

The History of the Alaska Moravian Church 1885-1985

The Moravian Seminary and Archives in Bethel, Alaska, have just published *The History of the Alaska Moravian Church 1885-1985*.

The book was researched and written over the past two years by two Alaskan authors, Mr. James W. Henkelman, ACSW of Anchorage, and the Rev. Kurt H. Vitt, TH.M., of Bethel, in order to provide a comprehensive, documented and illustrated history on the occasion of the Moravian Centennial in Alaska. The authors worked foremost from primary and secondary sources, taking into account the diverse range of materials deposited in archives from Bethlehem, Pa., the Moravian Mission headquarters in North America, and Hernhut, Germany, the world-wide headquarters of the Moravian Mission until 1914, as well as the Moravian Archives in London, England, to the Huntington Library, in California, and various state and national archives throughout the United States.

The result is a 420-page historical document that should become a valuable resource for continuing local and statewide research with respect to aspects of Christian missions in Alaska in the context of both Native culture and educational achievements and/or failures. The book gives an account of the life and development of the Yup'ik Eskimo in the Kuskokwim area under the influence of Moravian ministry during the past 100 years. It contains 250 historical photographs, maps and reproductions that present a memorial to the Yup'ik way of life and grant a 'visible' appreciation of the

changes that have taken place.

Most of the photographs come from the original collection, the negatives of Rev. Dr. Ferdinand Drebert, D.D. who served in Alaska for 42 years, who is renowned for his photographic artistry in addition to his Yup'ik language ability and other accomplishments.

The book provides information in the origins of the Moravian church worldwide, the importance of Arctic Native religion and Shamanism, the reasons why the Moravians entered the Alaskan 'mission field' in 1885, and the development and history of the Moravian congregations in Alaska. It portrays the challenges for the Native people and the Moravian missionaries, and it describes many of the definitive accomplishments of both missionaries and Native fellow-workers, especially the ministries and achievements of people like John Henry Kilbuck, Ernest Weber, Joseph Romig, Adolph Stecher, John Kinz, Arthur Butzin, Ferdinand Drebert, and their wives as missionaries. Equally important are the accomplishments of the Native ministers, Kawagaleg, Lomuk, Hawk, Nuchakluk, Foster, Petluska, Lloyd Neck, Jim Kinegak, Joe Albrite, Sr., Jacob Nelson, and especially Uyakok - Neck, the Yup'ik intellectual who developed the most outstanding Native writing system and orthography in North America at the turn of the century while lacking any formal linguistic training or knowledge of the English language.

The book further examines the historical relationship between the

Moravian Church and the Orthodox Church and their ministries in Alaska. It documents the development of the first indigenous church in Alaska. Since 1978 the Alaska Moravian Church is a self-supporting and self-governing church, administered solely by Yup'ik clergy and lay people who are providing ministries in the local

congregations in the Yup'ik language. In this context the history also presents accounts of the preservation of the Yup'ik language in the related Kuskokwim area through Native literacy programs which the Alaska Moravian Church has provided prior to

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present-day bilingual programs in public schools. Moravian missionaries not only learned to speak and write the Yup'ik language, they effectively taught Yup'ik reading and writing to Native children and adults alike.

In all, this history book lends itself to interesting and informative reading. For the interested reader, it allows further scholarly research. It may serve equally well as a resource for teachers and students in high schools in Alaska, especially in the Kuskokwim area, and for comparative studies also in colleges and universities beyond the con-

finer of Alaska. An extensive annotated bibliography is provided; in addition, several chapters come with their own specific bibliographies, e.g., the chapters on Shamanism, Orthodoxy, the Moravians, Sheldon Jackson, the Native language situation, and Yup'ik publications. A summary chronology is given in both English and Yup'ik.

Design and layout of the book were provided by a Bethel artist and craftsman, David Whitlaw, in cooperation with the staff and management of the Tundra Press, Inc., which printed the book. It is produced in 8½ by 11 inch format, in perfect binding. Text and photographs are printed and reproduced on high quality stock.

The History of the Alaska Moravian Church, 1885-1985 will be available at the Moravian Bookstore in Bethel, and other

sales outlets, as well as through mail orders. Price of the book is \$25.00, plus \$2.00 for postage and handling for out-of-town orders.

Address orders to the: Moravian Archives, P.O. Box 2084, Bethel, AK 99559. Phone: 543-3766
