

Welfare Fee Agent Retires After 30 Years

July 1969 marks the 28 year end of the career as a part-time Welfare Fee Agent of one of Alaska's remarkable employees, Alfred G. Francis of Kotzebue.

Francis, born in Alton, England on December 12, 1887, was "just passing through Kotzebue in 1939 on my way to Hawaii to retire at the youthful age of 52."

As spry as ever and with an elfin twinkle in his eye, Francis says he may get to Hawaii yet, although he "claims to be an Alaskan" through and through. Since 1939, Francis has filled various positions while working for the Welfare Department.

These include: 20 years as U.S. Commissioner, 11 years as Postmaster of Kotzebue, 29 years as Alaska Department of Fish and Game License Vendor, and 2 years as Kotzebue's Selective Service Clerk.

His eventful career also includes the distinction of his having worked on all the wooden bridges of the Alaska Railroad between Birchwood and Broad Pass during the summers of 1921 and 1922.

In the Fall of 1940, the Village of Kotzebue needed a U.S. Commissioner. There was also a separate job of "Welfare Fee Agent."

Welfare checks all came in one envelope and were distributed by the fee-agent, who soon discovered that his predecessor had been of a philosophic turn of mind and had advanced them a few dollars on their expectations. It was well that my office was not elective.

The welfare agent's excitement-quotient seldom reaches that of the crucial moment of a tiger-hunt or, say, a trip to Las Vegas.

In fact, if one pays attention to a literal interpretation of a few basic forms, it could be humdrum except that one is dealing with human beings and they are people with that great inherent fear of starving to death.

So one has no trouble listening. Human distress is more touching than majesty.

One great adventure was when Mrs. X brought a Deputy Marshall and together we went and captured a fatherless family of three children, small ones and they were put into foster homes. One of them, now grown, makes my heart purr occasionally by smiling and saying "Hi."

Then there was that age-proving business in Noorvik. A man and woman told of the flu epi-



CONFIDENT BOY SCOUTS—Self assured young Eskimo Boy Scouts from Barrow seem to be anticipating with interest their trip to the National Scout Jamboree at Farragut State Park near Coeur d'Alene, Idaho later this month. Along with many fellow Scouts throughout the United States, the boys, Delbert Rexford, left, Tony Leavitt, center, and Luther Leavitt, all members of

Troop 58 in Barrow, are touring national parks in the Western United States. The boys are posing for the picture in front of the Boy Scouts of America building at 1400 Gillam Way in Fairbanks. The Barrow youngsters are the first Scouts ever to represent Barrow at the annual National Jamboree.

—THOMAS RICHARDS, JR. Photograph

demic in Kotzebue that occurred almost before the White Man came.

The Eskimo families were decimated. In this particular family, first the Dad passed on, and then the mother, leaving this 8 and 10 year old alone and still-healthy families gone. These two took the family row-boat and went to Noorvik, 80 miles and "acrost" the Kobuk Lake.

More than a half-century later these were the same brother and sister with more than enough age to qualify them for Old Age Assistance.

"I have always been impressed by the high walibre of the Welfare personnel it has been good fortune to meet and work with," said Al Francis. "That is said sincerely and I leave with no tears. Of course, I am not going to sit down and wait for that Guy with the Scythe. There are things to be done. May it always be that way. 'Bye.'"



ROSA AND ALFRED G. Francis pose for a picture prior to completion of Alfred's 30-year career as a part-time welfare fee agent, Department of Health and Welfare.

Upward Bound Paves Way to Hawaii and College for Hazel Smith

COLLEGE—When Hazel Smith entered Upward Bound at the University of Alaska she had no idea it would lead to a year of high school in Hawaii and a scholarship to Ft. Lewis College at Durango, Colorado.

She left the UA campus last week to begin an orientation program at Ft. Lewis College prior to her first year of college study. She was one of six girls selected to attend high school in Hawaii last year through the Upward Bound program here.

The others were Nita Sheldon of Noorvik, Ina Uglowook of Gambell, Kay Koweluk of Wales, Mary Abalana of Egegik, and Ella Anaguick of Unalakleet.

Upward Bound director Bob Egan said the girls were selected to attend different high schools in Hawaii as an experiment which turned out successfully.

For Hazel, an 18-year-old, dark-haired girl from Kiana, Upward Bound was a big step.

"Before Upward Bound I didn't care about anything," Hazel said. She said she had no future to look forward to and wasn't particularly interested in school.

"Now that I've been in Upward Bound, I can see some of the problems my people face and I want to do what I can to help solve them.

"Upward Bound lets you get away from home. We can do our own thing and be independent. I've changed a lot—emotionally and mentally."

She admits there are problems in forging her way up through society to accomplish things.

"I don't want to be a celebrity Eskimo," she said, which is one of the problems she foresees in becoming a teacher and counselor for others. Hazel says one of the biggest stumbling blocks for kids her age is that they are

afraid.

"They are afraid of the things they don't know about and there isn't anyone around to convince them that they should not be afraid," she said. "But Upward Bound has done a lot to show them there is nothing to be afraid of."

One of the biggest challenges the program faces is its inability to help all of the village kids who want to participate. Only 81 were able to participate this year and some schools with more than 100 students had to screen them down to a few.

During the eight weeks that the 81 high school age youths are in Upward Bound they will get a taste of life on a college campus. Their studies include anthropology, mathematics, English, and communications courses like writing, drama and speech.

They will also get a chance to learn something about electronics and photography or take a course in secretarial work.

The idea is to get them to take a good look at themselves, says Egan.

"They have to understand that they are somebody," he said, "that they do have talents and ambitions and that they do have a chance.

"If I'd gone up to some of these kids four years ago and told them they could go to Harvard, they wouldn't have believed it.

Now some of them know what they're capable of.

Kay Koweluk, a spritely 18-year-old, was offered several college scholarships including one from Stanford University—but she chose to accept one from Trinity College at Hartford, Connecticut.

Hazel said Kay had a difficult time making up her mind but finally decided that Trinity was more interested in her as a person than the others.

"Kay no longer sees herself as a nurse or a teacher," Egan said. "She knows she wants to develop her skills in the liberal arts. She came back from Hawaii involved with the problems of Native teenagers and she has goals now that she wouldn't have thought of three years ago.

Egan, who was a high school counselor at Nome before taking over UA's program three years ago, said the kids he has worked with have probably changed him more than he has changed them.

"I was just a tourist when I arrived in Alaska," he said.

Since taking over the program, Egan has discovered that the same rules used for the rest of the nation hardly apply in Alaska. The usual program emphasizes college prep only.

If such a program were adhered to in Alaska, Egan said even the students defined in the "A" or "B" category would be doomed by statistics.

The drop out rate of Native students from the university has been well over 90 per cent. Only about 60 per cent of those eligible ever finish high school.

"We try to take the students who we feel will be helped by the program," Egan said. "With these kids encouraging them to go on to some kind of secondary education is more realistic than restricting goals to just college."

