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Alaska, Nulato, St. Peter Claver's Mission School, 1932

William M. Hughes

Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions

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MISSION SCHOOLS-20
ALASKA
NULATO, ST. PETER CLAVER'S MISSION SCHOOL
1932

Rec'd FEB 8 1932
 Ans. *2/11/32*
 Pwd. *2/11/32*
 Letter *2/11/32*
 Order filled *2/11/32*
 Ship't *2/11/32*
 Copy to 1 *2/11/32*

Mission of Saint Peter Claver,
 Nulato, Alaska,

January 15, 1932.

My dear Monsignor Hughes;

The December 26th, 1931, number of the America, under With Scrip and Staff, has a statement that may cause some adverse comment in Washington.

The Superior of the Alaska Missions is supposed to have said to the young man from Harvard, "Third, we protect them from the Government sharks, who impose upon them and rob them". I consider that a most unfortunate statement in view of the endeavours of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to cooperate with us in our work. Here is what I wrote to the America on the subject.

"Third, we protect them against the Government sharks, who impose upon them, and rob them". If the Superior made that statement, well, I am sorry you published it without an explanation. There are inefficient Government officials and workers teachers, but the rank and file may well merit our approval. May it not be possible that the missionaries themselves have not always been in the right. However, I merely wish to say that a statement such as the one quoted above is easily misunderstood even by those well affected towards our work. The Bureau of Indian Affairs shows itself more than willing to work in harmony with us. I find the Bureau teachers in the villages along this part of the Yukon very helpful in every way. The Bureau nurse here (in Nulato) is self-sacrificing to a degree that is worthy of our emulation. The same may be said of the teacher in Galena. "America" is looked upon as the official organ of the Jesuits in the United States, hence, the reference to "Government sharks" will be certainly taken amiss".

I write this to you because you are our representative in Washington, and you should know that the complaints are not all on the side of the missionaries. Some of the missionaries have been really difficult to deal with, most unreasonable in their demands and most unwilling to cooperate. I say this with very definite cases in mind. If we call names, "Government sharks", we may well merit rough treatment from the Government officials. In times

past we have had difficulty with Government officials here in Nulato, but I honestly believe that the Bureau has always been willing to remedy matters when they were presented properly. Mr. Wagner, the former head of the Bureau activities in this Alaska was not very competent. The present head seems to know his business ever so much better.

Yours sincerely,

Joseph H. Hines

Archives and Institutional Repository - Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions

BUREAU OF CATHOLIC INDIAN MISSIONS
2021 H St., N. W. Washington, D. C.

February 3, 1932

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Rev. Wilfrid Parsons, S.J.
329 W. 108th St.
New York, N. Y.

Dear Father Parsons:

Not mailed to Fr. Parsons. Fr. LaFarfa judgment is too bad to hazard it. (TM)
But copy sent to Fr. Francis Menager M. Elmeel

I have a letter of January 15 from Father McElmeel, Nulato, Alaska, in which he quotes the statement which he wrote you, the purpose of which was to correct a false impression which might be gotten from a statement of Father Francis Menager, S.J., Superior of Alaska missions. Fr. M's statement appeared in the December 26, 1931 number of America, under With Scrip and Staff. You will scarcely publish Father McElmeel's statement as is.

I am writing Father McElmeel to say that fortunately official Washington does not seem to read America. If they did, I would have been hanged as you will probably remember because of the publication in America of a confidential letter (so marked) of mine written to Father John Post, S.J. of De Smet Mission, Idaho.

I suggest to Father McElmeel that the best way to handle the difficulty (which does not excite me) and at the same time to furnish America more good copy, would be for Father Menager to write a statement of facts showing the cooperation offered by the Office of Education and its successor, the Indian Office, in Alaska. I shall ask Father Menager kindly to send the letter to me for---What shall I say?---as to a socius. In my editing of The Indian Sentinel, which I still claim is the most Jesuit magazine in the country, the Fathers are very patient and charitable. On the other hand, I do save an occasional one from a faux pas.

For the past ten years I have had an understanding with the N.C.W.C., including the News Service, that they would not publish anything on Indians, especially where the Government is concerned, without at least consulting me. About five years ago they failed to keep the agreement. They published an attack by Bishop Lawler. At a meeting of The Committee of One Hundred of which he and I were members, the Bishop put himself at the head of seven professional Indians and agitators. The Bishop introduced a resolution providing for the abolition of the Indian Office and the distribution of all tribal funds. He did that despite the fact that the two Jesuit mission schools in his diocese were receiving \$86,000 out of tribal funds and despite the fact also that knowing his poor judgment, I had had him in my office for several hours warning him what not to do. The Committee was astounded by the Bishop. General Hugh L. Scott stood up to his more than six feet of height and peered out under those shaggy eye-brows evidently in search of some one. I knew that that some one was myself. I did not need that command of mon general. Without mincing words I answered the Bishop. Among other things I stated that this Bureau was established by the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore to represent the Bishops of the country officially before the Government in Indian matters, that I knew I spoke the mind of all but one Bishop as well as the mind of 100% of the priests when I said that it would be as reasonable to kill off all the white parents of children fourteen years of age and under, and immediately to distribute all inheritance as it would be to abolish the Indian Office and distribute all tribal funds.

The Bishop was overwhelmingly voted down. He then hot-footed it to the N.C.W.C. News Service and gave them the story that very few of the Committee of 100 were in attendance when he was voted down.

The first I saw of the Bishop's story was in print. I immediately went to see Justin McGrath. (Lord have mercy on him.) To my question, "Have you not an agreement with me, etc?," he replied, "That is true. But we also have a fixed principle here, that a Bishop's statement is front page news." I said to Justin, "Let's go up to see Father John Burke."

-2-

My old friend, Father John, had a face as long as a horse, especially when I told him that I was going to the Delegate.

As usual the Delegate was very kind and strong. He replied that he could not do anything with the Bishop. But he added, "You answer him in the papers in which he appeared."

I did. The N.C.W.C. news service was delighted to get such a story as that: an attack by a priest (presumably in good standing) on a Bishop.

The Bishop has been good ever since and the contracts have been increased. You know that if it were not for this Bureau here those contracts, including also one enjoyed by your Fathers at St. Stephens, Wyoming, would not be in existence. When Father Ketcham, (R.I.P.) died ten years ago, I willingly returned to Washington, especially because I wanted to see those contracts saved. I found out later it was Father Ketcham's dying wish that I should return.

Yours fraternally,

Rt. Rev. Magr. William Hughes,
Director.

WH:MB

Copy to Fr. McElmeel

Epilogue

Letter of Fr. Jos. F. McElmeel, S. J.

Easter Sunday,
Tanana, Alaska.
March 31 (1932?)

Dear Bishop:

Today for the first time for three weeks I have felt safe in staying in my house long enough to write some sort of a letter.

As you may know from the newspaper reports, the Flu struck Tanana three weeks ago and to date has claimed fifteen victims. Though it is true that some of these would have died from other causes within a few months, yet the Flu can be justly charged with their death.

How I regretted on my daily rounds of the cabins that I did not know something or more about medicine & nursing. These daily rounds meant at least two visits daily to every patient. How many in all were sick in Tanana? It was the exception to find a well person in any cabin.

I sawed wood, carried it into the cabins, administered aspirin, gave lots of good advice about keeping warm, brought soup and fruit for some of the sick; while all the time I kept the main point their eternal destiny well before them.

Your Lordship will be consoled to learn that not one died without receiving the last Sacraments. I must not of course relate all in these pages, but I may say that in a number of cases their eternal salvation depended on my being here.

To sum up the whole story in a few words, I tried to do all that a priest should do in such circumstances, though as I sit here writing to you tonight, I am painfully aware that I was in many ways in the care I could have given to the sick. Knowledge was lacking, not good will.

A slight attack of the Flu has left me feeling rather depressed -- a sort of useless for anything feeling. About the only consolation I have is that I was the instrument God used to bring His Sacraments to so many dying.

The work of dressing many of the dead also fell to my lot. In some cases I had to spend my own money to buy suitable clothing for them. -- Tomorrow I shall start with a devoted Catholic man, Mr. Braico, to dig the graves for the dead. Some 50° below zero weather has made digging a bit tough.

When all the dead shall have been buried, I must start towards Nulato. I am not in the best of shape for the trail; but as it is getting late, I must make some sort of a start. I am not sending your Lordship accounts of the confessions & Communions, etc., as they are but duplicates of my Fall stay here. These poor people appreciate the presence of a priest.

Please accept this meagre report in the spirit in which it is sent. I felt that my bishop, as the custodian of God's flock, should have some idea of what has been done on the Yukon.

Yours respectfully

Joseph F. McElmeel, S. J.

Mission of Saint Peter Claver,
Nulato, Alaska,
June 13, 1932.

My dear Monsignor Hughes;

Word has just reached us here that a Doctor Gordon has been appointed head of the Alaska division of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Will you please send me all the information about him that you can get. It will help us very much in our dealings with him if we know something about his previous work, his school policies, his church affiliations, etc. I am convinced that the Bureau is working steadily and systematically to get the future leaders of the Indians and Eskimos into their schools. While we cling to the training system of 1876 the Bureau is at least pretending to prepare the pupils of their schools for life here and now.

As you know from a previous letter of mine I try to work in close harmony with the Bureau people, and admire many of the men and women in the schools along the Yukon, however, our boarding schools will become mere refuges for incompetents and incorrigibles if the Bureau continues to be able to attract the best from our villages. What is the solution? Well, that I must leave to the Bishop and our Superior.

I have just returned from a rowboat excursion to the camps between here and Tanana. A few wind storms and almost constant rain made the trip a rather rough one.

With all best wishes, I am

Yours sincerely,

Fr. F. M. Luel

Rec'd JUL 5 1932
Ans. JUL 9 1932
Fol'd
Letter to _____
Order filed _____
Work Slip O.K. _____
C. U. or Ref. _____
Type for _____

40-1
July 9, 1932

Rev. Joseph W. McKelmeel, S.J.
St. Peter Claver's Mission
Nulato, Alaska.

Dear Father McKelmeel:

I have your letter of June 13.

Doctor Gordon has been appointed Director of Education for Alaska, with headquarters in Juneau. Doctor Gordon has had a wide range of experience in teaching and in business.

Doctor W. Carson Ryan, Director of Education of the Indian Office, speaks very highly of Doctor Gordon. Doctor Ryan is a very fair man.

Yours fraternally,

Rt. Rev. Msgr. William Hughes,
Director.

EW:JR

Copy for Bureau
Orig. to donor
OCT 5 - 1932

Miss Agnes R. Rattigan
Providence, R. I.

My dear Miss Rattigan:

Your generous gift to the mission of St. Peter Claver came in this morning on one of the last boats of the year. We, the Sisters and I, are promising ourselves a thorough review of all the lovely things you sent us. We might, in fact, set up a drug store or deliwaessen shop with the contents of that box. One of the Sisters tells me that even a beauty shop, Yukon River standard, might be started with the supply of good soap you picked out for us. May God bless you for your constant and intelligent charity.

I have been away from Nulato most of the past two months visiting the fish camps up the Yukon. My present and zealous colleague, Father McKey, is now in Kaltag looking after the Indians there. He will return in two weeks to enable me to get away to the villages above Ruby. We are on the go all the time. Pray that our labor may not be fruitless.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) Rev. Joseph McElmeel, S. J.

Copied by MW.

40-1
Mission of St. Peter Claver
Nulato, Alaska
September 3, 1932.

Copy for Bureau

to S.J.
Orig. to donor
Nov 2 - 1932

Mission of St. Peter Claver
Nulato, Alaska
September 19, 1932

My dear Miss de Roulet

The Christmas box came in a few days ago on the last boat of the season. As usual everything you sent will be most useful for our Christmas tree. May God bless the hands that prepared all these lovely things.

We have been very busy this year visiting all the camps along the Yukon River between Kaltag and Tanana in our Chapel Boat, the only real Chapel Boat in Alaska at the present time, though some of the other Missions are following our lead next year. It is quite a problem to keep in touch with these vagrant people. They wander all over this part of Alaska in search of good places for hunting and fishing. In a few days I must start off on another missionary excursion that will take me away from Nulato for more than two months. Pray that I may do the work of the Lord with a generous heart.

Be assured, my dear Miss de Roulet, that we do not forget you and yours before God's altar.

Yours sincerely

(Signed) Joseph McElmeel, S.J.

Copied by TB.

Miss Marie A. de Roulet
7342 Constance Ave.
Chicago, Ill.

MISS SANTA CLAUS NEVER FAILS

[1932]

When I returned yesterday from a visit to the fish camps along the Yukon between here and Tanana I was advised that the usual lovely box of Christmas things had arrived from Miss Marie de Roulet of Illinois. May God bless her for her constant charity. Every year we look forward to receiving the box from Chicago, and it does not fail to come. The task of filling Santa Claus' boots is made easier for me by the lovely way our Miss Santa Claus dresses up her gifts. The Indian children are children of the truest kind. The ceremony of unwrapping each package is very deliberate, partly not to spoil the "iiiiiiiice" paper and string, partly to lengthen the joy. A look at a map of Yukon will discover names as Tanana, Kokrines, Ruby, Galena, Nulato and Kaltag. Every year Miss de Roulet's gifts gladden the hearts of children in these villages.--(Rev.) Joseph F. McElmeel, S.J., Alaska.