duties in Alaska. He must often be physician, nurse, postmaster, business manager, and community builder. He must have an inexhaustible stock of patience to enable him to submit, at any hour of the day or night, to the visits of natives who desire assistance or medical treatment. Exacting as the work is, it appeals to persons who possess in high degree the qualifications of self-denial and philanthropy. The results of the labors of self-sacrificing men and women, through a succession of years, are evident in the self-respecting, self-supporting communities which have replaced the squalid villages of former days.

The work extends throughout the Territory from the southernmost boundary to the northernmost cape. The majority of the villages in which the work is located are practically inaccessible during eight months of the year. The larger settlements have been reached, but there yet remain certain regions, especially difficult of access, into which the work has not been extended. Two of these regions were reached during the summer of 1921.

In the great delta between the mouths of the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers—a country of marshes and lakes—there are hundreds of Eskimos living in abject squalor. During July, 1921, a teacher and his wife were sent into this region with the materials for the erection of a school building, the equipment necessary for opening a school, and all the supplies needed for a year. Before the coming of winter precluded the possibility of outdoor activities, the teacher erected the building in which he and his wife must live and to which they must attract the primitive people of the region for instruction in everything pertaining to a higher plane of living. Teachers were also sent to Sleetmute, a primitive village on the upper waters of the Kuskokwim River.

School buildings were also erected at Noorvik, in Arctic Alaska, to replace a small log school building erected by the Eskimos themselves, and on St. Lawrence Island, in Bering Sea, where the schoolhouse erected by the carpenter of the *U. S. S. Bear*, with the assistance of the Eskimos, in 1891, had become inadequate; and at Eek, an Eskimo village in western Alaska, the portable building which had been sent to that place having become too small to accommodate the school. It was necessary to send from Seattle to their remote destinations all of the materials for use in constructing these buildings.

The bureau maintains hospitals at Juneau, Kanakanak, Akiak, Nulato, and Noorvik. The hospitals, physicians, and nurses serve only the more thickly populated districts. In the vast outlying areas the teachers must of necessity extend medical aid to the best of their ability. Accordingly, teachers in settlements where the services of a physician or nurse are not available are supplied with household remedies and instructions for their use.

Reindeer herds are now distributed among the principal native settlements from Point Barrow to the Alaska Peninsula. It is estimated that there were in Alaska June 30, 1922, approximately 259,000 reindeer, two-thirds of which belong to the natives and one-third to the Government, to white men, and to Lapps.

There have been two notable extensions of the reindeer service. On the untimbered slopes of the region tributary to the Alaska Railroad there is unlimited pasturage for reindeer. In order to

establish the reindeer industry in this region a herd of 1,352 reindeer has been driven by herders in the employ of the bureau approximately 1,000 miles from a point on the Bering Sea coast to grazing grounds in the vicinity of the railroad. Hitherto the exportation of reindeer meat has been confined to shipments from the Nome region to Seattle only during the short season of open navigation in mid-summer. The Alaska Railroad will provide unlimited means of transportation for reindeer meat and hides from the interior to the coast at any time of the year.

In the autumn of 1921 the Coast Guard cutter *Unalga* transported for the Bureau of Education a herd of 54 reindeer from the Alaska Peninsula to Kodiak Island. The western half of Kodiak Island is untimbered and abounds in grazing lands on which great herds of reindeer can be supported. Through its system of distribution of reindeer the bureau will provide the natives of Kodiak Island with a source of food and establish a future industry for the island from whose ice-free harbors reindeer meat and hides can be readily exported.

The magnitude and value of the reindeer industry resulted in 1920 in the making by Congress of an appropriation to enable the Bureau of Biological Survey, Department of Agriculture, in cooperation with the Bureau of Education, to make investigations, experiments, and demonstrations for the improvement of the reindeer industry in Alaska. The distribution of reindeer among the natives and the use of the enterprise as the form of industrial education best adapted to the races inhabiting the untimbered regions of Alaska remain under the supervision of the Bureau of Education.

With few exceptions the native villages in Alaska in which the Bureau of Education's work is carried on are not on the routes of steamers which visit the larger settlements. Transportation of appointees and supplies to the remoter places has been secured only with difficulty and by the payment of heavy charges to small trading schooners going to these regions at infrequent and irregular intervals. This is a precarious, inadequate, and expensive procedure.

In compliance with the request for a vessel suitable for use by the Bureau of Education in its Alaskan work the Navy Department transferred to the Department of the Interior the U. S. S. *Bower*, a wooden vessel with a carrying capacity of 500 tons and admirably adapted for the purpose contemplated. Funds to cover the expenses of installing an engine and reconditioning the vessel were provided in the Interior Department appropriation act, approved May 24, 1922.

By means of the *Boxer* the Alaska division will be able to make its own plans for the economical transportation from Seattle of its appointees and of supplies for its schools, hospitals, and reindeer stations. On its southward voyage it can bring out teachers whose terms of service have expired and carry for Eskimo herders reindeer meat which they wish to sell in the States. It can carry timber from forested regions to the timberless sections. It can distribute coal among the various settlements. It can be used as a school of navigation and seamanship for young native men.

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