

Reindeer industry started in 1892

A reindeer industry program in Alaska had begun in 1892. The reindeer industry was organized to help provide a permanent economy for the Eskimo people.

In 1896 the Moravian mission at Carmel, once a village located near Nushagak, asked the Bureau of Education to send them reindeer for their mission.

In 1901 the Carmel mission was recorded as having received 88 deer. The reindeer herd that had been sent to Carmel were kept during the summer and slaughtered in the fall.

Some of the reindeer meat was sent to nearby canneries as an addition to their food supply. They hoped that the procedures would be followed the next year and reindeer would become a source of food supply for the Moravian mission at Carmel.

A Moravian missionary had decided to transfer 300 deer from the Kuskokwim to the Copper River in 1904. The transfer began in December of that year.

During the transfer the herd became stranded near Iliamna Lake and remained there. This effect led more reindeer into the Nushagak and Togiak regions.

In 1906 the Moravians at Carmel decided to close the mission. There is no evidence as to why it closed. Later



after the mission was closed, new government reindeer stations were started at Choggiung, later called Dillingham and Ugashik.

It is stated that there was an estimate of 400 reindeer at Choggiung in 1913. There might have been more or even less. There is little information is available.

Reindeer had been said to be sighted near the Wood River Lakes region and on the Kokwok River. The reindeer were Native owned. There were also Eskimo herders who worked for the government who took care of some reindeer.

In addition, there were reports of five men living in nearby villages of the Kokwok River who owned reindeer themselves totaling about 260. Nearly half of the total reindeer there were owned by one person.

During the beginning of the 1940s there was a total of about 8,000

reindeer in Southwestern Alaska. The Native cooperative held the majority of Native owned reindeer.

In the late 1940s reindeer started disappearing in the Nushagak River region and the Togiak area. Some reasons for the disappearance was because of the lack of knowledge of how to herd the reindeer and disease spread from one reindeer to the other.

Lapp herders had been asked to come to Alaska to teach the Eskimos how to herd and take care of reindeer. The people around the Bristol Bay region had a hard time learning what was being taught to them on reindeer herding.

The industry that had disappeared had no long-term effects on the Eskimo way of life because reindeer herding didn't fit into the pattern of the village or traditional way of life to the Yup'ik people.