Preface

The voices in this volume are those of my father, George Edward Boulter, who served as the superintendent of schools in Alaska’s Upper Yukon District early in the twentieth century, and of my mother, Alice Agnes Green, a government teacher at the mission schools for Alaska Native children at Anvik and Nenana. Their voices are heard through the letters and reports that George wrote, chiefly to his superiors in Washington, DC, and in Seattle, and in the journal that Alice kept during her years in Alaska. Together, they speak of the lives of those with whom they worked and of controversies, at times quite heated, between the US Bureau of Education and the Episcopal Church over how best to serve the perceived needs of Alaskan Native peoples in the period between the closing days of the gold rush and the chaos of World War I. They also tell of the loneliness and the personality conflicts among small groups of white people in a harsh and sometimes lawless environment, cut off from the outside world for long months at a time.

My father died in 1917, when I was less than five years old, two of my sisters were infants, and the third was yet unborn. He died young, at the age of fifty-three. Our mother, twelve years his junior, survived him for five and a half decades. She was a very private person and seldom spoke to us of her life in Alaska or of our father. We knew almost nothing about him until many years later. None of his personal correspondence has survived, and, unlike my mother, he kept no private journal.

I owe my endless appreciation to my daughter, Barbara, whose years of devoted effort and encouragement made this book possible. Indeed, I never would have been inspired to begin work on it had she not given me in 1994 a copy of David M. Dean’s Breaking Trail (1988), a biography of the Reverend Hudson Stuck, archdeacon of the Yukon and Tanana Valley. It contained many references to my father and to his official correspondence, now held in the National Archives, in Washington, DC.

In 1994 and 1995, I settled myself in the National Archives and photocopied more than eight hundred pages of father’s letters and reports, which are preserved in the files of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (RG 75.11.1, Alaska Division, 1877–1940: Correspondence). From the pages copied, my daughter and I selected those printed here. We omitted letters that merely confirmed the appointment of teachers or that duplicated information found elsewhere in father’s correspondence. No letters or reports were combined with others, and none of any historical significance was omitted. In the libraries and archives of the Episcopal Church at Austin, Texas, and the
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University of Alaska Fairbanks, I also found some of mother’s early letters and published articles, and a few of father’s. I am grateful to both institutions for allowing us to quote from some of them.

Many years ago I put together an album about my mother’s family, the Greens, for her grandchildren and my sisters. My research for that album is the source of some of the details of her early life and education in Louisiana that appear in this book. Before she died, mother gave me her original diaries and her journal, written in Louisiana and in Alaska, and they have now been given to my daughter for safekeeping.

Knowledge of the Boulter family in England came from letters written to my sister Isabel in 1970 by my father’s nephew Leslie Ibbotson, the son of my father’s sister Annie Elizabeth and Harold Ibbotson, of London, and the younger brother of Stanley. Kenneth Ibbotson, of Abergavenny, Wales, a senior member of the Ibbotson family and the nephew of Leslie and Stanley, was most generous in allowing his uncle Stanley’s letters from Dawson to be printed here. They are the only record of my father’s life on the Yukon before 1906. My own research later uncovered details of his travels from England to Alaska in 1898.

This book is dedicated to my sisters, Alice, May, and Isabel, who never had the opportunity to know their father, and to the memory of our parents. Regardless of the judgments that history may pass on the undertaking of which they were a part, the sincerity of their commitment is beyond question. They have also bequeathed to us an invaluable record of their experiences, their thoughts, and their hopes.

George E. Boulter II
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Sea Level, North Carolina
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