

Alaska State Library
Historical Collections

Guide to Collection

St. Mark's Mission (Nenana, Alaska)

Booklet of St. Mark's Mission, Nenana, Alaska, ca. 1900 [manuscript]

MS 4-11-2

15 page album
Photocopied article
Photocopy of album

Processed by: Staff
Revised by: Anastasia Tarmann, July 2010
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ACQUISITION: In late 1979, Arthur Spencer III of Portland, Oregon, donated the manuscript booklet about St. Mark's Episcopal Mission and boarding school, Tortella Hall, to the Alaska State Library Historical Collections. No database accession number.

ACCESS: The collection is unrestricted.

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PROCESSING: This collection has been described at the item level. Original order maintained. The items have been placed in Mylar, and into a pH-neutral folder and archival box.

BIOGRAPHICAL / HISTORICAL NOTE

St. Mark's Episcopal Mission and boarding school, named Tortella Hall, is located in Nenana, Alaska. Walter [Harper, son of gold miner, Arthur Harper and Seentahna, a.k.a. Jennie Bosco] attended St. Marks Mission school in Nenana. In 1912, the 20-year-old Walter accompanied Hudson Stuck on the explorer's greatest expedition, the first successful 1913 ascent of the south and highest peak of Mount McKinley. Arthur Harper's son, Walter, who led the ascent up the mountain, became the first man to step foot on top of North America's tallest point. Tragically, Walter Harper and his new bride, Frances Wells, died in the 1918 sinking of the Princess Sophia in Lynn Canal, one of Alaska's greatest and most costly maritime disasters [Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Foundation, online].

Nenana is in the western-most portion of Tanana Athabascan territory. It was first known as Tortella, an interpretation of the word "Toghotthele," which means "mountain that parallels the river." The Nenana Valley of Central Alaska is the site of one of the earliest archaeological sites in North America, dating between about 11,000 and 12,000 years old. The first non-Native explorers to enter the Tanana Valley were Allen, Harper, and Bates in 1875 and 1885. However, the Tanana people were accustomed to contact with Europeans, due to trading journeys to the Village of Tanana, where Russians bartered western goods for furs. The discovery of gold in Fairbanks in 1902 brought intense activity to the region. In 1903, a trading post/roadhouse was constructed by Jim Duke to supply river travelers and trade with Natives. St. Mark's Episcopal Mission and School was built upriver in 1905. Native children from other communities, such as Minto, attended school in Nenana [Alaska Community Database Community Information Summaries, Alaska Department of Commerce, online].

Archdeacon Stuck, Episcopal Church missionary, went to Alaska in 1904. He died at Fort Yukon in 1920, of bronchial pneumonia, and was buried in the Indian cemetery at his...request; the bearers were members of the Native council, and bore the remains a quarter of a mile to the grave. Also, a very widely attended memorial service was held in New York City at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine [Donor's notes].

SCOPE AND CONTENTS NOTE

A small handmade booklet about St. Mark's Episcopal Mission and boarding school, Tortella Hall in Nenana, Alaska. Original photographs illustrate the booklet and hand written and typed notations explain the contents. The book describes the Mission's work and the school that housed and instructed twenty-eight children of varying ages. Among the Athabascan children and youth pictured is Walter Harper, who was with Archdeacon Hudson Stuck on the 1913 ascent of Mount McKinley, and for whom Harper Ridge is named.

SUBJECTS

St. Mark's, missionaries in Alaska, boarding schools, Episcopalian missions, Mt. Mckinley, Walter Harper, Archdeacon Hudson Stuck, Harper Ridge

INVENTORY

- 1 *St. Mark's Mission, Nenana Alaska: Tortella Hall by Moonlight*. [15 page booklet, including the cover, with 9 b&w photographs, hand written and typed text.].
- 2 Photocopy of item #1.
- 3 [Biographical article about Walter Harper, who attended St. Mark's school and led the descent up Mt. McKinley, now Denali, with Hudson Stuck. copied article from NY Times, April 10, 1932.].
- 4 Arthur Harper, 1835-1897. *Alaska Mining Hall of Fame*. [Biographical article about Walter Harper and parents, especially his father, miner and trader, Arthur Harper.].