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A NEW JOB FOR THE INDIAN BUREAU

Secretary Wilbur has issued an order effective Mar. 16, 1931, transferring the administration of the education and medical and sanitary relief of Eskimos, Aleuts, and Indians in Alaska, from the Office of Education to the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

This step was a result of the action of the recent Congress in transferring the appropriations made for the health and education of Alaskan natives from one of these Government bureaus to the other. These appropriations include about \$800,000 for Alaskan native schools, \$320,000 for health, and \$100,000 for the completion of an industrial boarding school for natives at Shoemaker Bay, Alaska, a total of about \$1,200,000.

This is in accordance with the present policy of the Department of the Interior with relation to the proper function of the Indian Service and the Office of Education. The intent of the law which created the Office of Education was that its primary purpose was research, that its business was to study educational problems. The purpose of the present change is to relieve it of functions chiefly administrative and to place those functions where they more properly belong.

From the time Alaska was purchased from Russia in 1867 to 1884 the United States Government virtually ignored educational needs in the area, leaving them to missionary schools. In 1884 Congress made its first appropriation for education in Alaska and Henry M. Teller, then Secretary of Interior, assigned the work to the Commissioner of Education. The development of schools that would accommodate a scattered population in this wide and inaccessible area proved to be an administrative task which led the Office of Education into many strange complications. There was, for instance, the introduction of reindeer into Alaska in 1891, and the growth of herds largely in the ownership of the natives until they have come to number hundreds of thousands. This work was developed on the theory that the principal chasm between barbarism and civilization may be bridged by converting a hunter into a herder. The result was, however, that the Office of Education, in Washington, became the strange guardian of vast reindeer herds in Alaska. It was relieved of this responsibility two years ago by the transfer of the reindeer administration to the Governor of the Territory, just as the administration of schools and health work is now transferred to the Indian Service.

Today the Office of Education maintains in Alaska 93 schools for natives, employing 195 teachers, and enrolling 3,900 pupils with an average attendance of a little more than 3,000. To care for the health of natives in this far-flung territory there are seven hospitals, nine doctors, and 31 nurses.

It is a huge task that is here being transferred from one agency of government to another. The enormous distance to be covered, the remoteness of the stations, the low temperature, and the darkness that prevails through the long winters of the Arctic are difficult to cope with. Aleution Peninsula and Islands, for example, stretch out to the west from the mainland for 1,000 miles, bare and sparsely populated by a strange, mixed race. There is a school here and there. North from this arm of America along Bering Sea and the Arctic Ocean is another stretch of 1,000 miles of treeless coast which sleeps in the darkness beneath the snow through the greater part of the year and breaks into a sudden verdure in the brief but long delayed summer. This is the realm of the Eskimo.

Far into the interior where reach the Yukon, the Porcupine and the Koyukuk rivers, live the Athabascans, most isolated of all human beings on this continent. It is probable that there are groups of Americans at these headwaters who have never been seen by white men and who do not know that a world beyond exists. Down that fringe of Alaska that reaches furthest south where the climate is warmer are to be found the Thlingets, the Hydats, and the Metlakatlangs, not unlike the Indians of the Northwestern States. In villages that range in population from 30 to 400, these people live, each village largely a unit unto itself.

Already many Eskimos have replaced their igloo homes, which were dirty and insanitary, with houses built largely under the direction of American school teachers. They are coming to live as do civilized people. The young Eskimos all speak English and read and write. They have been taught ventilation, sanitation, personal cleanliness.

Into these communities go American teachers. A man and his wife may be stationed at a point far out on the Aleutians. A zealous young woman may go alone to a native village far inland hundreds of miles from the nearest railroad and there remain for years, snowed in for months at a time. A venturesome youth may take a place in the Arctic and find, in the

(Continued on page 4)