Introduction

When my grandparents, George Boulter and Alice Green, left their homes on opposite sides of the Atlantic to make the long journey to the Yukon and Alaska, they went for quite different reasons. George went to seek his fortune; Alice went to serve. Both left cities dominated by a river—London and the Thames, New Orleans and the Mississippi—and both had spent their early lives with the same constant ebb and flow of the people and goods of a riverine life such as they found in Alaska. Ultimately, both worked at spectacular sites on another river—the Yukon—at its junctions with the Tanana River and with the Anvik River, in the Alaska Interior.

George was born in London on July 27, 1864, one of six children and the eldest son of James Boulter and his wife, Ellen Barnes. James was a designer and engraver of floor coverings and wallpapers who, from 1873, owned and operated a showroom and workshop on South Lambeth Road. George, who had a good education, wrote well, was a competent draughtsman, and played both the piano and organ, worked in his father’s business until 1897.

The ancient London borough of Lambeth, where the Boulter family lived, was traditionally home to the watermen, warehouses, and small industries that served the City of Westminster just across the Thames, on its north bank. By the 1880s, Lambeth was becoming popular among bank and legal clerks and office personnel employed in central London. Although it still had some of the large homes of prosperous merchants and manufacturers, it was most heavily populated by poor, working-class people who toiled in sawmills, glass and slate works, builders’ yards, potteries, and the like. George lived through epidemics there; open sewers and tidal flooding were common; smallpox and cholera were not uncommon. He was aware of the problems of the poor: substandard housing, lack of adequate sanitation, unsafe working conditions, little education or chance for advancement.

In 1898, at the age of thirty-three, George left home to try his hand at gold prospecting. The Klondike gold rush held more appeal than the draughting and design work that he knew—or the clerical work, teaching, or social work he might have taken up in Lambeth or elsewhere in England. Yet these were the very activities that would engage him in Alaska, and for which he proved to have some ability.

Alice was born in Galveston, Texas, on September 20, 1878, and raised in New Orleans, one of six children and the eldest daughter of John James Green and his wife,
George Edward Boulter, 1897. This photograph, with his signature, was taken in London before he left for Alaska early the next year. Collection of Alice A. Boulter.
Alice Garrett Campbell. The family was Southern to the core, in the South since the early eighteenth century. Her father was born in New Orleans and lived all his sixty years there, with the exception of the Civil War years and a short time in Galveston, where his parents had a home. Of his profession, Alice knew only that he was “in railroads.” As a fifteen-year-old lad, John had walked out of New Orleans after its surrender to the Union Army in 1862, crossed the marshes and Lake Ponchartrain, and stopped only when he reached Mobile, Alabama. There he obtained transport to Richmond, Virginia, where he joined the Louisiana Guard Battery, commanded by his uncle, and fought with the Confederates until their surrender in 1865. Both of Alice’s great-great-grandfathers, from Georgia and Virginia, were also soldiers—one a private and one a lieutenant—who served with the Continental Army during the American War of Independence.

Alice’s life in Louisiana was more sedate but in its own way revolutionary—or at least befitting a Rebel. At this time, it was expected, if not always spoken, that an eldest daughter would care for her mother in old age and would remain on hand to counsel and guide her younger siblings. And yet it was also perceived as the Christian duty of educated, capable young women to minister to the poor and unfortunate, at home or among “heathens,” whether American Indians, Chinese, or South Sea Islanders. Missionary work and teaching were respectable occupations for single young women like Alice—being a shop girl was not. Her family home on Felicity Street in the fashionable new Lower Garden District of New Orleans was not far from working-class neighbourhoods along the Mississippi. So, like George in Lambeth, Alice was well aware of the effects of poverty and lack of education.

A devout Christian, who loved children, especially the little ones, Alice was very early attracted to the caring aspects of teaching. She studied at the New Orleans Free Kindergarten Training School and received her teaching diploma there in 1899. Her first position in New Orleans was close to home, at Kingsley House, the first settlement house in the South. This was the period during which the settlement movement was gaining ground in the United States. Founded in England in 1884, with the opening of Toynbee Hall in East London, the movement sought to promote the infusion of middle-class values among working-class populations by establishing “settlement houses” in poor urban areas where social workers would provide education and other needed services.

Kingsley House was, and remains, adjacent to the so-called Irish Channel, the area close to the Mississippi’s riverboat docks, warehouses, and small factories that was settled by the Irish escaping the potato famine in the 1840s and where they mostly remained as labourers. Its head resident, and Alice’s close friend and mentor, was Eleanor McMain, sometimes called “the Jane Addams of New Orleans.” Through her work at Kingsley House, McMain was instrumental in launching the field of social work in the American South.

Side view of the plantation house in Bastrop, Louisiana, about 1903, where Alice lived for three years while teaching school. Collection of Alice A. Boulter.

Alice in the swing at Bastrop, seated on the right (detail). Collection of Alice A. Boulter.
Alice then took a student teaching position at the Summer School of the South in Knoxville, Tennessee, and following this made the upriver journey to Chicago to work at Hull House under Jane Addams herself. Addams was not only a social worker but in the first generation of college-educated women in America—an early feminist, who, in 1915, became the first chairperson of the Women’s Peace Party, as well as president of the International Congress of Women held that same year in The Hague. She had established Hull House, the second settlement house in America, in 1889, locating it in Chicago’s most needy neighbourhood. There, Addams’s ideals found expression in practical goals: to provide social services for the poor, including a day-care centre for working mothers, language and citizenship classes for immigrants, legal and health care services, a community kitchen, recreational facilities, a book bindery, an art studio, a music school and theatre, a gymnasium for boys, and a boarding club for working girls. She was, in the words of settlement house leader Albert J. Kennedy, “convinced by her experience that the health, happiness, and sanity of her sex depended upon women’s active participation in the work and ordering of the world.”

Little of all this is apparent in Alice’s personal diary (now in my possession), kept at Bastrop and Winnfield, Louisiana, where she taught kindergarten and primary school for a number of years before leaving for Alaska in 1907. Outside teaching duties, her life was an endless round of “paying calls,” social and church gatherings, choir practice, horseback rides in “skirts” (sidesaddle), or drives with gentlemen admirers in a “rig,” a “surrey,” or “trap,” through green fields or “out on the bayou road.” She delighted in quiet moments under the oaks or pecan trees, in nosegays of flowers, and in preparing school or Bible class lessons alone, “deep in the pastures.” She certainly brought something of the Sunny South with her to Alaska, although her sunny nature was sometimes misconstrued as frivolousness, particularly by Mrs. Evans, the austere Bostonian matron at the Anvik mission. Her Alaska journal and school reports, however, show that she was anything but frivolous in her approach to teaching and her devotion to the children in her care.

George and Alice met in their professional capacities at Anvik early in 1909, and in August and September that year they met socially in Fairbanks and again at Tanana. Little can be gleaned from her journal, and certainly not from his official letters, of their growing attachment to each other. At the end of September 1910, in a late-evening talk with Annie Farthing, the matron at St. Mark’s Mission boarding school in Nenana, Alice announced her engagement. George didn’t reveal his intentions to his superiors until April 1911, just three months before the wedding. Their respective positions with the Alaska School Service left little time for amusements or courtship, especially in George’s case. On the one occasion that he mentions her by name in a

letter, he calls her “Agnes.” Indeed, Alice used her middle name until leaving Alaska, signing herself “A. Agnes Green” and subsequently, “A. Agnes Boulter.”

The Alaskan Interior, where the two lived and worked, extends from Norton Sound, on the Bering Sea, eastward to the Canadian border, bound on the north by the Brooks Range and on the south by the Alaska Range and Wrangell Mountains. A vast, sparsely populated plateau covering nearly half the state’s landmass, the area is dotted with peaks and subarctic forest and is home to migrating herds of caribou and moose. The city of Fairbanks lies in the heart of the Interior, and, even today, parts of the region surrounding it remain difficult to reach. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Yukon River was the Interior’s main artery, serving as the trade route from the coast. The headwaters of the Yukon River lie to the south of Whitehorse, in a series of lakes that straddle the border between the far northwest corner of British Columbia and the Yukon. From Whitehorse, the river runs northwest through Dawson, crossing into Alaska at Eagle, just west of the border with Canada, and continuing on to the area known as the Yukon Flats. At Fort Yukon, it turns to the southwest, flowing through Rampart, Tanana, Kokrines, and Koyukuk, and then south to Anvik and Holy Cross, before finally curving west and north and ultimately emptying into the Bering Sea, just below Norton Sound.

The river presented its own problems of access, however. Along its 1,200-mile course from Anvik, in the west, upriver to Eagle, at the Canadian border, the Yukon was open to steamer and small boat traffic no more than five months a year, from June to late October, and otherwise iced in. Its main Alaskan tributaries, such as the Innoko, Koyukuk, Tanana, and Porcupine rivers, were no better. Winter travel in the Interior was limited to dog sleds, snow shoes, toboggans, and the occasional horse-drawn sled, while summer travel off the main river systems was complicated by expanses of broad marshy plains and muskeg, criss-crossed by creeks and minor waterways navigable only by small boat. Far from the more southerly coastal cities of Ketchikan, Sitka, Juneau, and Skagway, the weather could be brutal. Winter temperatures could easily drop to minus 50°C, and in summer the soil could remain frozen to within a foot of the surface, making subsistence farming an impossibility.

From 1867, with the signing of the Treaty of Cession and the purchase of Alaska from Russia, through to 1884, the Department of Alaska was primarily a military holding, variously administered by the US Army, the Department of the Treasury, and the US Navy. In 1884, the District Organic Act (also known as the First Organic Act) brought some measure of civil and judicial administration to the region. But with 4,000 miles separating the District of Alaska, as it was designated, from the seat of power in Washington, DC, and without a direct telegraph link between the two until 1903, communication remained limited to sea-borne correspondence, carried inland with difficulty. After 1884, a federally appointed governor was headquartered at Sitka,
located on Baranof Island, in the Alexander Archipelago, far from the Interior. The only practicable route from Sitka to Fairbanks was by sea to Juneau, then up the Lynn Canal, followed by a long portage to the upper reaches of the Yukon River, and finally downriver to Fairbanks—a 2,000-mile journey taking two months.

Today, Alaska Native peoples are customarily divided into three groups: Eskimo, Indian, and Aleut. In Canada and Greenland, “Indian” and “Eskimo” are regarded as derogatory terms and have been replaced by “First Nations” and “Inuit,” respectively, but so far this change in terminology has not caught on in Alaska. Alaska’s Eskimo peoples—Yup’ik, Iñupiat, and Siberian Yup’ik—primarily dwell in areas along the coast. So do the Haida, Tlingit, and Ts’msyan (Tsimshian), First Nations familiar in Canada as their territory extends well into coastal British Columbia. The Alaska Interior is occupied chiefly by Dene peoples, who speak a variety of Dene (Athabaskan) languages, while the Aleut population is concentrated in the Aleutian Islands.

In the nineteenth century, however, in view of incomplete surveys and the enormous distances involved, government officials often had little first-hand knowledge of the Alaskan terrain and its inhabitants, especially the Dene of the Interior, and many of their decisions were based instead on the government’s experience with American Indian peoples. No doubt this lack of understanding played its part in a century-long succession of amendments to legislation and shifts in policy. In addition, Alaska Natives stood in a somewhat different legal relationship to the US government than did American Indians. Alaska never had the equivalent of the Indian Wars, nor did the US government enter into treaties with Alaska Natives—treaties that were founded on the concept of Aboriginal title to land but that ultimately robbed American Indians of their autonomy, reducing them to the status of dependents. In Alaska, Aboriginal title was never formally recognized, with the result that, in the eyes of the government, Alaska Natives had no legal claim to the territory they occupied. Although section 8 of the District Organic Act

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3 Dene (or Dené) languages are more commonly known as (Northern) Athabaskan languages, a word often spelled “Athabascan” in the context of Alaska, in accordance with a 1997 resolution by the Tanana Chiefs Conference designating this as the preferred spelling (see “The Name ‘Athabascan’,” Alaska Native Language Center, http://www.uaf.edu/anlc/resources/athabascan/; cf. Michael E. Krauss, “The Name Athabaskan”). In 2012, however, in response to a growing movement among scholars, the Athabaskan Languages Conference (headquartered in British Columbia) changed its name to the Dene Languages Conference (see “About Dene Languages,” Dene Languages Conference, http://www.2014denelanguageconference.com/#/about/c4nz). The term Athabaskan derives from a Cree place name and is thus not a name that speakers of these languages would use of themselves. Although the term Dene is sometimes applied more narrowly, to refer specifically to Dene-speaking groups in northern Canada, and here the term will be used in its broader sense, to refer collectively to the peoples who inhabited the Alaska Interior.

4 Following established practice, I use “American Indian” to refer to indigenous groups in the forty-eight states south of Canada and “Alaska Native” for the indigenous peoples of Alaska.

5 In the space of roughly a century, from 1778 to 1871, the United States negotiated close to four hundred treaties with American Indian nations. For a thought-provoking discussion, see Vine Deloria Jr. and David E. Wilkins, Tribes, Treaties, and Constitutional Tribulations.
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of 1884 stated that “the Indians or other persons in said District shall not be disturbed in the possession of any land actually in their use or occupation, or now claimed by them,” it went on specify that “the terms under which such persons may acquire title to such lands is reserved for future legislation by Congress.” In fact, balancing the prospect of great wealth from mining and natural resources with the pledge enshrined in the first part of this statement proved difficult, especially for an absentee landlord.

The same act also stipulated, in section 13, that the “the Secretary of the Interior shall make needful and proper provision for the education of the children of school age in the Territory of Alaska, without reference to race” and that “the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars, or so much thereof as may be necessary, is hereby appropriated for this purpose.” During the nineteenth century and throughout much of the twentieth, official policy, in the United States as in Canada, rested on the assumption that indigenous peoples were primitives who must be integrated into the dominant society. Indeed, the only alternative was outright extinction. The “needful and proper” provision of education, both moral and practical, to these peoples was viewed as the key to their assimilation.

In the United States, the goal of assimilation was formalized in the Civilization Fund Act of 1819, which allotted government stipends to organizations—overwhelmingly church-affiliated groups—that provided education to American Indians. Through education, Native peoples would become “civilized”; in other words, they would be persuaded to abandon their own values and traditions and embrace those of white, Christian culture. Such visions of moral progress were, of course, common currency at the time—but had “civilized” been used in its more fundamental sense, to refer to people who live as members of a civil, self-governed, and humane society, there would have been no need for such a project. As it was, the policy of assimilation led to the founding of numerous boarding schools (the equivalent of Canada’s residential schools), first in the United States and eventually in Alaska, engendering a collective trauma the effects of which have only recently begun to be recognized.6

With the passage of the Organic Act, Secretary of the Interior Henry M. Teller became responsible for education in the District of Alaska, a job that he assigned to the commissioner of education, John Eaton, Jr., in March 1885. A month later, Eaton appointed the Presbyterian missionary Sheldon Jackson to the position of general agent of education for Alaska.7 Until then, the only schools in Alaska had been operated by mission societies. The first missions were established by the Russian Orthodox Church, but, following the purchase of Alaska, the Catholic Church as well as various Protestant missions moved into the area. These included a Presbyterian mission and boarding

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6 For an account of the lasting legacy of these schools in Alaska, see Jim La Belle, Stacy L. Smith, Cheryl Easley, and Kanaqlak (George P. Charles), “Boarding School: Historical Trauma Among Alaska’s Native People.”
school at Wrangell, on the Alaska Panhandle, founded by Jackson in 1877, the year he arrived in Alaska, and the Sitka Industrial Training School, which he established in 1879.

As a missionary in the Rocky Mountains, Jackson had earlier lobbied Congress for funds for the education of American Indians, and he had come to Alaska to continue his proselytizing and to establish Presbyterian missions. His background and beliefs fit well with the policy of acculturation and assimilation through education. The initial $25,000 appropriated by Congress in 1884 for all Alaska schools, Native and white, allowed Jackson to begin his work, and, in 1885, the first government school opened at Juneau, soon followed by others. Funding from the federal government, however, was, in the opinion of Alaska’s governor, “not nearly sufficient” to build and maintain all the schools and teachers’ residences required to educate Alaska’s entire population of school-age children.8 To resolve this problem, Jackson turned to an arrangement with which he was well familiar: contract schools.

A system of contract schools already operated for American Indians south of the Canadian border, through the Office of Indian Affairs.9 In his 1886 report on education, Jackson wrote that, inasmuch as “some of the great missionary organizations of the United States” were already active in Alaska, “it has been deemed wise to arrange with them for co-operation in the work of establishing schools.”10 As it was applied in Alaska, the Bureau of Education, housed within the Department of the Interior, entered into contracts with mission societies, allocating a portion of its funding for schools to existing mission schools, which already had teachers and facilities in place. Church buildings were utilized as schoolrooms, and government teachers were appointed by the Bureau of Education upon recommendation by church leaders. Teachers followed a government-approved curriculum that prohibited religious instruction as part of the formal curriculum, in accordance with the principle of the separation of church and state. The use of Native languages was strictly forbidden in government classrooms, as English was regarded as the language of civilization. Language is, of course, the vehicle of culture, and immersion in English served to drive a wedge between children and local and family traditions. At the same time, to aid the dissemination of the Christian message, early frontier missionaries were often strongly opposed to efforts to impose English. Native languages were thus permitted for church services and for religious instruction (which, again, was supposed to take place only outside school hours and schoolrooms).

8 Appendix F, “Extract from the report of the Hon. A. P. Swineford, governor of Alaska, to the Secretary of the Interior, 1885,” Appendix F in Sheldon Jackson, Report on Education in Alaska, 44. Swineford argued that “the appropriation should be increased to at least $50,000.”

9 The Office of Indian Affairs was established in 1824, initially as a division of the War Department; in 1849, it became part of the Department of the Interior. In 1931, responsibility for Alaska Native education was transferred from the Bureau of Education (or, rather, the Office of Education, as it became in 1929) to the Office of Indian Affairs, with the latter then renamed the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1947.

10 Sheldon Jackson, Report on Education in Alaska, 34.
In the context of the United States, such a close collaborative relationship between church and government might seem odd today, and yet, as Stephen Haycox points out, to late-nineteenth-century Americans, living in a country awash in evangelical Protestant reformism, “the employment of missionaries as public school teachers seemed quite natural.” Concerns were nonetheless raised at the time about whether contract schools violated the spirit of the First Amendment to the US Constitution. Although the question was never actually put to a legal test, in 1893, in response to mounting criticism of the system, Congress prohibited the Office of Indian Affairs from using its annual appropriation to fund contracts with religious bodies. The following year, government subsidies to contract schools in Alaska were reduced, and, in 1895, they ended altogether. In his 1907 report to the commissioner of education, Harlan Updegraff, the newly appointed chief of the Bureau of Education’s Alaska Division, defended the early arrangement, writing that by “making contracts with the missionary societies for the instruction and maintenance of the children in the vicinity of stations,” the bureau had been able “to extend the school system in Alaska more rapidly and more economically than would have been possible if it had depended solely upon its small Congressional appropriations.” The termination of subsidies did not, however, mean the end of the relationship between the Bureau of Education and church missions.

The principal American Protestant denominations had already reached an informal agreement to limit their activities to the regions of Alaska in which they had historically exerted influence, an arrangement that, in the opinion of Hudson Stuck, the Episcopal archdeacon of the Yukon, prevented duplication of expenditure and discord among the various missions. Under the contract system, government schools became associated with the denomination operating in the region in which the schools were located. Episcopal Church missions occupied the largest region, the Interior, running the length of the Yukon River and its tributaries all the way from Anvik, in the west, to Eagle, not far from the Canadian border. Many of the schools that George supervised were thus located at Episcopal mission stations. As Stuck saw it, once the government

12 Updegraff, “Report on the Alaska School Service and on the Alaska Reindeer Service,” 375. Technically, Congress’s action in 1893 with regard to the Office of Indian Affairs did not apply to Alaska, where Native schooling fell instead under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Education. However, as Updegraff notes, the action “was taken as indicating a policy to withdraw appropriations to contract schools” (375).
13 Ibid., 373–74.
14 Stuck wrote that “a meeting of the secretaries of the principal missionary boards was held at which an informal working agreement as to the allotment of certain regions of the vast field to certain organizations was reached,” an agreement that “has resulted in an almost complete absence in Alaska of the unfortunate, discreditable conflicts between rival religious bodies which have not been unknown elsewhere.” Hudson Stuck, The Alaskan Missions of the Episcopal Church, 13.
had “professed its earnest purpose of working in harmony with the mission authorities,” it had been able to “secure deeds of gift for government school sites within the mission reservations from the Bishop of Alaska.”

The dominance of the Episcopal Church in the Interior was largely by virtue of the Anglican missions active there before 1884. When Anglican Bishop W. C. Bompas retired in 1905, he appealed to the Episcopal Church (the Anglican Church’s American counterpart) to take over the remaining Anglican missions in Alaska, which Episcopal Bishop Peter T. Rowe proceeded to do from his base at Sitka. Rowe had been appointed the first Episcopal bishop of Alaska in 1895, and, in 1896, had travelled the Interior along the Yukon, founding churches as far east as Circle and Fort Yukon.

The 1884 Organic Act, section 8, had already guaranteed that churches engaged in missionary activities could continue to occupy up to 640 acres of land in the vicinity of mission stations. In 1900, an act of Congress further authorized the secretary of the Interior to survey these church reserves and to issue “patents” to them.

Health care for the Alaska Natives was part and parcel of Sheldon Jackson’s role as general agent of education. In this capacity, he initiated a scheme that would prove to be controversial. Jackson had become convinced that the Iñupiat people who lived along the shores of the Bering Sea and Arctic Ocean were starving and that reindeer would provide them with a much-needed source of food and clothing. In 1891 and 1892 he travelled to Siberia to purchase reindeer and had soon imported 171 animals to Port Clarence, on the Seward Peninsula, for his new Teller Reindeer Station. Jackson had managed to secure financial support for the project, including a $6,000 allocation from Congress in 1893, and the scheme swiftly grew larger and more complex, with the ambitious Jackson envisaging a highly profitable “reindeer industry” in Alaska. He also regarded it as valuable training for Alaska Natives, herders and apprentices, who would be able to acquire and manage their own herds over time and thus be initiated into the world of capitalism. Eventually, the scheme attracted considerable criticism, largely on the grounds that it benefitted white entrepreneurs more than the Native population.
One of Jackson’s critics was William T. Lopp, a Congregationalist minister based since 1890 at Nome, on the Seward Peninsula, whom Jackson had, in 1893, appointed the superintendent of the reindeer station. In 1904, Lopp became the superintendent of schools for the Northern District of the Alaska School Service. An early supporter of the reindeer scheme, he continued to believe in its potential value but had grown concerned about its direction. In 1905, he urged the Department of the Interior to mount an investigation, which culminated in a report that charged Jackson with mismanagement and recommended revisions in policy designed to restore the original objectives of the project. In 1906, Jackson resigned as general agent of education. He was succeeded in 1907 by Harlan Updegraff, who became chief of the Alaska Division of the Bureau of Education (the position of general agent of education having ceased), and Jackson’s reindeer scheme officially became the US Reindeer Service that year. Under the Bureau of Education “the distribution and custody of reindeer became an integral part of the then existing school system. District superintendents of the schools and local village school teachers assumed the dual role of educators and Reindeer Service Administrators.” These included George, who recorded his regular contact with the herders and their animals.

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, Alaska’s non-Native population had risen steadily, owing in part to the growth of commercial timber and fishing industries and, especially, to the influx of gold prospectors. The population boomed, however, in the wake of the 1896 discovery of gold in the Klondike and the 1898 gold strike at Nome, which provoked a rush that lasted roughly a decade. Recognizing that, the provisions of the First Organic Act notwithstanding, the Bureau of Education could not possibly keep up with the need to supply schooling for all children in Alaska (“without reference to race”), Congress allowed towns in Alaska to incorporate and levy taxes that could be used to set up public schools, and the 1905 Nelson Act further provided for the establishment of schools in settlements too small to incorporate. The system put in place by the Nelson Act was, however, a segregated system. Section 7 of the act stipulated that “the schools specified and provided for in this Act shall be devoted to the education of white children and children of mixed blood who lead a civilized life”—that is, who have converted to Christianity and renounced their traditional ways. Responsibility for these schools lay with the governor of Alaska and district administrators. In addition, the Nelson Act (section 1) provided for the creation of an “Alaska fund,” into which revenue from the sale of liquor licenses and trade...
licenses beyond the borders of incorporated towns was to be deposited, with 25 percent of the fund set aside for public schools. The education of Alaska Native children remained under the authority of the Department of the Interior, in Washington, DC, administered by the Alaska School Service for the Bureau of Education and funded by an annual congressional appropriation.23

Onto this confused and convoluted scene came George and Alice, in 1905 and 1907, respectively. George was initially employed by the Episcopal Church to teach at St. John’s, its new mission at Eagle Village, where his salary was paid by the church, but he also served as a government teacher at the district school for white children held in St. Paul’s Church in the nearby town of Eagle City.24 In 1908, he was appointed assistant superintendent of schools for the Alaska School Service’s Northern District, and in 1910, was promoted to superintendent of schools of the new Upper Yukon District. As is clear especially from his earlier letters, the government was engaged in a tug-of-war with the Episcopal Church for dominance in Native education, and it fell to George to negotiate some of the tensions.

Alice accepted a position from Bishop Peter T. Rowe to teach in the Episcopal mission boarding school at Anvik in 1907 but subsequently discovered that the federal government would pay her salary (frequently in arrears) for the 1907–8 school year. Midway through the year, however, a situation arose that confused her status. From March 1908 until early in 1909, she didn’t know who her employer was, or even whether she was officially employed at all, but she continued teaching, unpaid. In a letter dated January 6, 1909, Harlan Updegraff informed her that, for 1908–9, she was in the service of the Episcopal Missionary Society, but he encouraged her to apply for the government position for the following year. She remained at the Anvik mission as a government teacher until August 1910, when she transferred to the boarding school at St. Mark’s Mission, in Nenana, again as a government teacher in a mission school. At the end of the 1910–11 school year, she retired from teaching to be married to George. After his death, in October 1917, she served briefly as interim government teacher at Tanana, site of the Episcopal Church’s Mission of Our Saviour, and as acting superintendent of schools for the Upper Yukon District before finally leaving Alaska in June 1918. Although she had asked to stay on as a teacher in Tanana in 1918, Lopp—who took over from Updegraff in 1909 as chief of the Alaska Division—discouraged

23 In a letter of April 29, 1913, George indicates that, in areas that lacked a public school, white children were welcome in Native schools, “provided they conformed to all the rules of the school” and provided it was understood that they were “received by courtesy and not by right.” It somehow seems less likely that a public school would have extended the same courtesy to a Native child.

24 George’s name first appears in Sheldon Jackson’s annual report for 1905–6, where he is listed as the government teacher at Eagle (Jackson, Report on Education in Alaska and the Introduction of Reindeer, 244). He is listed in the same capacity in Harlan Updegraff’s reports for the two following years.
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her, writing on April 9 that “I consider it unwise for you to remain in the country with your family of small children.”

From George’s correspondence with the Bureau of Education, we learn that teachers in these schools, and indeed in all government schools in Alaska, were appointed on an annual basis and paid only for the nine months of the school year, from September 1 to May 31, dates that were, of course, set by the government to correspond with the standard school year, not with local patterns of life. Teachers could not be reappointed at their current school, or any other, for the following year until the bureau’s congressional appropriation was announced on July 1, at the beginning of its fiscal year. George often reported on the lack of continuity in his schools that resulted from this policy. Many government teachers came to Alaska hoping to make it their life’s work; many became discouraged and stayed only a year or two. Besides the constant uncertainty about employment, the duties demanded of government teachers proved too much for many. The best contemporary guide to those duties is the Rules and Regulations Regarding the Alaska School Service for the Natives of Alaska, Adopted May 20, 1911. The duties detailed in its thirty closely spaced pages of small type—duties that are today the responsibility of multiple specialized agencies—were impossible for lone teachers to fulfill to the letter, supported only by occasional visits from a district superintendent.

In these years, attendance “to the heart as well as mind and hand” of the Alaska Natives through “moral training” was still the goal, as Sheldon Jackson had specified in his 1886 Report on Education in Alaska. In that report, Jackson had laid out the standard colonial vision of Native education, the function of which was “to instruct a people, the greater portion of whom are uncivilized, who need to be taught sanitary regulations, the laws of health, improvement of dwelling, better methods of housekeeping, cooking, and dressing, more remunerative forms of labor, honesty, chastity, the sacredness of the marriage relation, and everything else that elevates man.” To this end, girls were to be taught housekeeping, cooking, gardening, and sewing, while boys required instruction in carpentry, boot making, and “the various trades of civilization.” In his 1909 report on education, Harlan Updegraff reaffirmed these goals, writing that the education of Alaska Natives was the means to their “advancement in civilization” and instructing teachers and superintendents “to regard themselves as social workers and to lay hold of every possible opportunity of assisting the development of the natives.”

25 Jackson, Report on Education in Alaska, 31. Jackson added that Native peoples “need to be taught that both the law of God and the law of the land forbid more than one man and one woman living together as husband and wife, that each family should have a separate home, however small”—a vision of the Christian nuclear family that missionaries worked hard to impose.

26 Ibid., 22.

improvements to sanitary conditions and hygiene, and “the inculcation of moral principles,” with “only slightly less emphasis” to be placed on the standard elementary school subjects. “The schoolhouse in each village,” he wrote, “is regarded as a social center for the accomplishment of practical ends.”

The 1911 Rules and Regulations echoed Updegraff’s words. Schools were to be “conducted for the benefit of adults as well as children,” and instruction (in English, of course) should be “practical in character,” with a focus on “the development of native industries, household arts, personal hygiene, village sanitation, morality, and the elementary English subjects.” In addition, teachers were required to perform any “such duties for the benefit of the natives or for the interests of the Bureau of Education as may be assigned to them by the district superintendents.” Daily exercise for the children and instruction on the “nature of alcoholic drinks and narcotics, and their effects” were added to the list of duties, along with the prohibition of “profane and vulgar language” among the children. In “extreme cases” the Rules and Regulations allowed corporal punishment, although its nature and extent were not defined.

Teachers were further enjoined to report annually to the commissioner of education on improvements made to the water supply, waste disposal, and the ventilation and cleanliness of dwellings in local villages, as well as on what had been accomplished in the “industries,” in the building of “new and improved homes,” in the treatment of diseases, and in the “observance of law and moral conditions.” Teachers were to make regular visits to schoolchildren’s homes, provide medical care to all Alaska Native people living near schools, and distribute food or clothing to the destitute, albeit only in exchange for labour from the able-bodied. Furthermore, they were expected to report on families’ means of support and any income earned. Industrial training, the inculcation of agricultural skills, and the instilling of respect for gainful employment were seen as the means to separate Alaska Natives from traditional subsistence living and to prepare them for a new life as modern wage earners.

Teachers were also expected to “exercise vigilant supervision” at all times over their school building, their classroom, and their supplies and were required to submit monthly reports, in triplicate, on attendance and on the condition of their schools. An inventory of supplies, as well as reports on the “physical and intellectual standing” of each pupil and on the state of the local community, were to be sent annually to the commissioner of education. In reality, however, teachers were often without

28 Ibid., 1298.
30 Ibid., sec. 13.
31 Ibid., secs. 23, 27, 30, 31.
32 Ibid., sec. 44.
33 Ibid., secs. 34–36, 44.
34 Ibid., secs. 28, 29, 41, 43, 44.
classroom supplies, as none were stored on the Upper Yukon and had to be sent by sea from Seattle. As is clear from a number of George’s letters, desks were in short supply or dilapidated, many buildings were not properly weatherproofed, and student numbers fluctuated wildly. In a report dated November 1908, Lopp noted that Alice’s classes at Anvik were held in “a poorly lighted and ventilated room” in one of the buildings of the mission.  

With its meagre annual budget for Native schools, the Bureau of Education questioned all expenditures by superintendents, even the cost of supplying soap and a weekly bath for schoolchildren. Funds for the relief of destitution were grudgingly distributed, despite the fact that the decline in fish and game stocks on which the Dene peoples of the Interior relied was attributable in part to lax or unenforced game laws for white hunters (some private, many commercial) and to the growth of commercial fishing and canneries along the coast, where the salmon began their upriver run. Inadequate funding also meant that government teachers at mission schools were sometimes obliged to lodge with missionaries, not always an amicable arrangement, as well as to work in harmony with the mission, whatever their own religious affiliation. Even as an assistant superintendent, George had no permanent residence for two years but was forced to reside with missionaries or at the army post or in other shared accommodation.

For their labours, government teachers were paid $90 a month and superintendents $150, often a crippling three or four months in arrears. These low salaries, of uncertain duration, allowed for no contingencies, emergency or otherwise, and hardly sufficed for a holiday outside the Interior during the summer months. Moreover, no pensions were available to teachers in the Alaska School Service, and, as George learned at some expense to himself, employees were not eligible to be reimbursed for medical expenses incurred on the job. Nor were there full medical facilities near most schools. Unless a devastating accident occurred and the patient could be taken to one of two military hospitals in the Interior or the Episcopal mission hospital at Fairbanks, sickness was dealt with by teachers, using the few medicines allocated to them, or by missionaries, who had their own medical supplies and infirmaries.

Despite its drawbacks, the Alaska School Service attracted many fine teachers. The majority were single women, whose appointment was not so much discriminatory or sexist as practical. Their nurturing, maternal natures were what the job needed. George was of the opinion that single women had a stronger sense of duty and were

36 See the letters of W. T. Lopp to Elmer E. Brown and to George, both dated June 8, 1911, and the letter of William Hamilton (the assistant chief of the Alaska Division) to Lopp, June 15, 1911. “The only way in which compensation could be made to Mr. Boulter covering the expenses in question,” Hamilton wrote, “would be by securing the passage of a special Act of Congress. This would be a very difficult matter as, unfortunately, many similar instances of injury and loss occur in the government service every year.”
more devoted to their work, more stable and “contented,” as well as more genuinely concerned with the welfare of local peoples. In contrast, single male teachers were easily distracted; many, he wrote, were in a “constant state of unrest.” He preferred married couples for remote villages, where they might set a good example and remain for some years—and where a second worker, whether a handyman-husband or a motherly, domestically inclined wife, could be had for the wage of just one teacher. As superintendent, George had no direct role in the appointment of teachers, but he was responsible for assessing their individual traits and suitability and for monitoring their performance and the progress of the children they taught. He also had to deal with any personal problems that affected their work.

In 1908, in the section of the Northern District comprising the Yukon and Kuskokwim valleys (virtually the whole of the Interior), there were fourteen government schools, at which 528 students were enrolled. These were reduced to eight schools, with 268 students, in the new Upper Yukon District, created when the Northern District was subdivided in July 1910. By 1917, the year of George’s death, the number had dwindled yet further, to only six schools with just 170 students. In the spring of that year, when George surveyed the villages and small settlements in his district, he estimated that some 1,420 Alaska Native children remained out of reach of education, whether that provided by the government or by missionaries. The Bureau of Education hadn’t previously been aware of the existence of many of these settlements, and with the war in Europe soon to overtake America, little was done to remedy the situation.

Government schools for Alaska Natives did not offer instruction beyond the lower grade levels. Prior to the 1920s, when the federal government began to establish vocational boarding schools for Alaska Native children, students who showed academic promise were sent to boarding schools in the United States proper. Church-affiliated boarding schools, however, had existed before 1920, such as the Sitka Industrial Training School, established by Sheldon Jackson in about 1884, and the school at the Roman Catholic Holy Cross Mission, opened in 1888 on the lower Yukon. Upriver on the Yukon, the Episcopal Church established two boarding schools for Alaska Native children, one at Christ Church Mission, Anvik, and the other at St. Mark’s Mission, Nenana, and Alice was a government teacher at both. The Anvik school opened to boarders in 1904 and closed in 1937; St. Mark’s operated from 1907 to 1955.

37 Harlan Updegraff, Report on Education in Alaska, 1908, in Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year Ended June 30, 1908, vol. 2, 1027 (table 2). The northwestern section of the Northern District contained another twenty-one schools, with a total of 1,164 students. So, as assistant superintendent of the district, George was responsible for thirty-five schools altogether.


40 Diane Hirshberg, “‘It Was Bad or It Was Good’: Alaska Natives in Past Boarding Schools,” 5.
As both a deeply religious woman and a government teacher, Alice promoted the virtues of the Protestant Christian home: thrift, prudence, industry, diligence, and religious observance, with chastity and sobriety included for adults and a healthy amount of innocent fun and games for the young. Combined with self-sufficiency, these moral strengths would arm the Alaska Natives against exploitation by white settlers and whiskey merchants, while literacy would further equip children for life in a white-dominated world. Despite the distance of the Interior from the coast, the children whom Alice taught were accustomed to regular visitors from “Outside” and a lively schedule of steamer traffic; they lived alongside busy villages with trading posts, itinerant prospectors, and adventurers, who brought not only news but also disease and a variety of other ills. Because these schools were located on church reserves, the missionaries could, and did, prohibit the sale and consumption of alcohol on their land, but they had no authority in adjacent villages. Alice wrote that she could not go to the village at Anvik sometimes because of drunkenness there. When she could, she encouraged village children and young adults to attend classes at the boarding school and extended “domestic training” to their mothers in their own cabins.

In 1912, George reported that many of the brightest students in his schools were being taken from their families and villages by missionaries and sent to mission boarding schools. The missionaries were adamant that the future of indigenous peoples lay in the children, but their methods caused some friction with the Bureau of Education and decreased student numbers in government schools. Verbal clashes erupted between the two over the appointment of non-Episcopal government teachers to contract schools at their missions, over the teaching of the Bible and prayer book in Dene languages in a government classroom (even if after school hours), over which of the two authorities had ultimate responsibility for care of Alaska Natives, and over the presence of government schools on reserved mission land. It became Archdeacon Hudson Stuck’s goal to build Episcopal missions and schools at remote, isolated locations on the Upper Yukon, where the church would educate and minister to the Alaska Natives without government interference. His opposition to government schools on or near mission reserves drove George to recommend that all new schools be built far distant from them. At the same time, he was expected to maintain a cordial working relationship with the missions—while still complying with every directive from the Bureau of Education in Washington, DC.

The duties of a district superintendent, as outlined in the 1911 Rules and Regulations, were to visit all the schools in the district either quarterly or, if the school was extremely remote, annually and to report regularly on “the methods, discipline, the teachers and their efficiency.” The superintendent must also “ensure the proper care of Bureau of Education property,” such as books and furniture, and make repairs and improvements to the ventilation, heating, and water supply of the buildings and teachers’ residences (if government property). Further still, the district superintendent would be “ex-officio supervisor of construction of government schools” and would also oversee, inspect, and report on the reindeer herds and herders in his district. Then there
were whatever “other duties” might be assigned by the commissioner of education or the US Reindeer Service.\footnote{United States, Bureau of Education, Rules and Regulations Regarding the Alaska School Service for the Natives of Alaska, secs. 2, 3, 6, 12.}

During his eleven years on the Upper Yukon, George also monitored fish and game stocks and arbitrated in any tribal problems, policed the sale of alcohol to Alaska Natives, and did his best to apprehend white whiskey traders. All this was done on his regular and extensive tours of schools, villages, and homesteads and of camps far up creeks, where he sometimes surveyed prospective sites for schools or for a reservation, or took a census of the local population. And, of course, reports and more reports were required from a district superintendent: monthly reports to the commissioner of education in Washington, on the condition and requirements of all the schools in the district, and annual reports on the progress of “the industries, the domestic arts, sanitation and agriculture,” on the “health and moral and economic conditions in the native villages,” and on each teacher employed in the district.\footnote{Ibid., secs. 8, 9, 11.} Lastly, an annual budget had to be prepared showing the amounts needed to support and maintain these schools.

Until its division in 1910, the Northern District was the largest in the Alaska School Service; it encompassed the 1,200-mile stretch of the Yukon River from Eagle to Anvik, plus many more miles along its tributaries. From his base at Tanana, it took George a week or more to reach Eagle in the summer months (nearly 700 miles upstream by paddle steamer or skiff) and nearly a month in winter by dog sled, usually travelling alone, often over trails rendered all but impassable by snow. His reports on schools and villages for the Bureau of Education were produced at his headquarters, some handwritten, some typed, and sometimes with reference to notes made along the trail. Situated in the heart of the Interior, he had to contend with slow or interrupted mail service, which meant that urgent matters requiring a response or decision by one of his superiors went unresolved, and one crisis tumbled on top of another. A policy inquiry or a request made in January might be dealt with in March, or even later. (The slow pace of the postal service is illustrated by the chronological gaps between letters to and from George, which are generally printed here in the order he sent and received them.) Mail to and from Washington had to travel a return journey of 8,000 miles; supplies from Seattle came half that distance but often took many months to reach the Upper Yukon. Any short message of immediate telegraph importance was sent in an expensive telegraph message.

After 1910 and George’s promotion, his tours of schools were reduced to 800 miles on the Yukon River, from Kokrines to Eagle. But the job became no easier. Gambling and alcohol abuse among Alaska Natives were increasing, even though liquor laws had been tightened, and district courts and law enforcement were already overstretched, with only six deputy marshals controlling the sale of alcohol along 1,600 miles of the...
Yukon River. In 1912, George was appointed a special peace officer, with the power to arrest any person, Native or white, violating the 1899 Criminal Code of Alaska or acting “to the detriment of any native.” The latter included the sale of alcohol, and the court cases for which George was subpoenaed multiplied.

Especially after 1915, when territorial legislation established a procedure whereby Alaska Natives could become US citizens (provided, of course, that they had adopted a "civilized" way of life), a distant federal government increasingly looked to the Alaska School Service not only to improve schooling but also to prepare Alaska Natives for citizenship—all while having its funding cut and facing growing opposition from settlers. Partly in an effort to encourage Alaska Natives to abandon their traditional hunting and gathering and adopt a more sedentary way of life, and partly to instill the concept of private ownership, the Alaska Native Allotment Act of May 17, 1906 (34 Stat. 197), empowered the secretary of the Interior to allot “not to exceed 160 acres of vacant, unappropriated, and unreserved nonmineral land” to “any Indian, Aleut, or Eskimo of full or mixed blood who resides in and is a native of Alaska, and who is the head of a family, or is twenty-one years of age.” The immediate value of these homesteads to Alaska Natives was debatable. Not only was the land too poor for successful farming operations, but, once granted, allotments were held in trust by the federal government, which meant that the landholder could neither sell nor lease the land without permission from the secretary of the Interior. All the same, white settlers resented such “concessions,” viewing them as favouritism toward indigenous people and discrimination against settlers. “The sooner the natives are exterminated the better” is a sentiment I have had expressed to me hundreds of times by people who ought to know better,” George wrote to Harlan Updegraff in November 1909. One cause of this “sentiment” was that white traders were prohibited from selling liquor near missions or government schools—a loss of income to which they objected.

Alaska was a frontier, and, like most frontiers, it attracted speculators and others seeking new resources, suitable for exploitation. As the non-Native population expanded, Alaska Natives increasingly found their independence threatened, as

43 Ibid., Appendix IV.
Introduction

outsiders encroached upon their traditional territories. Perhaps not surprisingly, the idea of segregating the two by moving Native groups onto reservations was gaining currency in official circles. From the standpoint of the Bureau of Education, concentrating Native peoples on reservations would help to solve the vexing problem of where to build new schools.

Indeed, the problem of where to locate schools was the subject of many letters from George. When towns boomed during the gold rushes, many Alaska Natives migrated to them to trade and work, and schools for their children became overcrowded. As the gold fields were played out, opportunities for cash employment in the mines or as woodcutters declined, and towns emptied of prospectors and traders to whom local peoples might sell or barter their fish and furs. As these groups moved on, government schools in the vicinity of what were formerly boom towns became redundant. In addition, some Alaska Natives had taken up plots of land, many distant from existing schools, in the hope that, once there, they would not be forced onto reservations. As George wrote to Lopp in January 1916, “I have every reason to believe that many natives have taken up individual homesteads for the sole purpose of circumventing the Government in its plans to settle them on reservations.”

Reservations were, of course, distinct both from “homesteads” and from reserves, that is, parcels of land set aside for the exclusive use of schools or missions. The possible benefits and disadvantages of reservations for Alaska Natives were debated by all: spokesmen for the School Service, the Department of the Interior, Congress, the Episcopal Church, and Alaska Native chiefs and leaders. In January 1912, Bishop Rowe travelled to Washington, DC, where, testifying before the Committee on Territories, he recommended that reservations be established for the good of the Alaska Natives. Writing to William Lopp in October, George firmly took issue with the bishop’s views:

The plan as suggested by Bishop Rowe of placing certain Indians on reservations is, when applied to those living along the Yukon and Tanana rivers, undesirable and unworkable. To place those Indians on a reservation would be a most difficult matter owing to the comparative ease with which they are now able to make a living. Such, too, are their careless and migratory habits that any kind of life on a reservation would be distasteful to them owing to the restraints that would be put on them.

He went on to say that “a reservation would surely be the means of destroying the independence of the Indians” and “would make paupers of the Indians instead of the self-supporting people they now are.” These were, of course, the very fears voiced by Alaska Native peoples themselves.

As is clear from his correspondence, George was impatient with the frustrations of trying to operate a government school on mission land. He was also greatly concerned by the government’s failure to control the sale of alcohol to Alaska Natives and, more generally, by the increasing incursions of white settlers and hunters onto Native lands. The following year, in a report to Philander P. Claxton, who had succeeded Elmer E.
Brown as commissioner of education in 1911, George recommended the gradual closure of government schools located on lands owned by the Episcopal Church. Instead, he wrote, “I recommend that we have a reservation of our own at some central point along the Yukon,” one where “we would be unhampered by outside influences.” As he describes it, his vision of a separate School Service reserve is closer to that of a self-sustaining community that would have the autonomy to create its own rules.

To what extent the overall health and welfare of the Alaska Natives was taken into account by the Department of the Interior in its rush to create reservations is an open question, but in all likelihood expediency was the greater priority. Employees of the School Service and missionaries were left with this conundrum: how best to provide not only education but health care on reservations isolated from many Native villages as well as from larger population centres. They already fought a never-ending battle against disease, including epidemics. In 1909, Brigadier-General A. W. Greeley reported that 48 percent of Alaska Natives suffered from contagious diseases, infant mortality stood at 24 percent, and childhood deaths amounted to another 16 percent of the diminishing indigenous population.46 Alice recorded thirteen deaths in the small Dene village of Anvik during her first two years there, from 1907 to 1909. She wrote that there was “scarcely a whole one among them” because of both introduced diseases and sickness associated with poor sanitation. Tanana, George’s headquarters, recorded thirty-four deaths in 1913 from tuberculosis and syphilis. TB was the greatest killer of Alaska Natives, and no sufferer, however contagious, was quarantined. No isolation wards or “cottages” for patients with contagious diseases were erected until 1926, despite the US Public Health Service having been warned by its medical inspector in Alaska in 1911 that if TB were not eradicated the indigenous population would be extinct well before the end of the century.47

Other introduced diseases were measles, influenza, smallpox, and the newly identified infantile paralysis (polio). An outbreak of measles in 1900 had already killed 25 percent of the Alaska Native population in central Alaska and on the lower Yukon River.48 As we learn from George’s correspondence, a smallpox epidemic that struck near Eagle in 1911 took few lives because of prompt, concerted action and was contained by vaccination. But the polio epidemic near Tanana in 1913, where George and Alice were living with their infant son, George Jr., had to run its course, eventually taking more lives than the better publicized diphtheria epidemic at Nome in 1925.49 By 1917, the year George died from typhoid, no general inoculation program against smallpox or diphtheria had begun in Alaska, and although hospitals opened, they also closed.

In the Interior, four hospitals were operated by the Episcopal Church at which Native people could receive medical treatment: at Circle (1897–1905), at Rampart (1902–5), at Fairbanks (1904–15), and at Fort Yukon (1916–57). Additionally, the church briefly had smaller medical facilities or infirmaries at Tanana, Iditarod, Allakaket, and Nenana and employed the occasional qualified doctor to tour its missions. There were army hospitals at Fort Egbert, Eagle, until 1911, and at Fort Gibbon, Tanana, until 1926, but they were off limits to Native people, although some army post doctors would attend to the sick or injured at the missions or in their cabins and a few peripatetic doctors and nurses were temporarily employed by the Bureau of Education. The Roman Catholic mission at Holy Cross treated those few Alaska Natives that it could, but its facilities were overburdened and underfunded. The first government hospital for Alaska Natives was not opened until 1916, in Juneau, far distant from the Interior, however much George and his co-workers reported the urgent need for one over the years.

Quite apart from the impact of introduced diseases, over which traditional remedies were powerless, and the incursion of settlers, the Bureau of Education’s move to build “new and improved homes” brought changes in the manner of living, which also took their toll on Native health. Whereas the Dene peoples who inhabited the area of the Upper Yukon had once roamed freely, moving with the seasons, they were now often crowded into poorly ventilated cabins in which they lived whenever they were not hunting or at their summer fish camps. Contemporary criticism of government policies for Alaska Natives came not just from the School Service and missionaries. Although Brigadier-General Greeley—a serving officer since the Civil War and chief of the US Army Signal Corps in Alaska, as well as a celebrated Arctic explorer—might seem an unlikely candidate to speak out against the government, in his 1909 Handbook of Alaska he wrote that “every thoughtful man must realize the moral duty of this nation toward those whom we have materially, morally, and physically injured.” He went on to declare that “the story of the Alaska natives . . . can only be viewed as disgraceful to a nation claiming to be civilized, humanitarian or Christian.”

The Alaska Natives at the heart of this book are the Dene-speaking peoples of the Interior. These communities are part of a large family of linguistically related indigenous peoples who range from the vicinity of Norton Sound eastward into Canada, beyond the Mackenzie River as far as northern Manitoba. In Alaska, eleven Dene groups are identified on the basis of language: Ahtna, Tanaina, Deg Hit’an (Deg

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50 Ibid., 34–35.
51 Ibid., 5.
52 Greeley, Handbook of Alaska, 176, 186.
Dene speakers were among the last Alaska Natives to come in general contact with Europeans. Apart from cursory reports by Russian explorers and Hudson’s Bay Company traders, the first came from US government surveyors. None were encouraging. Ivan Petroff, in 1880, found them living in poverty and wrote that they would “probably share in the fate” of the American Indians, “disappearing rapidly before the first advances of civilization, until scarcely enough are left to accommodate themselves to the new state of affairs.” He went on to say that “they have thus far displayed no traits which would warrant us to hope for their speedy civilization.” Frederick Schwatka, who took part in the military reconnaissance of Alaska from 1882 to 1885, similarly declared the “Tananah Indians” to be “very warlike and in every way averse to civilizing influences.” If such assessments are worthy of note, it is only because they persisted long afterwards among white settlers.

In 1912, there were some 24,000 indigenous people in Alaska; only 6,000 or so were speakers of Dene languages, sparsely populating the greater part of the landmass. Around Anvik, where Alice spent three years, were the Deg Hit’an people (then referred to as Ingalik, a term no longer used), who lived along the Anvik River, the lower Yukon from about Holy Cross northeast to the Kuskokwim River, and the lower stretches of the Innoko River. With the assistance of Isaac Fisher, the Reverend John Chapman, of Anvik, produced *Ten’a Texts and Tales from Anvik, Alaska*, a translation of Deg Hit’an folktales published in 1914. “Ten’a” (Dene), a term that simply means “people,” was also the name given to the Koyukon people of the middle Yukon and Koyukuk rivers by Father Julius Jetté, who collected and translated examples of their folklore and compiled a comprehensive dictionary of their language early in the twentieth century. The Holikachuk (Doogh Hit’an), who lived along the upper

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56 Isaac Fisher, who appears frequently in Alice’s journal entries for Anvik, was the Reverend Chapman’s indispensable guide, interpreter, and assistant. He grew up at the Anvik mission, where he lived until his death in 1927, of influenza. In *Forty Years in Anvik*, Chapman writes that Isaac’s passing “deprived me of a companionship which had lasted more than thirty-five years” (24). He goes on to say: “His perfect familiarity with the native language and his skill in interpreting the meaning of the native idioms made his help invaluable in making the many revisions upon which we worked together” (24–25).
57 Jetté’s dictionary, which ran to seven volumes in its original, handwritten version, remained unpublished for nearly a century. During the 1970s, Eliza Jones, a native speaker of the Koyukon language, began working with linguists at the University of Alaska Fairbanks’s Alaska Native Language Center to edit Jetté’s manuscript, with the result published in 2000 under the title *Koyukon Athabaskan Dictionary*. For Jetté’s ethnographic work, see “On Ten’a Folk-Lore” and “Riddles of the Ten’a Indians.”

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Innoko River and had regular contact with their Yup’ik and Iñupiat neighbours to the west, were also among the groups with whom both Alice and George worked.

All Dene peoples travelled beyond their traditional territories, whether to trade and hunt or to take up paid work, and sometimes married outside their linguistic group. Although their eleven languages are distinct from one another, each could to some extent be understood by native speakers of another, if not necessarily by newcomers. Alice became familiar with the Deg Hit’an language spoken at Anvik, but when she transferred to Nenana, some 500 miles up the Yukon and Tanana rivers, she was unable to understand the Tanana language. When George first applied to the School Service at Eagle in 1907, he wrote that he had “studied the language” at Eagle and Dawson—most likely the Han language, the principal language in that region. During his years as superintendent, he seemed conversant enough in other Dene languages to hold meetings with villagers and chiefs. His headquarters at Tanana was in Koyukuk country, where Koyukon, not Tanana, was spoken. Extending far into Canada’s Yukon and Northwest Territories were the Gwich’in people, centred in Alaska around Fort Yukon, Circle, and the Porcupine River, also within George’s district. As we discover from George’s letters, in 1911, the Gwich’in language (or Takudh, as it was then called) became the subject of dissension between the Episcopal Church and the Alaska School Service. In the eyes of the Bureau of Education, the use of Gwich’in at the Fort Yukon mission represented the elevation of church policies over US laws.

Subsistence living based on hunting and gathering was the norm among Dene peoples. In summer, whole families fished, usually from temporary camps, and cut, dried and stored fish for winter, often working a twenty-hour day. In spring and autumn they hunted, butchered, and dried and stored large game. The men did most of the hunting, fishing, and trading and were responsible for the dogs, sleds, and harnesses and for woodcutting. Women attended to all domestic chores, providing everything required to satisfy their immediate needs and to sustain them through the winter. Moccasins were sewn annually for each member of the family, protective clothing was fashioned from animal hides, plants and berries were gathered and preserved, fish were gutted, hung, and dried, small game was snared, and all other food had to be collected, prepared, and stored. Outside their extended family settings, Dene supplemented their livelihood by selling furs and fish, mostly to white traders, as well as traditional crafts, from sleds to clothing. Cash earned from white employers came largely from men’s labour in the mines, as deckhands on steamers, as river pilots, sled drivers, and guides, as carpenters building everything from cabins to churches, mission houses, and schools, and from cutting timber for the paddle steamers.

Children, too, had their responsibilities. They assisted with snaring small game, tanning hides, making handicrafts for sale, gathering edible and medicinal plants, and fetching wood, water, or ice. Their regular absence from school because of these duties was a persistent problem. Alice tolerated what she called these “necessary chores.” George continued to search for and suggest ways of improving school attendance that would not interfere unduly with families’ hunting and work routines.
The relationship of George and Alice with the Alaska Natives seems patronizing and dictatorial today, but they were, after all, products of their time. George was born into the late Victorian worldview of colonizer and colonized, with its unquestioned assumptions about the moral duty of the British to bring Western culture, including the rule of law, to the peoples over whom Britain exercised dominion. Similarly, Alice came of age in an era dominated by evangelical Protestantism and social reformism in the US, during which Christian principles were assumed to be the moral foundation of civilized culture. US Indian policy had likewise taken a reformist turn, one that “accepted acculturation as the best solution to the problems of continuing Indian warfare and the inexorable advance of white settlement,” and this reformist turn was carried into Alaska. George’s and Alice’s early working lives were accordingly conducted within a framework of “enlightened” paternalism, in which the assumptions that indigenous cultures were backward, that Native peoples required “uplifting,” and that education in white ways was an act of generosity, not an insult, essentially went unchallenged. In teaching, emphasis fell on the need to establish a personal connection between teacher and pupils and to foster children’s talents and character development—the ideals of the Eleanor McMains and Jane Addamses of the new century, all duly embraced by Alice.

Alice was a teacher through and through, ever watchful, critical, evaluating each and every personality trait of the children in her care, and their performance in school and at play. She prided herself on being a disciplinarian who kept order in her Alaska classrooms with “severe sweetness,” with “the rule or rod not used,” just as she had done in New Orleans, Knoxville, and Chicago and would do later in California. The kindergarten methods that she employed appear surprisingly modern in some respects: they included art projects, playtime, and nature studies in the fresh air. But, in Alice’s report to the School Service for 1911, the ingrained paternalism of evangelical Protestant missionaries was strongly expressed. After four years’ work teaching and living among the Dene, she wrote: “The poor primitive people are very weak, the oldest is as childish as the youngest, they are all ‘but as a little child, they know not how to go.’” The attitude expressed in 1909 by Harlan Updegraff, then chief of the Alaska Division of the School Service, was a good deal less charitable. He reprimanded George for his “sympathy for the natives,” which, he feared, had led George “to violate the principles deduced from the experience of the Government during the last seventy-five years in dealing with inferior races.” Such well-intentioned compassion, he argued, had merely caused many Natives to become “devitalized in many respects.”

George was indeed aware of the difficulties besetting the Dene peoples for whose education and welfare he was responsible, and he wrote to his superiors about them. He wrote of the Bureau of Education’s failure to resolve the problem of school absences during hunting season and of hungry children obliged to work at home because their fathers were “idling away their time” or had squandered their earnings

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58 Haycox, “Sheldon Jackson in Historical Perspective” (unpaginated).
on gambling or alcohol. He questioned the suitability of the school textbooks with which he was supplied for use in the Interior. He also believed that if Native children were given too much too soon, in subjects such as mathematics and geography, they would be unable to absorb the lessons. Both George and Alice wrote that children of mixed marriages appeared to be markedly more intelligent than full-blooded “Indians,” a phenomenon they explained by pointing out that the former had learned English in infancy. Their shared assessment of many adults as “indolent” or of children as having limited intelligence was, of course, based on a rigidly high set of standards stridently pursued by crusading American educators, standards that virtually any child would find difficult to meet.

Only a few of George’s annual reports on his districts appeared in the Bureau of Education’s annual publications, but this volume collects all that still exist in the National Archives. They are augmented by his letters, the two together providing a rich chronicle of the wide-ranging work of the School Service. No personal letters to or from George have survived, and he kept no private diary. With the exception of information contained in three letters that his nephew Stanley wrote from Dawson in 1904 to a sister in London and an article George wrote for The Alaskan Churchman in 1906, the entire record of his Alaska years is in these letters and reports. The earliest letters are addressed to John Wood and George Thomas at the Episcopal Church Missions House, New York, and relate to George’s work at the mission and government schools in Eagle, from 1906 to 1908. After that, his main correspondents in the Alaska School Service were Harlan Updegraff, chief of the Alaska Division until 1909 and based in Seattle, and William T. Lopp, who served as superintendent of the Northern District until 1909, based in Nome, and then, from 1910 to 1923, as chief of the Alaska Division, based in Seattle. The commissioners of education in Washington, DC, to whom George reported were Elmer E. Brown, until 1911, and then Philander P. Claxton—two eminent educators, neither of whom had any Alaska experience. Because George also worked with and alongside Episcopal mission schools, he was in touch personally and by letter with Hudson Stuck, Archdeacon of the Yukon from 1904 to 1920, and Bishop Peter T. Rowe, Alaska’s first Episcopal bishop, who served from 1895 to 1942. Most of these letters have to do with their opposing views on the health, welfare, and education of Alaska Natives.

In his letters and reports, George often described the difficulties of travel along the Yukon River, in winter and summer, journeys that seem to have taken at least as much of his time as his actual visits to schools. Over the years, he repeatedly voiced the same concerns: the maintenance of government school buildings and teachers’ residences and of Dene village cabins, the lateness or lack of school supplies, the irregularity of children’s school attendance, and the personal problems of their teachers. Of the “industries” mandated by the School Service, George included something
in each report on the condition of gardens located on school reserves, on fishing, hunting and food supplies, and on measures to relieve destitution. The most pressing issues on which he commented in his letters were the illegal sale of alcohol to the local population, their poor living conditions, and the high incidence of diseases in villages. He wrote little about the white settlers or traders, except as they or their businesses affected or disrupted the work of the School Service and/or the lives of Alaska Natives.

Alice wrote two articles for *The Alaskan Churchman* on her life in the mission school at Anvik. Like George, she kept no personal letters from her eleven years in Alaska. The few official letters she exchanged with Church Missions House, in New York, and with Lopp, Brown, and Claxton in the Bureau of Education are included here, as is her annual report to the bureau for 1910–11, the only full report by Alice preserved in the National Archives. Otherwise, the only contemporary record of the four years she spent at Anvik and Nenana, from 1907 to 1911, is her private journal. She wrote in ruled notebooks, which she later numbered 1 to 5; unfortunately, notebook no. 3, covering the latter half of April through to the end of July 1909, was lost sometime prior to her death.

As a private diary written at the end of the day and not meant to be read by others, Alice’s journal was not carefully composed. Alice filled it with accounts of her life with the children, in the classroom and around the mission. She was, she wrote, “with them all hours of each and every day,” sharing “each other’s pleasures and little sorrows.” Whether she and the children went ice skating, or Christmas caroling, or berry picking or simply did household chores together, Alice wrote about it—in immaculate penmanship in her ruled notebooks. She kept a personal account of each child’s character and little acts of mischief—intimate portraits that would have been out of place in her reports to the Bureau of Education. She wrote about most days’ classroom work with short, sharp summaries: “children all doing miserably in their recitations,” “our spelling match a brilliant success.” Holidays such as Washington’s Birthday or Valentine’s Day were celebrated with “great merriment,” as were children’s birthdays, and Alice devoted many lines to the costumes, games, and treats she devised for the children on Halloween, Christmas, and Easter.

The Reverend at Anvik, and Annie Farthing, at Nenana, seemed to be Alice’s only confidantes at the mission schools, and she wrote affectionately about their times together. She had a few words to say about every acquaintance or stranger who stopped at the missions from upriver or down, and, because they reminded her of New Orleans, she noted the name of every passing riverboat, steamer, or launch and whether they brought the mail or supplies or friends, old or new. She also admitted to being very lonely in Alaska, and she wrote with much pleasure, or sorrow, about the arrival of personal letters by steamer or dog sled. She was often ill or “faint,” and she recorded that, too. Her journal entries typically opened with comments about the weather; “glorious” sunsets and sunrises abound. The weather determined whether walks and outdoor recreation would be possible, as well as the degree of household and classroom comfort.
Introduction

and the growing conditions in the garden. Alice often commented critically in her journal on the unsanitary conditions in the village cabins that she visited regularly and on the prevalence of illness. She also sadly recorded the many deaths of infants. Criticisms of the School Service and the government, however, appear only in her annual report to the Bureau of Education for 1910–11.

Of George, Alice made little mention in her journal except for noting the very occasional personal letter she received from him and the short time they spent together at Fairbanks and Tanana in 1909. A few of the personal photographs she kept when she left Alaska in 1918 are interspersed among George’s official letters. The majority of photographs illustrating her journal are from an album of Archdeacon Stuck’s own photographs of the Anvik and Nenana missions and the children there. He compiled this album for Alice and wrote short captions next to every image, presenting it to her in October 1911. Alice, my grandmother, shared this photograph album with me many, many times after she retired from teaching in 1946. In her schoolmistress voice, still tinged with the South and with England, she would enliven each photograph with her stories of Anvik and Nenana and Tanana and “Dear Daddy,” my grandfather.

When I made my own long journey through Alaska in 2002, it was an 8,000-mile odyssey from Vancouver. My Canadian friends and I drove and camped along the old route up the Fraser River, then east to Dawson Creek and on to Watson Lake, in the Yukon, and Whitehorse. From there, we travelled north on the Klondike Highway through Lake Laberge, Pelly Crossing, and Dawson, and then over the “Top of the World” to Forty Mile and across the international border to Boundary (old Poker Creek) and north to Eagle, following the “gold rush” trail. My companions were bemused by my excitement at being on Robert Service’s “marge of Lake Lebarge,” where poor Sam McGee was cremated, and at seeing an old miner’s scow abandoned between the river and the road at Pelly Crossing, a launching place for the wild Yukon River run to the gold fields.

In Eagle City, I walked back in time through my grandfather’s life: the little schoolhouse with its bell tower where he taught, the whitewashed buildings of Fort Egbert, the cabins, the church. I scraped my feet through the stones at the Yukon’s edge, was awestruck by the bluffs rising sheer from the riverbank, imagined I heard a steamboat’s whistle from around the tortuous river bend, and wandered in and out of every building. The entire little city is a living museum. I asked about Eagle Village upriver, where my grandfather taught school, but was discouraged from visiting it—wouldn’t have been welcome, I was told.

Reaching Fairbanks, I hopped onto the eight-seater mail plane to Tanana for the melancholy flight over the labyrinth of marshes, muskeg, and intermingling creeks and channels down the Tanana River to its magnificent meeting with the Yukon. To approach this vista from the air is a thrill my grandparents never experienced. I was
not going to be put off visiting the local village and so set out on foot, unannounced, for the three-mile upriver walk along the same path my grandfather took so often. Dogs, sounding to be in their hundreds, put an end to my musings—and my walk. Most sled dogs are tied up for the summer, but some are not, and those are probably the ones that don’t take kindly to strangers on foot. I was rescued by the local Tanana priest at St. James’s, not the church my grandparents knew but a more recent building, who ferried me to the village in his skiff (and confirmed that the dogs were dangerous to children and strangers). There, on the high bluff overlooking the mighty Yukon, was the thoughtfully placed cemetery, its countless grave markers overgrown but peeking through the foliage at the spectacle below from small clusters neatly enclosed within white picket fences. Somewhere there was my grandfather. In its wild, secluded setting, I marveled at the incongruously noble and grand Church of Our Saviour, completed in 1909, where grandfather attended services and played the organ. The church is now deconsecrated but sacred nonetheless.

The priest graciously ferried me back to the downriver end of Tanana, near old Fort Gibbon, so that I could meet some of the residents of the local elders’ home. Before the Tanana Regional Elders Residence was built, the closest Alaska Native retirement centre was in Fairbanks, but it was not popular with the residents, who longed to be back on the Yukon. At the Tanana home, I met the oldest resident—a woman who told me she could remember her mother talking about Mr. Boulter and how much she appreciated all he had done for her people. As my grandmother wrote on seeing that same Mr. Boulter again, waiting for her at Tanana in 1909, “My joy seemed complete.”

In 2011, through a Boulter family cousin, I was introduced to Athabasca University Press and Pamela Holway, its senior editor. Pamela took my unpolished manuscript in hand and over the next four years we transformed it into the book it is today. For her confidence in the historical importance of these letters and journal, and for her professionalism, I thank Pamela wholeheartedly.

Barbara Grigor-Taylor
London, April 2015