

LBJ LIGHTS HOOPER BAY TREE

President Lights Christmas Tree 5,000 Mi. Away

President Lyndon B. Johnson last Monday officially introduced the rural electrification program in Alaska when he lit a Christmas tree in Hooper Bay 5,000 miles away.

The release that came to the Tundra Times did not explain how the President performed the feat and Bonnie Ericsson, Tundra Times secretary, became inquisitive as to how it was done.

"How could the President light that tree in Hooper Bay 5,000 miles away? He must have had a long extension cord," Bonnie speculated.

Bonnie's inquisitiveness puzzled her editor boss, Howard Rock, and they discussed whether it was done by micro-wave or whether it could have been done by activating something over the telephone.

"Is there anyone we could call to find out?" Bonnie asked.

"Why don't you call AVEC (Alaska Village Electric Cooperative, Inc.) in Anchorage?" said her boss.

Bonnie made the call and contacted Bill Rhodes, manager of AVEC.

Rhodes explained that when the President lit the nation's Christmas tree at the White House last Monday, he also made a special recognition of the launching of the rural electri-

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MAJESTIC AT NIGHT—The church of the Roman Catholic Immaculate Conception in Fairbanks awaits Christmas in silent majesty.
—DIGNA JOHNSON Photograph

LBJ Lights Tree For Excellent Performance—

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fication in Alaska.

Rhodes said that Richard Birchell, area superintendent of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Bethel, had worked hard to have the Christmas tree lit in Hooper Bay by the President.

A telephone hookup was established between Bethel and Hooper Bay and from Bethel to Washington, D.C.

When the President made his appropriate ceremonial remarks over long distance phone, the Christmas tree in Hooper Bay was switched on at the same moment when LBJ switched on the White House tree.

Hooper Bay, a village near the mouth of the Yukon River in southwest Alaska, became the first community to utilize electricity installed by AVEC.

The tree was transported from 125 miles away for Hooper Bay. The location of the village has no trees.

When President Lyndon B. Johnson pushed the button to light the national Christmas tree on the ellipse in Washington, D.C. at 5:30 p.m. (EST) Monday, December 16, 1968, he also lit a Christmas tree in the remote village of Hooper Bay on the far western Bering sea coast of Alaska.

The President's action also initiated the switching on of electric power throughout Hooper Bay for the first time in history.

This small, isolated settlement of approximately 500 Eskimos is the first of fifty-nine such Aleut, Eskimo and Indian villages which will receive central station electric service under a unique project involving the cooperation of the Rural Electrification Administration in the Department of Agriculture, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, The Office of Economic Opportunity, the U.S. Department of Labor, the State of Alaska and the villages.

The purpose of the project is to improve the living conditions and health of the natives and to stimulate economic development in the area.

Wiring of the buildings, most of which was done by the citizens of Hooper Bay under the direction of officials of the recently formed Alaska Village Electric Cooperative and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, was completed last weekend.

Receiving service are all residences of the community, in addition to two churches, a mission house, a native store and an elementary school operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Headed by Mayor Nile Smith, an Eskimo, residents of Hooper Bay participated in the decoration of the Christmas tree, which was flown to the barren seacoast settlement from 125 miles inland.

In addition to traditional lights, the Eskimos decorated the tree with their own handmade crafts in preparation for the President's action lighting the tree from the nation's capitol nearly 5,000 miles away.

While it surprises most people unfamiliar with Alaska, the first electric appliance sought in this Eskimo village is refrigeration. All native subsistence foods can be stored in freezer chests to contribute to a better year-around diet for the Alaskan native.

The cooperative will ultimately be owned and controlled by the native villages it serves. William L. Hensley, an Eskimo native of the Kotzebue area is president of the cooperative until he is replaced at annual meetings yet to be held.

Manager W.C. Rhodes heads the cooperative staff charged with coordinating and building the small electric systems all over the State of Alaska.