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REINDEER IN ALASKA

From the Annual Report of the Indian Rights Association

Going back a generation ago, we recall the efforts of the late Dr. Sheldon Jackson, representing the American Missionary Association, in introducing the reindeer in Alaska, for the benefit of the Eskimo. In this work the Indian Rights Association actively and financially assisted.

The habitat of the reindeer was Eastern Siberia. Sheldon Jackson, having become familiar with the climatic conditions in Alaska, believing that the location would be favorable, secured a small herd of ten reindeer in Lapland in 1891. These were shipped to the Seward Peninsula. The expense incident to the purchase and transportation of this shipment was met by private subscription, as were similar shipments, until Congress, in later years, provided limited sums for purchase of additional reindeer, reaching the total of 1280 deer in 1900.

The care of these animals was in charge of trained native Laplanders. The Education Bureau of the Interior Department was officially in charge of the reindeer herds until 1929, when the supervision was transferred to the Alaska Government, on account of the increased responsibility of the rapidly growing herds. By reason of the similarity of conditions among the Eskimo to those existing among our Indian population, the greatest care is necessary in protecting this industry.

To meet this vital need the Secretary of the Interior, on November 20, 1929, appointed a committee:—

“ . . . to advise him with relation to boundaries, carrying capacities and range rules, and disputed ownership and other problems which have arisen from the rapidly increasing reindeer herds of Alaska. The members of that committee are:—Senator John B. Kendrick, of Wyoming; Representative Scott Leavitt, of Montana; and Assistant Attorney General Charles P. Sisson, of the Department of Justice.”

The character and fitness of the members of the Committee carry the assurance that the interests of the Eskimo will be carefully guarded.

The success of the experiment is phenomenal. From the nucleus of 1280, in 1900, the Governor of Alaska, in his report for June 30, 1930, places the present number of reindeer at the stupendous figure of between 600,000 and 700,000 head, two-thirds of which are owned by the natives. Other estimates place the num-

ber at fully a million head of deer.

Fifty-nine of the seventy-eight herds belong to the natives, who have 328 herders on the range. The herds vary in size, the largest comprising possibly 30,000 head. The deer are distributed among 2,500 natives, while some 13,000 natives are dependent upon the reindeer for food and clothing. This industry now ranks among the most important in Alaska. Aside from supplying food and clothing for the Eskimo and other residents, the shipment of reindeer meat to the States is increasing. It is estimated that the industry can supply from 100,000 to 150,000 carcasses annually for shipment.

The appropriations of Congress thus far have been altogether inadequate to provide for the proper care of the reindeer. It has been stated that this vast property interest, spread over thousands of square miles, is in charge of one official with only one assistant. A plea is now being made for an appropriation to enable the Commission recently appointed to secure at least 16 additional employes, which is believed to be the very least number which should be employed to give adequate oversight and care of the reindeer industry.

A BOY WHO HAD IDEAS AND USED THEM

A year ago we were in a little store in a town where we spent a part of our vacation. It was just a store and that was about all. The stock didn't amount to much, and what there was the proprietor didn't seem anxious to sell. It was the most run-down, onery, no-account store we ever saw. This summer we were in that store again. We had hardly stepped our foot inside before a boy about fifteen years old was right on hand, courteously asking what he could do for us. We looked around. The shelves were full, fresh vegetables and fruits were displayed—and there were a-half dozen customers in the store. It was a different place. The boy who came to wait on us had done it all. By chance he had been hired to clerk, and he made over the business—not from any set scheme of his—but just because he was full of ginger. The old store had little or no trade, which had bothered the boy so that he started out to take orders, and he kept at folks until they began to buy from him. Pretty soon folks found out that they could get what they wanted at the store, or have it gotten for them in the shortest possible time. Besides that the boy was always there, always busy, always looking for a chance to go out of his way to accommodate or do a favor for his customers—or for anybody else. Today, less than ten months after that boy took hold of things, that store is the most flourishing and profitable in the village.

Now, you fellows, think that over a little.—THE AMERICAN BOY.