

REINDEER IN ALASKA

About March 1 of 1898 the people of Seattle were given one of the strangest sights in a year of remarkable events. Through the streets of the city for the preceding six months had been passing a motley throng coming from almost every country on the face of the globe, all bound for the great gold strike on the Klondike. At Woodland Park, during the early days of March, there was an encampment of Laplanders from the north of Norway numbering 113 persons, men, women, and children. In their care were 538 reindeer, also brought from the north of Europe. Great piles of the baled reindeer moss which was brought for provender was piled about the camp, and the whole scene was a bit of the life of Arctic Europe transplanted in America. The shipment had left Trondjeim, Norway, on the S.S. *Manitoban*, February 4 of that year, and reached New York City on the 27th.

This was the result of the efforts of the Congress of the United States to relieve the distress reported to be prevalent in the mines of the Klondike, in Canadian territory, consequent upon the great gold rush of 1897. The act as passed on December 18, 1897, provided for sum of \$200,000, "to be expended for the purchase of subsistence stores, supplies, and materials for the relief of people who are in the Yukon River country, or other mining regions of Alaska." The plan was to take the reindeer from a point on the coast of Alaska to the Klondike, that they draw sledges laden with supplies, and among the other articles were 418 sleds and 511 sets of reindeer harness.

The reindeer were taken north from Seattle on the bark *Seminole*, leaving March 10, and reached Haines Mission, on the shore of Lynn Canal, on the 27th of the same month. There the entire cargo of deer, sleds, moss, etc., was unladen, and cantoned in charge of fifty-seven of the Laplanders, superintended by Mr. William A. Kjellman.

The needs of the miners on the Yukon had proved not to be as acute as had been reported, the interest in the expedition subsided, and the reindeer were left for a time on the shores of the inlet. The moss, which was a necessity of life to the deer, ran short. An attempt to feed the animals on alfalfa hay proved a failure; some sickened and died, and the others were much weakened. Then began the attempt to take them over the Dalton Trail, up the Chilkat River to the uplands where the reindeer moss is abundant. The river thawed

earlier than usual, rendering the trail almost impassable, and it was April before the animals moved out from Haines. The herd was divided, the War Department retaining 200 head and the Interior Department taking 326 head. By May 6, 185 deer reached the north summit of the pass, and 43 were left in the Chilkat Peninsula, making 228 left alive out of 526 that reached Haines. By September 1 there were but 144 remaining. Of these some were taken to Circle City and there killed for food, and a few of the remaining animals were taken to the Tanana Valley, where they all disappeared in a short time.

It is a prevalent opinion in many places that these were the deer from which the reindeer herds of Alaska have proceeded, but it is not the case. These deer were all sled deer for transport purposes and were gelded males.

One of the interesting features of the venture is that the enterprise seems to have been intended partly as an attempt to colonize Laplanders in Alaska who would in the course of time control the reindeer business in the Territory. There were 113 immigrants, comprising 74 Lapps, 10 Finns, and 25 Norwegians. Of these there were 68 men, 19 women, and 26 children. Among the married Lapps was a husband of 29 years and his wife of 50 years, with a son of 16 years. The contract under which they came was that each man was to have a herd of deer at the end of his term of service if he remained a certain time in the employ of the government. Had this been carried out as intended nearly the whole of the reindeer herds would have passed into the hands of the Lapps and Norwegians. But fate decreed otherwise. The larger part of the immigrants went to Nome and St. Michael, reaching there as the gold excitement at Nome was in its infancy. There nearly all of them left the government service to engage in the search for gold, and the colonization scheme passed into oblivion.

But the real story of the introduction of reindeer into Alaska is not materially connected with this expedition in any way whatever. It had its inception in the needs of the native population of the northern and western coasts of Alaska for subsistence, for the keeping of life in the bodies of the human beings on those bleak shores where the natural life which had constituted their means of livelihood during the ages of the past had been swept away. It is an interesting chapter in the history of Alaska.

The reindeer industry of Alaska has added a new source of wealth and of food supply to the people of America. Within the past thirty years it has developed from absolutely nothing to a financial value of

nearly \$4,000,000. The number of deer at present approximates 150,000 animals, and at a very low valuation each animal is worth \$25.

At one time the wild reindeer or caribou occupied the larger part of the Territory of Alaska, and they yet range over large areas of the country. The natives derived a considerable part of their subsistence from the herds, which numbered thousands. As the white man came into the country, bringing with him improved firearms, the added consumption, together with the ease of destruction, caused the herds to be entirely removed from great areas of the northern and western parts of the Territory. The natives suffered in consequence, and the plan was adopted to import the domesticated reindeer to fill their places.

The first suggestion of the introduction of the domesticated reindeer is said by some to have been made by Captain Healey of the United States Revenue Cutter Service, but the credit of the development of the idea is due to the Rev. Sheldon Jackson, the first general agent of the Bureau of Education of the United States for Alaska. His attention was strongly drawn to the necessity for some relief for the native population, and he was in a position to accomplish more toward it than any other man, while his enthusiasm carried him to devote his energies to it with untiring zeal. He lectured before audiences from coast to coast on behalf of the cause, laid the project before Congress, and asked an appropriation for the purpose, but was denied. He then turned to private subscriptions as a source of revenue for the foundation of the industry, and to prove its feasibility, which was denied by many.

The first importation of deer was made through a subscription of \$2150, and consisted of 20 deer purchased on the coast of Siberia, 16 of which were landed on Amaknak Island in Unalaska Harbor, during the summer of 1891. They thrived on the pasturage, and demonstrated the practicability of the project. The next year 171 deer were landed at a point on Port Clarence, in the Seward Peninsula, at the north side. This was called Teller, in honor of Senator Teller of Colorado, who was Secretary of the Interior at the time of the authorization of the Alaska school system in 1885.

The importations continued, all of them from Siberia, the purchases being made by the officers of the Revenue Cutter Service, and the deer being brought in the ships of the Service. They continued until 1902, by which time there had been a total of 1280 animals transferred from Asia to America. Of these there was one consignment of a special breed of deer called "Tunguse," from the tribe of Siberians from whom they were procured. They were secured by

Lieutenant Buthoff of the Revenue Cutter Service. They are finer animals than the ones purchased of the Chuksees of East Cape and vicinity, being larger, stronger and longer of leg. These were intended to improve the whole stock of Alaskan deer, but by some management in the selection of herds they have mainly passed into private hands, and so have partially lost their value to the government herds. Of these there were 428 animals.

The funds for the purchase and maintenance of the reindeer, with the exception of the sum of \$2156, before mentioned, have been secured by appropriations by Congress, the first in 1894 of \$6000, the following year of \$7500, and later of larger sums, with a total to 1917 of \$312,000. Of this only a small part has been used for the importation of the reindeer, while the rest has gone for the support of the industry, notably for the bringing of Lapps and Siberians to instruct the Eskimaux in the care of the herds.

The first instruction was by the Siberians, four of whom were brought from Asia in 1892, but they proved unsatisfactory, and were replaced by Laplanders. The first Laplanders were procured by a private subscription of \$1000, and with this fund the superintendent of the reindeer, Mr. Kjellman, went to Norway and from Finnmarken brought six men, four of whom were married. These men proved very competent and rendered good service. During 1898 others were brought, but most of them left the government service soon after reaching Alaska and went to the gold mines near Nome.

The first superintendent of the herds was Miner W. Bruce, who was appointed at the opening of the station at Port Clarence in 1892. He was succeeded by W. T. Lopp, of the American Missionary Association station at Cape Prince of Wales, on June 30, 1893. Mr. Lopp returned to his station during the ensuing year, and William A. Kjellmann of Madison, Wis., took the position. During 1906 J. C. Widsted replaced Kjellmann for a short time, when Kjellmann again assumed the duties and continued until Francis H. Gambell was appointed in 1899. Carl O. Lind succeeded him, and afterward the Territory was divided into districts, each of which has a superintendent. After the close of the administration of the educational affairs of Alaska by Sheldon Jackson, the general supervision has been in the hands of W. T. Lopp, as superintendent of education of natives of Alaska and chief of the Alaska Division, the reindeer being under this service.

The stations at which the deer are kept extend from the Alaskan Peninsula to Point Barrow. The last report of the government on this service is for 1917, and gives a total of 98,582 deer, distributed

in 98 herds, of which 67,448 were owned by natives, 23,443 were owned by Lapps and whites, 4,645 by missions, and 3,046 by the government. The ownership among the natives constituted 1,568 persons, of whom 170 were apprentices. The income to the natives, exclusive of hides and meat used by themselves, was \$97,515, and the income to others than natives was \$35,002, making the total from the industry \$122,517. The total income of the herds from the first to the date given is estimated at \$772,795, and the valuation of the herds to be \$2,464,750, and the grand total from the industry of \$3,930,345, from a total appropriation of \$317,000 by the United States.

The export of the meat from the Territory to the United States began in 1915, with a shipment of 13,485 pounds, with a valuation of \$2,040; the shipment during 1918 was 99,174 pounds, valued at \$17,845, and the total shipments to date are 155,201 pounds, valued at \$27,845. The amount consumed in the Territory is not given in the statistics.

There are thousands of reindeer in Alaska today that are ready for the market, but the chief difficulty is to secure shipping facilities. The carcasses are placed in cold storage after the animals are slaughtered and are shipped in cold storage boats to Seattle. This at present is possible from but two points, Nome and St. Michael. There has been a project considered which would place two additional plants, one at Golovin Bay and the other on the Kotzebue, but it has not been carried out. The Kotzebue Bay plant would serve the whole region to the north of that point, the animals being driven to that place during the winter and there slaughtered and shipped during the next summer. The meat sold at 28 cents per pound for the entire carcass in Seattle during 1918.

To forecast the future of the industry is a difficult problem. There is grazing ground in Alaska for a large number of reindeer. Some authorities estimate that it will support as many as 5,000,000 animals. It is certain that there are immense areas over which the white moss, which forms their chief subsistence, is the prevailing vegetation. There are no herds along the Arctic to the east of Point Barrow, the regions already occupied are capable of supporting many more than it now contains, and there are large tracts in the interior of the country along the mountain ranges which are available for grazing. There is no doubt that it is destined to become a great industry in the near future.

The danger which threatens at the present is that the control of the business may pass into the hands of men who will control the ranges and crowd the native to the wall as the cattle kings did with the Indians of the Western cattle ranges. The native has the right to live in the country he has inhabited, and his rights should be protected.

But the main fact is that before many years there will be each year shipload after shipload of the finest of meat sent from the Territory of Alaska to aid in the food supply of our country. If the estimate of 5,000,000 is taken as the possible amount the country is capable of supporting, and the rate of increase is 20 per cent., the annual increase of the herd would be 1,000,000 each year. The per cent. of increase from 1906 to 1916 was 22 per cent., so this is a low average, and should be increased by careful management. If 40 per cent. of the increase is the marketable output each year, and the average value is taken as 25 cents per pound by the carcass, the annual income from the industry will be the sum of \$15,000,000, an amount greater than the value of the entire pack of salmon from the Territory for the year 1913. This will have been created out of an area which was entirely barren of any production in the year 1890, and the value of 5,000,000 reindeer at \$25 each would reach the sum of \$125,000,000, or four times the investment in the above mentioned fisheries for that year, and over fifteen times the cost of the entire Territory at the time of the purchase in 1867.

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