

The Bureau of Missions,

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Alaska - Missions

PAL.
MISC.

A Land of Far Distances





First Christian Endeavor Convention in Alaska, November, 1902.

The first Christian Endeavor convention in Alaska was held in November of 1902, at Wrangell. The highways of Alaska are waterways, so travel and definite dates are somewhat uncertain. Storm bound on the road to the convention, the various delegates gathered at Klawock held a meeting by the way. It was an occasion of gladness and blessing. It was

reported as the greatest unifying power seen up to that time in southeastern Alaska. Old sores and troubles were forgiven and forgotten as the people mingled together in praise and prayer. As in David's day, music is a powerful factor in bringing peace to the passions of men. The native band in more than one of our Alaskan fields is the pastor's strong ally.

WEST of San Francisco as far as Maine is east of it—so far west do our Alaskan possessions extend. As far as from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada—so far is it between Alaska's southern and northern shores. As great as the area of all our land east of the Mississippi river—save only Michigan, Wisconsin and the States touching the Gulf—so great is the area of Alaska. As far as from Minneapolis to Portland, Oregon—so far is it, as a bird flies, from the southernmost of our own mission stations in Alaska to the most northern.

A mighty river, navigable through all its length across the entire peninsula, and a thousand miles beyond, the Yukon has taken its place among the great rivers of the world.

The recently discovered Mt. McKinley in its height is rivalled by few mountain peaks in any continent.

Mineral and agricultural wealth—the treasures of the earth—are matched by the fishing industry and the treasures of the sea. In the decade closing with 1900 Alaska's population doubled, the added thirty thousand being mainly "boys" from the East in search of wealth—the wealth that perishes.

In all this vast land what is our Church doing? When missions were opened in the great territory purchased from Russia, there was a compact between the denominations by which each agreed to concentrate its efforts for the natives to the special part allotted to it. To the Presbyterian Church was given the southeastern extension of the territory. A mission teacher and an ordained missionary in 1877 entered the untried field with its unknown and horrible heathen customs.

Too long for telling here is the story of the struggle—slow at first—between the powers of darkness and the messengers of Him who is the Light. Little by little the dawn broke. Gradually old customs lost their power.

Our Juneau mission illustrates the progress made on all our Alaskan fields. Here our native church was organized in 1887. On its charter list were thirteen—whites and Indians—of whom only one now survives. The present pastor is the Rev. L. F. Jones, who has been for ten years on that field. During this time almost three hundred have been added to the church, all save three on confession of faith; two hundred infants have been baptized; sixty native marriages have been performed; and in connection with the Juneau church there has been erected a substantial hall, which is located in the native village, and in which the natives gather not only for socials and band practice but also for religious services during the week. A Juneau paper—and not all editors are in sympathy with mission lines of service—voluntarily prints this editorial tribute to Mr. Jones and his church:

"The effect of church work upon the lives and morals of the natives may be seen, not only in individual characters, but in a comparison of what the natives do to-day as compared with what they did when the missionary first came amongst them. This, by the way, is the only true mode of comparison—not to compare the natives with our white civilization but the natives now with what they were when religion found them.

"Many old customs in vogue at the beginning of this period have disappeared. Then, burning the dead was a custom which has given way entirely to Christian burial. Then, witchcraft was in vogue but is now a thing of the past. Gambling was then rife but has now vanished. Then, native street girls were plentiful and frequented dance halls of the whites. Now they are scarce and frequent no

dance halls. The old marriage custom is fast passing away. Feasting and dancing, which used to engage all of their time during the winter, are on the decline and are lightly indulged in. Until recently they were devoid of public spirit, but now they build sidewalks and provide street lights by public subscriptions. They are building better homes, take more pride in furnishing them, and families are more and more individualizing themselves. These are some, not all, of the indications of progress. And no one can deny that the 'Church' is the chief agency in bringing about these reforms.

"The good work done by Rev. and Mrs. Jones among the natives is deserving of great praise, and their advancement under the guidance of Rev. Jones is appreciated by all who have followed the progress made by the natives during the past ten years."

But the work to the natives in Alaska is now a small part of the Church's obligation. The Presbytery of Alaska is but one of two presbyteries of our Assembly located in that territory.

About ten years ago occurred the first important gold discovery. Then began the influx of whites to the interior. This greatly increased the commercial activity along the southeastern extension of the territory and wholly changed the characteristics of mission work there. Our missionaries face no longer the simple conditions existing among the aboriginal people, but are perplexed by the problems of a frontier and changing region. In interior Alaska our mission stations are few, but are located with a view to reaching the miners in congested centers wherever the latest gold discovery has attracted the throng.

During the past year two of our missionaries have been located on the Tanana creek, about two hundred and fifty miles from Rampart. The Rev. M. E. Koonce, Ph. D., during five long and lonely years, has held this outpost and ministered splendidly to the miners within many miles of Rampart, scattered at their diggings along the creeks.

The new gold field on the Tanana has our oldest and newest Alaskan missionaries, the Rev. S. Hall Young, D. D., and his wife and the Rev. Howard M. Frank and his bride. Fairbanks and Chena are the two towns in which they are located. When that part of the country shall have settled, after a more thorough understanding of its mining conditions and possibilities have been reached, there will probably be but one town. Our missionaries will watch the changing situation and be quick to take advantage of it. Meanwhile at each place a building has been erected at which services are regularly maintained. An athlete in his student days, Mr. Frank is practically proving the value of muscular Christianity by his weekly trips among the creeks, during which he "mushes" scores of miles and preaches to hungry-hearted men and women who gather in road-houses and saloons to hear the once familiar gospel story.

Nearly fifteen hundred miles distant is our next missionary, the Rev. Herman M. Hosack, who has two stations—Council and Teller—a hundred miles apart. We have at Council an organized church. For this whole region he asks two or three missionaries. There is work enough—and more—to keep them busy. His field is unique in that on many occasions at his services the entire population is present—not a man or woman missing!

After three years of heroic isolation and strenuous service in this Labrador of our western coast Mr. Hosack feels the need of coming to the States for mental and spiritual uplift. Only those who have been absolutely alone, away from all whose ideals and lives are noble, can understand the peril to heart and life endured in our Arctic fields.

“For many years the northwest wind has been bringing from that great land a wail of despair as sad as ever came from the darkest corners of the earth. It was the mute cry of men, women and children living in the habitations of cruelty into which no ray of divine light and love had ever penetrated—the inarticulate moan of immortal souls left to live and die without God and without hope, all forgotten by the great Christian world beyond them.”—SHELDON JACKSON, D.D.

The first Presbyterian missionaries entered Alaska in 1877. Figures are but a poor measure of spiritual work in planting the Master's Kingdom; yet they are forceful in illustration.

After ten years of Alaskan missionary service Christianity had so grown that the Presbytery of Alaska was erected with two churches, having one hundred and sixty-three members, and nine ministers.

Our last complete statement from the Presbytery of Alaska was compiled a year ago and shows that it now includes fourteen churches, twelve hundred and twenty-two members, and fifteen ministers. Of these one is self-supporting—the church at Skagway, a town unknown ten years ago. Three of the churches are for white settlers, to whom at the beginning of Alaskan missions it was not dreamed the Church would ever need to send help.

Not a single one of the churches in the Presbytery of Alaska has omitted offerings to the Boards, while six churches have filled every column—an example that many of our churches in the States would do well to follow.

The Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., Harvey C. Olin, Treas., 156 Fifth Ave., New York

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