

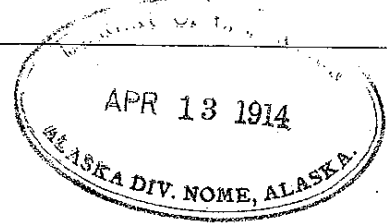
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF EDUCATION
ALASKA SCHOOL SERVICE

COPY

Feb. 25, 1914

SUBJECT, _____

Mr. W. A. Shields,
Supt. of B. Of E.,
Nome, Alaska.



Dear Mr. Shields--

In replying to your very welcome and sensible letter of Nov. 29-13, which reached us the 23rd inst, will say I take genuine pleasure. This is no joke, I have something to say.

First--I heartily coincide with your views concerning the use of sled deer and will act accordingly so far as within me lies. The deer business is getting to be a big and interesting affair to me.

You no doubt, have seen better, but we have here, the finest bunch of sled deer I have seen yet. My, you ought to have seen us come from camp yesterday. It was an exciting, eye rather perilous, yet magnificent sight to see the big Government sled deer clip fifteen miles down the Kuk River and across the Inlet to Wainwright, in much less time than any of the dogs in the village could have possibly have made the trip.

I was up and had the boys move the camp five miles to the S.W? on new and higher ground, preparatory to fawning season where there is more moss. I consider it a grave mistake to winter on the same ground two years in succession. Have really been kept to busy to learn many facts personally, concerning these feeding grounds, etc, until recently. I told some of the boys that I was afraid the moss would be thin up there on last winter's ground but they thought not. Joe, (one fellow who don't like to get out and dig, although he is a good deer man) said the herd was too big. I replied that was no reason why they should want to be running off all the time, nor get poor, if they had plenty of moss. Segevan is my councilor and right hand man so when he came back from Barrow we talked the matter over and decided to move. Poor fellow he got a dose of ptomain in Barrow, eating old walrus meat and has been on his back a very sick man since he returned but is mending nicely now. The boys hated to leave their warm igloos and live in snow houses, but they were very nice about it and rushed about loading their sleds, lassoed deer and got off about three o'clock yesterday afternoon. These people are the best to mind and do what is told them I ever saw, and although they don't do things properly at times, they do the best they know how.

I have had to call on every man in the village owning deer in the herd, twice this winter to go and help hunt lost deer and off they all went and came back with frozen and blackened faces, but with the lost deer.

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The natives say this has been the most windy winter they ever had. It has certainly been a fright. For three weeks at a clip, without a gasp for breath, King Boreas has played a frightful caper. It was absolutely impossible to keep deer together or to hunt them. A number have been frozen. The deer men stuck to their business nobly and it is touching to see them with their cheeks all frozen in this burning, blistering intense cold. There were times when I thought I wouldn't get my breath when on a trip to the herd. We found five deer twenty-five miles below here belonging to Barrow Herd No. 1., in a big blizzard. I am glad for your sake that you did not have to make the trip up here, although we would jump up and down to see you and hadn't given up hopes until this letter arrived.

Last year the natives failed for some reason, to lay in a store a good supply of meat and the result was a scarcity this winter. It has been nip and tuck with some to get enough to eat. Having ten or twelve adults enrolled it broke in on our attendance, for many days they had to hunt to get enough to eat and keep their families.

Now the weather has settled and many seals are being caught. Nathan got twenty night before last. Frank and Artie shot nineteen in one day. I am just aching to hunt but haven't time.

A boy, Alvin, came from Point Franklin, exposed himself and pleurisy is the result. He is a sick boy. Hope he will pull through, better this A. M.

James sat on the ice while perspiring, heedless of the warnings I have given against this, and he has been laid up with pneumonia, and other complications as the result. He is walking around a little now.

We've certainly had both hands full this winter. Thank God everybody is mending now, except the chronic T.B. cases of which Dr. Watkins said there was fifteen and he didn't get to count them all, for some were inland. Quite a camp, eh? We are not kicking. These people need all the assistance they can get and instruction we can render them, and I'm sure its freely given, all hours of the day and night. I know there are thousands of people in the States, no better than we, whom money could not induce to live here among these cases. Shoulda's wife is about all in. All we can do is to ease her suffering as her spinal column has buckled. Stephen, our Government apprentice, a most excellent boy, is shot all to pieces with the T.B.. We feel so sorry for him. He can do very little at Camp now. Frank was not here last night so Stephen interpreted for me. His voice fails him and he is weak and trembly in spite of the tonics and flesh and blood foods given him. We are taking every precaution to escape this fearful "white plague" ourselves.

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The difference between an optimist and a pessimist is said to be this -- the former sees the doughnut while the latter sees the hole in the doughnut. We are still of the latter and are living in hopes that the Government will some sweet day provide T.B. camps for all active cases among the natives. Separation, to my mind is the proper solution for the perpetuation of this people. These cases living in the igloos among those who are not infected simple makes them T.B. incubators. I refrain from putting on paper some conditions we found on our way to Barrow.

You hit ^{of our crying need} the nail on the head when you speak of our natives buying lumber and building themselves sanitary houses. I would offer as a suggestion, that a young lumber yard be left in charge of each and every teacher to be exchanged for money received from the sale of fox skins as you state through Mr. Lopp. Don't you think it would be a good thing if all our natives up here would send their fox skins out by mail to Mr. Lopp? Mr. Cram and I are getting our natives emancipated from the C.S.W. & T. Co., at Barrow, which has manipulated and nearly owned them body and soul for years. Their scheme has been to keep them in debt from one season to the other so the natives would be obliged to take their skins there at any old price the Co., saw fit to give, charging any price suitable for the articles in exchange. Am trying to have our Wainwright natives get out of debt so they will be free to sell their skins where they can get the highest prices for them. We like Crams and are sorry they are going out.

We have a good school ^{44 students} and would have many more scholars, who would like to come, but there is no room for them here. Two of my scholars have to leave for Pt. Belcher tomorrow because they have no place to stay. Think of sixteen people living in those two rooms of James house this winter. Have asked him to swing his beds up against the wall and cut a larger ventilation.

I would be glad to go to Icy Cape and hold school if conditions would make it permissable. Am glad you leave the matter to my judgment. I doubt the expediency of going down for two reasons. First--- the natives are planning whaling on a vigorous scale this year, all the boys and girls that can handle dogs and sleds will be used at Icy Cape, Metlatavik and Wainwright, to haul meat and blubber from far out on the ice, to shore to be stored. This will leave very few to attend school. Second--- The coal business is going to keep one of us here, yet had you said "go" we would have dropped everything and gone.

The bills of sale I am sending are for a frame house which Dick and Jesse would not live in, so I advised Charlie to buy it with female reindeer, of which Jesse received two, Dick one and their

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sister, Annie, one. Don't know whether I will be able to get hers back from Pt. Franklin or not in time to send in this mail. I made these out for valuation of house instead of mentioning house on the Bills of Sales. Is this correct? We couldn't afford to let a square foot of floor space go unoccupied owing to the congested conditions of the igloos.

Now re the coal.

I think all our natives burn coal now. Although they all haven't suitable stoves in which to burn it. They buy coal stoves readily with coal and I trust by another year they will all have been supplied. There is no place here to store coal prior to shipment for protection from the elements. It deteriorates rapidly with heat and moisture, so it is up to me to build a coal shed on the bank out of the lumber here, to save the hundreds of sacks of coal which I have moved off the beach above high water mark after the Transit, (which was to take it to Kotzebue) was beached. I expect to have twelve to fifteen hundred sacks for transportation next summer. *will fee all the sacks*

The coal is burning towards the beach and this is only where it crops out a few places along the river bank. It does not burn far under ground.

The coal is full of seams and when an undercut is made you can hit it a tap and the entire mass will fall breaking in many pieces. It is quite warm when it comes out and emits a gas which I fear would preclude the possibility of driving a shaft unless some means of artificial ventilation were installed. Some of the men were partly shut in by a falling mass of dirt over the entrance, before our arrival last year, and they tell me, "they were died for awhile." The roof is mud and the vein so thin, 15 or 20 inches, that so much dead work would have to be done that it would not pay to timber it. They say there is a larger vein further up the river which I will investigate. Mr. Shaver staked the coal down this way but did not stake the larger vein they tell me about. The tremendous amount of drifted snow makes it impossible to operate these mines in winter. I have no difficulty in getting them to mine coal when they can get it out readily.

The schooner?? is a very dangerous craft. I discourage its use on the sea. She is flat bottomed and can't be held to tack against an off shore wind. Am afraid the boys get lost with it. When she is loaded she works, and the swells opens up the seams. Mr. Bates went with the boys to Icy Cape with a load of coal. I don't think he could be induced to make the second trip. They were all very much frightened. Had to bail her out frequently. She has to carry sand

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ballast to go over the lagoon to the coal mine to keep her right side up. Its too bad for a good schooner could have been built with the lumber that was put into this one. The boys say the Government row boat here, "he wants all the time to turn over."

We'll fix the schooner and they may use it on the inlet and river. We put it off the ground on soild timbers last fall. Wish we had a power schooner here. This is really whst it needs and then coal could be distributed both ways at a minimum expenditure, also brought and stored here for future emergencies.

From facts I have gleaned I consider that man, Samuel Kan-a-ook at Icy Cape, a bad native and dangerous to run at large. I understand the marshall is on his way up to investigate him. His own daughter had a child to him which was born here and fed to the dogs. She died of grief. He is now living with a half breed girl, Susie, from Pt. Hope, that is, she lives in his house. Capt. Backland is unfortunate in having such a man in charge of his business there. The natives are afraid of him.

Our Republic is doing fine work. Wish you could see the improvement. We have quite a financial system, Banking business, Deposit books and slips, receipts, given and taken-- checks have to be properly executed to make withdrawals. They carry on their regular weekly and monthly meeting in parlimentary order. This is developing them along many lines. They have become more communicative and self reliant. Yes, we are figuring on a plan of extending the Republic to the entire village, eliminating the financial part of it.

We hold village meetings in which we talk on sanitation and discuss matters concerning the welfare of the village, but to put them in the Republic will please them very much we think.

Well, time would fail me to tell you many items of interest. Phillip the one-legged man, for example, he's the greatest chap I ever saw, and accomplishes more on one leg than 99 out of 100 do with both. He is a marvel to drive a dog team over the great pressure ridges of great cakes of ice pitched every way and never lose his seat on the sled rail on his stub. I had to let my sled go any old way to save my neck and at the same time he was always right side up with care. I yelled many times, "Phillip your alright, I take my parka off to you!"

Now I doubt whether you will ever want me to tire you again with such a lengthy epistle.

We would almost infer from a report from Sinuk, that we were fugitives from justice and dirty ones at that. Nevertheless we are ready at any time to meet any one or anything on record at Sinuk.

You have a fair conception as to about how clean

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a housekeeper my wife is. I always thought she
was quite immaculate.

Olive is not improving very fast. Tonils are bothering her.
How are the twins?

Mrs. V. joins me in regards to you and
yours.

Sincerely yours,

W. B. Van Valin