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Northwest Yearly Meeting Alaska Missions

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Archives

Solomon, Alaska.
Jan. 9, 1949ALASKA MISSIONS
ENTIAT
CHURCH

Mr. & Mrs. Joseph Reece
2904 N.E. 50th Ave
Portland 13, Ore.

Dear Friends,

For a long, long time we have wanted to get a letter off to you; but our correspondence has suffered because it was continually pushed into the background by other things that claimed our whole attention. However your work and that of the whole Yearly Meeting was often on our hearts as we voiced our petitions before the Throne of Grace. We trust God has proved faithful in supplying grace, strength, guidance and forbearance in every problem and emergency you are called upon to face. We well know that you hold no easy position, we marvel you hold up so well with all the burden and responsibility of the work of Yearly Meeting falling your way.

We are enjoying our school work here at Solomon. The population of our quaint village is about 75; and I have only 17 youngsters enrolled in school. It reminds us of our own childhood school days with seven different grades all reciting their lessons in the old one room school house. Our work not only consists in teaching; but many other duties besides, as-caring for the clinic, social security and old age assistance, selective service, village council, native industries, issuing birth certificates, death permits etc. etc.

The missionary work here is under the Covenant Mission Church. We were very well acquainted with both their work and some of their missionaries during the period of time we resided at Kotzebue. The interior of their mission field touched ours on the southwest. Many of our Eskimos, who worked in the gold mines at Candle during the summer and fall months, were under their spiritual guidance each year. When we first went on the field they were called the Swedish Evangelical Church and later changed their name. The work here is under the supervision of an Eskimo pastor. The Field Supt. Mr. Amundson, lives at Nome and has his own airplane; thus is here often to help out in the work. His family were our guests over the Thanksgiving holidays. I have charge of the choir, and they meet to practise every Friday Night. It seems like old times to work with an Eskimo choir and help in their Christmas programs. They try to work Ira into preaching for them every now and then. He told them he came up for a rest; but enjoys giving a message now and then.

In many ways Ira seems much better since he relinquished the burden of the work at Entiat. He felt so helplessly tied, and the work itself so discouraging it was getting the best of him in more ways than one. Still he is far from being well in body. Any over exertion takes its toll.

We hear often from the Entiat people, and hope each time that they will have someone to help them in the church work. We feel your plan for the work there may be the best; but what the future hold for that place is more than we can see, still with God all things are possible. We know nothing is too hard for the Lord; however in our puny strength we could not cope with the situation. We do pray God to send some one that will be able to help the people see themselves as other see them. We failed, altho' we prayed the Lord to give us the Word that would open their eyes. They want to work for the Lord more than anything else on earth, their whole life is wrapped up in the church. They were all so good to us in every way, and we did love them.

All the men in the village work in the gold mines during the summer . There is a highway between here and Nome with two ferries in between . The road extends on up the Solomon to three more gold mines a distance of about twenty more miles . All the people speak English , in fact most of the younger children do not understand their Eskimo dialect ; It makes it much better when it come to teaching them in the school room . Thus since they have been around the white man so much and receive white man's wages for their labor , they live as we do in the states . They have good cabins with furniture and most have radios .

The other white person in the village besides ourselves in our merchant, Mr. Curran, who is 84 years of age . He is married to a native and has many children and great-grandchildren . His birthday is close to Thanksgiving ; so his family meet at his house to celebrate . They meet there again at Xmas . It has been the custom , so Mr. Curran, says for the school teachers to eat with him on all the holidays . Thus we were there Thanksgiving, Xmas, and New Year's Day and each time they had a big turkey dinner and all that goes with it . The rest of the village meet at the church for a village feast both at Thanksgiving and Christmas .

We are 33 miles from Nome , and during the winter as much cut off from its influence as Entiat was from Seattle . The mail plane has not been here now for almost six weeks . Thus we have to make our own intertainment as a village . The church people rule the village . They will not allow outsiders who come in to have the white man's dances and no liquor is sold here . The entire village (with the exception of one Catholic family) attend church every Sunday and also for prayer meeting . The Dept. of Interior request the teachers to have activities each night at the schoolhouse during the Christmas holidays . From our experiences at Kotzebue it proved a curse at many stations, because at that time all the men are in from off their traplines until after the New Year and the churches hold their revival meetings during this period . In many of the villages the teachers at the same hour would hold dances and card parties with free lunch and tobacco at the school house . This made it very hard to get hold of the youth . We wondered how it would be here ; and we were glad to know they would not demand that kind of entertainment . Some of the teachers did not want to give dances and card parties ; but the village demanded it . Therefore we feel God was very good in placing us here . Of course the school children but on a lengthy Christmas program Christmas eve and the traditional visit from old Santa Claus followed with exchnage of gift around the tree . Then on the Day of Christmas all the features were at the church . They held their church services at 8 .00A their feast in the late afternoon , and then at 7.00 P.M. they held their church program . They also gave out gifts at close of their program . (That is a Swedish custom , and then again after midnight on New Year's Eve) We had evangelistic services at the school house each evening at 7.00 P.M. then games and activities until 10.00 P.M. followed . We showed our slides New Year's eve . had games then another feast given by the school home Ec. class (We have a full line school nutrition program) Then at 10.30 church services began and lasted until well after midnight . Much like the Friends carry on their services at Kotzebue ,

It doesn't get as cold here as most places this far north , as the water is shallow here in the Sound and the winds keep the water open causing a more even temperature . Only 24 degrees below zero . But it blows , blows , then blows some more about all the time . The snow is drifted well up around all the buildings .

We did appreciate all the nice things you said in our behalf; however we feel you over emphasized our value to the work . There was so much to be done and we did so little . We can see so many things we left undone , that we felt we could not stay and take help from the yearly meeting any longer when it could be used to our credit elsewhere . We thank you for inviting us to remain with OYM . We enjoyed being a member and want to continue as one, hoping some day to live within its limits once again . We would enjoy hearing from you and the work from time to time

Yours in the Master's love

John and Parolee Downs

Copy of original manuscript

Arrival