

1972

The Christian College in the Artic

George Fox University Archives

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/alaskan_mission_papers

Recommended Citation

George Fox University Archives, "The Christian College in the Artic" (1972). *Alaskan Missions Papers*. 38. https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/alaskan_mission_papers/38

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Alaskan Missions Collection at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Alaskan Missions Papers by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

THE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE IN THE ARCTIC

In October 1972 George Fox College launched a pilot project of educational mission work among the Eskimo natives in Northwest Alaska with the establishment of a college extension center in the community of Kotzebue. The program of classes was set up at the invitation of native church and community leaders, and represents an expression of the historic Quaker concern for intellectual as well as spiritual development of the individual.

ALASKA YEARLY MEETING OF FRIENDS

Quakers have been pioneers in mission work in native Alaska for more than 85 years. A mission and school for Eskimos was established by California Friends in 1887, just twenty years after the Seward purchase of the territory from Russia. In almost a century of ministry, the Christian message has made great impact upon the Eskimo people. The Quaker philosophy of training natives to assume leadership in the church has resulted in a strong indigenous church organization among the Eskimos. There are twelve Friends Churches with almost 2500 members in Alaska Yearly Meeting. Its leadership, superintendent, clerks, and pastors are all Eskimo natives.

The Friends Church at Kotzebue is the largest native-built and native-financed Eskimo church in the world. It is a new, modern facility seating more than 500 people and is situated in the center of the community of almost 2000 Eskimos. New churches are being started this year by the Eskimos in the Alaskan cities of Anchorage and Fairbanks.

There is a spirit of revival and spiritual awakening taking place at present among the natives in the north. It is reaching especially the youth and young adult level and is considered quite phenomenal by people in the area. It is promoting new enthusiasm and growth among the village churches.

ESKIMO EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Northwest Alaska educational opportunities have been very meager in the past. Only recently has a public high school been established in Kotzebue. There are still none in the native villages in all the Kobuk area. The result is that the educational level of the average Eskimo adult is about the 4th or 5th grade. Not a single pastor among the natives has a high school diploma.

With the development of better public schools for youth, and with the coming of electronic media to the bush communities, the pastors and church leaders are keenly sensitive to the need for more training.

GEORGE FOX COLLEGE EXTENSION PROGRAM

At the invitation of Eskimo Friends Church leaders, George Fox College has responded to this need by developing a program of college extension classes. A community survey was made in July of the educational needs and academic interests of the people. Accordingly, seven courses were scheduled representing three areas of academic interest and need.

- I - Courses in ACCOUNTING, CONSUMER ECONOMICS, and BUSINESS LAW were scheduled to help the Eskimo understand the transition from a subsistence living by hunting and fishing into the moneyed economy of modern society. This was one of the needs expressed by native leaders. Prof. Harold Wilhite, CPA, helped relate these areas into the concept of Christian stewardship and church financing.
- II - Courses in PUBLIC SPEAKING and PERSUASIVE ADDRESS (Homiletics for pastors) were given to assist church leaders to be able to communicate more effectively. Many pastors did not know how to develop and prepare sermons and to preach effectively and they requested help in this area.
- III - Courses in FUNDAMENTALS OF MUSIC and APPLIED MUSIC were given in response to numerous requests. The Eskimos are a very musical people. They love to sing and are quite adept at simple musical instruments. But without opportunities to learn the basic principles of technique, they know very little about musical notation and fundamentals. Their response to these classes was enthusiastic.

ENROLLMENT

Seventy-two people were enrolled in the fall short-term of classes. The total class registration, including duplication, was 105. People came from villages as far as 100 miles to attend the classes. Most of the pastors and wives were in attendance. Since the only travel is by snowmobile or bush plane, it represented a great effort and sacrifice and indicated their desire for more education.

CONCLUSION

The Eskimos are basically an intelligent, industrious, and adaptable people. While not educationally oriented, they are eager to learn and are alert to take advantage of educational opportunities.

But they live almost on a poverty-level existence. The per capita income for Alaskan natives averages only one-fourth that of the average white Alaskan. They are unable to pay the tuition costs of American higher education.

George Fox College wants to help the Eskimos help themselves.