

Edgecumbe Enjoys Holidays Then Tragedy Hit Sitka

(Editor's Note: Mt. Edgecumbe High School students at Sitka had colorful festivities during the holidays. Then on the second day of the New Year, a tragic fire destroyed the St. Michael's Cathedral, a 121-year-old Greek-Russian Orthodox church, as well as a great portion of Sitka's business district. Alexander Muktoiyuk, a senior, told of these things in the following article.)

By ALEXANDER MUKTOYUK
Mt. Edgecumbe High School

Christmas and New Year holidays at Mt. Edgecumbe School were eventful and colorful. We might say that the holiday events started on the evening of December 18 when the Senior Ball was held in the girl's gym.

This dance was indeed a colorful one. To fit the theme song selected by the senior class, "Beyond the Reef," a huge, beautiful scene of a reef, done with great talent by Harry Kaleak (Barrow) and Jerry Daniels (Elim), was posted on the stage.

The excellent music was furnished by a foursome from Sheldon Jackson Junior College called, "The Bumble Bees."

Many faculty members attended the ball, and to the students' amazement, participated in the dances which gave the students a feeling of accomplishment in restoring youth to these wonderful people.

Harry Kaleak from Barrow and Betty Jean Klein from Golovin were crowned King and Queen of the Ball.

On Sunday, December 19, the girls dorm had its open house. Although it was not possible for this writer to attend, he heard many compliments about the artistic decorations put up by the girls.

STUDENTS ASSEMBLY

There was a general assembly in the Field House on Christmas Eve in which all the students sang Christmas carols under the direction of Miss Sumter, guidance head, and Mrs. Ruth Wolverton's piano accompaniment.

After the assembly, which lasted until about 8:00 p.m., the students rushed to the dorms to receive their presents. Each student found a sack of goodies left under their pillows by Santa Claus.

A group of about 25 boys went caroling around the community and later received much praise from those who heard them.

It was fascinating to see how these boys despite being away from home, expressed the Christmas spirit.

Although there was no visible evidence of homesickness among the students, one was sure that many of their minds

were filled with memories of the past holidays they spent with their loved ones. But each contributed to make it a better holiday for the rest of us here.

CHRISTMAS DAY

On Christmas day, following church services, some of the students were checked out by relatives and friends for dinner. For those who were not checked out, a big turkey dinner was served in the dining hall.

Then in the evening a dance, which was well prepared, was held in the Field House. A musical group consisting of Elmer Frankson (Pt. Hope), James Norton (Kotzebue), Gilbert Long (Barrow), and George Ahmaogak (Barrow), supplied the music.

This same group played on New Year's Eve dance. On the second half, they were relieved by another group which consisted of Paul Asicksik (Shaktoolik), Mike Moses (Stevens Village), Phillip Nicholi (Holikachuk), and William Derendoff (Huslia).

The two groups showed much talent in handling their instruments—two guitars, a base guitar, and drums.

At midnight, hundreds of balloons were released from an enclosure of a large colorful parachute above the dance floor. Noise-making toys were passed around and the year 1966 was welcomed with all the joyful noise and enthusiasm.

TRAGEDY

That was the way the Mt. Edgecumbe School greeted the first day of 1966. And then:

Early Sunday morning, the second day of the New Year, the students were awakened for breakfast and told that there was a fire in Sitka. It was a cold, windy morning. They looked and the flames were starkly visible in the pre-dawn.

The fire had started in Porter's store (where most of the boys bought clothes) and spread wildly over the main part of town, destroying some 17 businesses and two churches, the Lutheran Church and St. Michael's Cathedral.

Although most of the valuable arts were saved from the Russian Orthodox church, there was a feeling of great loss of what the building was in itself. It was beauty one noticed first as he entered the proud city of Sitka.

No one doubted that there was a much greater loss for those who worshiped in the cathedral.

But we are assured that this landmark will be rebuilt in the near future—this time as a fire-proof structure. Mayor John O'Connell of Sitka, Governor William A. Egan, and Senator Ernest Gruening were very confident that it will be

erected again.

The words of these great men over the radio were indeed encouraging and we feel that every Alaskan should contribute a little to put up again what was the pride of all Alaska so that we will still have that pride in the future.

Practically all the students here have been affected by the destruction of the businesses. One of the boys here was said to have admired a pair of shoes at Porter's and that he was going to purchase them as soon as he could afford them.

One of the privileges afforded the seniors also came down when the flames caused the Coliseum theater to collapse.

We are told that the KSA-TV station, which was also a total loss, will be in operation again in the near future. This will not only mean the restoration of an entertainment for many students, but it will be the first bandage to heal the wound of our land's first capitol.