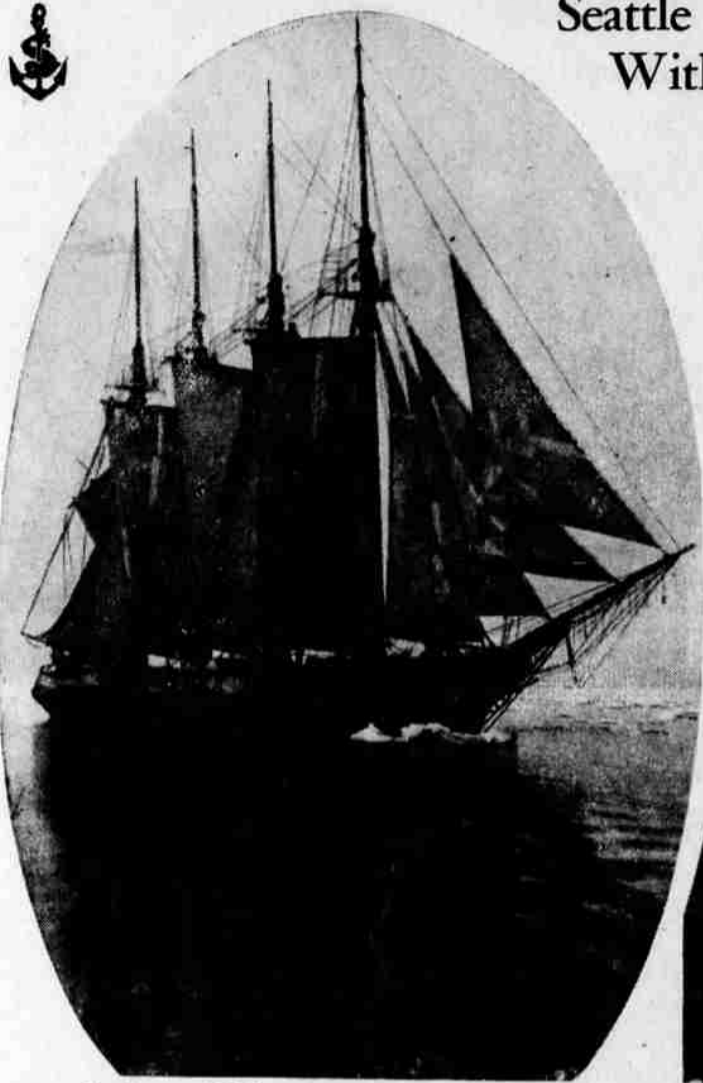


Schooner Plays Santa Claus To Arctic Eskimos

Seattle Ship Faces Many Perils On Annual Trip
With Supplies to Settlements on Arctic Ocean



By Raymond J. Krantz

"BACKLAND'S BACK!"

That's the excited cry that rings out on many bleak shores of the far north when the trim trading schooner C. S. Holmes is sighted off in the distance, her white sails bearing her slowly but surely on her precarious way through the ice-floe studded waters of the Arctic Ocean. It happens just once each year, when the windjammer makes her annual voyage from Seattle, Washington, to the frozen reaches of Alaska with much needed supplies for the Eskimos and white folk.

The shout of "Backland's back!" is the signal for a celebration, a holiday spirit—for Captain John Backland, master of the C. S. Holmes, has brought with him all of those things for which the people of the far north have been waiting. Often enough, they have waited nearly a full year for those desired articles.

Radio sets, outboard motors, groceries of all kinds, pilot biscuits—the Eskimos are very fond of this marine "delicacy"—coal, guns, ammunition, clothes, candy, chewing gum, tobacco—these are a few in the varied list of trading and cargo goods transported to the far north each summer by the trading schooner. It would be impossible in short space to completely list the craft's cargo.

When the vessel departed from Seattle on May 26, 1936, bound for the Arctic, she had in her capacity holds a complete knock-down church, capable of seating 400 to 500 people when it is finally set up at Wainwright, an important settlement about 150 miles south of Point Barrow, the northernmost settlement on the North American continent. In addition to having as a part of her cargo a new Presbyterian church, the C. S. Holmes also carried a shipment of shelter cabins for delivery to the Alaska Road Commission, at Point Lay, in the Arctic region.

The C. S. Holmes is in some respects, a rather unique vessel. Her master is a University of Washington graduate, with a degree of bachelor of arts, in—of all things for an able master mariner!—philosophy! And while Captain Backland is a real sea-going man, university degree or no degree, he also is something of a social light at Seattle, and the departure of his black-hulled trading craft is something of a social event as well as an occurrence at which the local waterfront literally perks up its ears.

The schooner's officers—Ed Anderson, first officer; and Andy Dahl, second mate—are real wind-ship men and know what running sailing ships is all about. And they have to know their "stuff," for the Arctic Ocean, with its perilous flocks of ice is no place for a hesitant or uncertain sailor.

Each year, the C. S. Holmes is towed from Seattle to Cape Flattery, the northwesternmost point of the United States, and there she spreads her canvas, and is off to the Arctic, by way of Unimak Pass, Alaska. At Unimak Pass, the vessel tacks her way through to Bearing Sea, while the symmetrical outlines of that beautiful cone-volcano, Shishaldin, loom white and majestic among the clouds. And occasionally a trailing of volcanic smoke may be seen pouring forth from the mountain's apex.

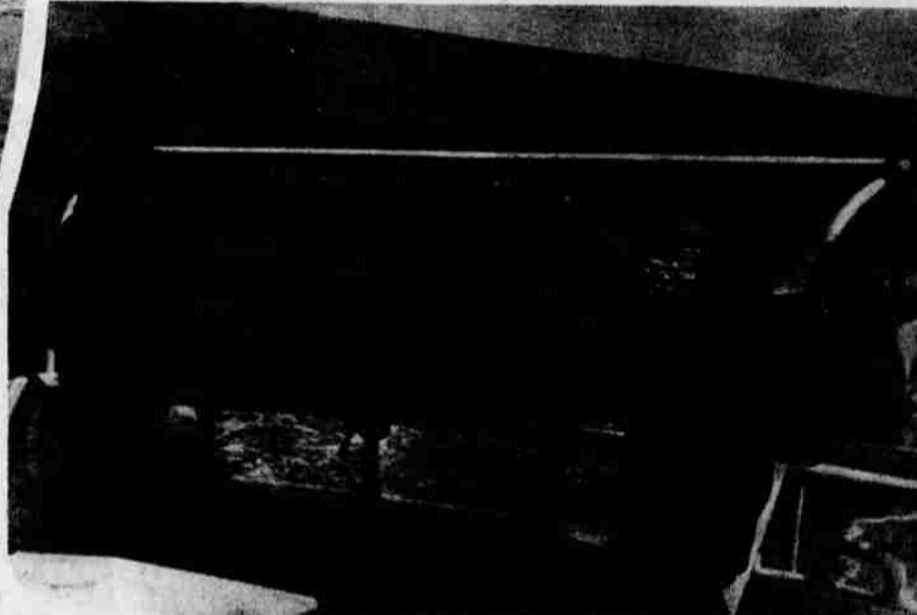
Once through the pass, the C. S. Holmes courses her way to St. Lawrence Island, in Bering Sea. This lonely isle was discovered on Saint Lawrence's Day, 1728, by Vitus Ivanovich Bering, the Danish navigator who explored in the North Pacific for the Russians, and so he gave the island the name of the day of its discovery.

At Gambell, the trading vessel unloads cargo, and Captain Backland trades with the natives for their furs. The manner of trading is simple, with the natives coming aboard the schooner with their stacks of pelts. They present the furs to Captain Backland, who appraises them

reflections of the trading schooner, the C. S. Holmes, shimmer over the rippled water. A large amount of drift ice can be seen beyond the vessel. There also is a sizable piece near the bow.



One of the C. S. Holmes' two 24-foot motor towboats pulls the schooner through a clear lead in a vast floc of Arctic ice. The towline may be seen extending to the right.



Ed Anderson, first officer; and Andy Dahl, second mate, "Shoot the Sun" for position, on the way north to the Arctic Ocean. Both officers are real wind-ship men.



The C. S. Holmes riding at anchor in the ice at Point Barrow, northernmost settlement on the North American continent, which is the goal of the trading vessel on its annual trip to the Arctic. It was near here that Will Rogers and Wiley Post crashed to their death.

after looking them over carefully, and then a trade of so much cash and so much in goods is arranged. Let us say that the furs are worth \$50. The arrangement then might be \$20 in cash, and \$30 in trade. This being agreed upon, Captain Backland makes out a list of the articles desired by the native, finally completing whatever odd cents are left with chewing gum and candy, and then the order is filled by the schooner's boy or supercargo.

At Gambell, according to a former member of the windjammer's crew, the Eskimos are the most honest of any in the north. "They have," he said, "none of the white man's ways."

Gambell is situated near the northwest cape, Cape Chibukak, and features a government school, and a Presbyterian mission, the latter established in 1892. The school was first opened in 1891. The picturesque little village takes its name from Mr. and Mrs. W. C. Gambell, missionaries and teachers, on St. Lawrence Island from 1894 to 1898, and who lost their lives on the schooner Jane Grey. The Eskimo name of the village is Chibukak.

The trading ship then voyages around the island to the village of Savoonga, where more bartering in furs is carried on, and cargo destined for delivery is unloaded. The schooner often replenishes her fresh water supply at Savoonga, the crafts two Norwegian-type motor towboats being used in this work.

The towboats, originally built by George Kneass, San Francisco boat builder, are 24 feet long, and are powered with sturdy gasoline engines. They are exceedingly busy craft in the north, for they are used to haul the schooner through leads in the ice when the winds fall, and they take cargo ashore at all ports, shuttling back and forth between shore and ship. It was in 1929 that the boats towed the C. S. Holmes from Point Barrow to Wainwright, a distance approximating 150 miles. This was made necessary due to the need of leaving Point Barrow before the ice closed in on the trading vessel.

Time being all important in the far north, the windjammer-trader wastes none of it, and her work at Savoonga being finished, she then drives

on to Cape Prince of Wales, on the eastern shore of the bottleneck which is Bering Strait. The post office or village proper is called Wales, and the former was established in 1902. Here the sailors of the C. S. Holmes unload coal for the mission, as well as other cargo. And the trading for furs goes on as at all points where the ship calls.

"Eskimos have a notoriously short-sighted view on life," declared a crew member of the trading schooner. "They buy supplies for at the most, one or two days. They do not seem to think much of the future. They figure that if they have enough for today, well, tomorrow will take care of itself."

At Wales there is a reindeer station and a government school. Most of the natives have been educated in government institutions of learning in the north, and so the days of traders giving valueless articles in exchange for furs are very much a thing of the past, according to Captain Backland. The Eskimo village at Cape Prince of Wales has been known as Kingegan, and in 1890 it boasted a population of 488 souls.

And now the clipper bow of the C. S. Holmes points into the ice expanses of the frozen Arctic Ocean for the first time during the voyage, and the wind ship forges on until she arrives off Shishmaref, a native village located about halfway to Kotzebue Sound from the cape. The settlement takes its name from Shishmaref Inlet, which indents the shore of Seward Peninsula to the north. Lieut. Otto von Kotzebue, in August, 1816, exploring these waters in the Russian brig Rurik, named the inlet in honor of Captain-Lieutenant Glib Semeonovich Shishmaref, who accompanied Kotzebue.

Shishmaref village is a favorite hunting and fishing spot for the Eskimos, especially in the summer time. They hunt walrus and polar bear, and fish for salmon, whitefish and other denizens of the sea and streams. As a rule, there is considerable ice in the vicinity of the village.

Kotzebue, C. S. Holmes' next port of call, is situated on a long peninsula, and is fronted by a wide expanse of shallow water, so vessels having cargo for the village must anchor six to seven miles away. The vessels, usually are so distant that only their masts are visible from shore. The Ferguson brothers, Archie and Warren, operate a Diesel powered scow which lighters cargo and trading goods ashore from such vessels as the C. S. Holmes and freight steamers.

Since Kotzebue village is an important post, with many traders located at the settlement, the windjammer usually remains at the Kotzebue anchorage longer than at most of her stops. In addition to trading activity, Kotzebue has a government hospital, a post office, and schools.

It is here in particular that the Eskimos are "wild" to see the C. S. Holmes, and they do plenty of yelling and shouting among themselves. The main reason for the excitement, as members of the fur trader's crew explain it, is that the schooner usually is the first vessel to arrive at Kotzebue with fresh foods from "the outside."

CAPTAIN Backland each year is honored with a dance at the school house, after all cargo and trade goods have been unloaded. It is a bizarre sort of dance, with white folk dancing in company with dark complexioned Eskimos. Captain Backland also gives a little celebration of his own, for a select group of his own personal friends of long standing. The captain is a man of considerable personality, with a ready smile and an infectious laugh which causes other folks to laugh and enjoy themselves, also, and so these affairs are of the happiest sort and tend to brighten the monotonous days of the people of the icy north country.

"Kotzebue has a poker game going about all the time," said a crew member of the C. S. Holmes. "The games continue all night. The Eskimos, oddly enough, are 'crazy' about the game, too."

The village, of course, honors the name of Lieut. Otto von Kotzebue, son of the distinguished author.

But with the days a-rolling by, one after the other in quick succession, it is necessary for the trading ship to get on her way again if she is to win her yearly battle with the Arctic ice barrier, which is liable to close in at any time and lock a vessel in its unyielding grip, and destruction of the ship is the usual prize for such ill luck or poor judgment. And so the trader sails on, northwestward along the Alaskan coast, to Point Hope, which was named after Sir William Johnstone Hope by Beechey, in 1826. The place



Captain John Backland, master of the trading schooner, is a graduate of the University of Washington.

is a picturesque settlement, with the Eskimos living in huts made of tundra turf placed over rude framework of lumber. These huts in certain parts of Alaska are called barabaras—pronounced "buh-rah-buh-rees." The accent is on the second syllable.

At Point Hope, the whaling vessels formerly wintered, there being a long sandpit with sheltered bays on either side. And while the village is a small one, there is a large reindeer herd in the vicinity. Coal, gasoline, groceries and other supplies are left at Point Hope by the schooner, and then the course is beyond Cape Ljapun to Point Lay, a small settlement on a sandpit and lagoon. A former member of the crew of the trading ship now is a trader at Point Lay. This place was also given its name by Beechey in 1826, and the name compliments George Tradescant Lay, naturalist of Beechey's expedition.

When the vessel arrives at Wainwright, about 150 miles southeast of Point Barrow, the end of her voyage insofar as the northbound half is concerned, is near.

POINT BARROW! The farthest north settlement on the North American continent! This unrenouncing village is the ultimate goal of the C. S. Holmes' annual voyages. It seems, does this settlement, hardly worthy of any great effort to reach it.

"It looks like any old sandpit with some clam divers' shacks on it," was the way a sailor aboard the vessel described the place. Point Barrow is a summer time village, but Charles Brower, the noted trader, and his large family, make their headquarters there the year around. And there's a hospital and a mission, and the Eskimos are interesting in their fur parkas and mukluks, the former a kind of coat with hood-piece, and the latter, fur boots. But just the same, Point Barrow isn't much. And it's a lonely place, also.

It was near Point Barrow, on August 15, 1935, that Will Rogers and Wiley Post lost their lives in a plane crash on the bleak tundra when their craft nosed down into a lagoon after attempting a take-off. When the trading schooner returns south this fall, she is scheduled to have in her holds the wrecked plane, connected to Hollywood and Hartford, Connecticut, interests. There will be a respectful silence as the mangled plane is hoisted aboard the schooner.

And so, with her load of trade goods and cargo delivered, and polar bear, fox, wolverine, wolf and other furs carefully stowed away, the schooner squares around from Point Barrow and starts her homeward-bound voyage, and before the vessel docks at Seattle again, at least five months will have elapsed. And that's a long voyage, but the crewmen don't mind, for long voyages mean large paychecks to them!

Captain Backland has commanded the C. S. Holmes since 1928, when his father, Captain John Backland, Sr., passed away. The present master of the vessel made his first trip to the north in 1923, and he was 19 years old at the time, so as a sailing ship master, he is a fairly young man. He is, however, able as a seaman, and his uniform way of getting his work done in the Arctic shows that he knows what it's all about.

The vessel is interesting in its own way, for it was built in 1893 at the famous Hall Brothers Shipyard, at Port Blakely, Washington, this giving the ship an age of 43 years. Forty-three years old! And yet the schooner seems ready for many more years of arduous service in the north. The schooner's dimensions are: registered length, 162.8 feet; breadth, registered, 37 feet; and depth, 11.5. Her gross and net tonnage figures are 623 and 556, respectively.

C. S. Holmes is a four-topmast sailing schooner, flying three jibs, a fore staysail, foresail, mainsail, mizzen and spanker. She also carries fore, main and mizzen topsails, so when she is under full sail, the vessel presents a beautiful sight of a literal "cloud of canvas." Running light, returning from the north, the schooner has logged better than 12 knots, and she is exceptionally handy, as her sailors proudly declare, "never missed a stay yet!"