

**“EDUCATOR AND CIVILIZER”:
THE WOMAN’S HOME MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF THE
METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND THE
EDUCATION OF INDIGENOUS ALASKANS¹**

ALEX GUNTER PARRISH

In 1890, members of the Woman’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church celebrated the influx of interest and tangible support for a new industrial home in Unalaska, Alaska. Sheldon Jackson, the general agent for education of Alaska, had published a widely-read book on the territory, and the plight of the Native peoples of Alaska narrated in its pages aroused the hearts and wallets of concerned Christians across the United States. Society secretary for the Bureau for Alaska, Lydia Daggett, commented in that year’s *Annual Report* that “Items and articles in the public print have been more numerous than at any previous time, and have attracted attention to this vast Territory of ours.” The new home, the Jesse Lee Home, received funds and goods from supporters of different ages and means—such as two little girls who “sold their pet lamb for missions” or a woman who donated money for one desk, hoping “the little arms that rest upon this desk while being educated will live to bear aloft the banner which is inscribed ‘Holiness to the Lord.’” But celebrated most of all were the gifts “[f]rom sources hardly expected.”² Daggett had written to an unnamed sewing machine company of the Jesse Lee Home’s need of a sewing machine, and was delighted to receive both a machine and a letter containing the following note of support: “We are pleased to comply with your request. We ship a sewing machine properly packed to the address you gave, and hope it will prove as great an *educator* and *civilizer* as your other efforts for the benefit of the Alaskans.”³

It is this “educating and civilizing” of the Alaska Native peoples by the Woman’s Home Missionary Society (WHMS) that is the focus of this article. The presence of Methodism in Alaska is due in large part to the work and persistence of women. Where others were unwilling or unable, Methodist women took the reins and resolved to continue the mission. In the face of

¹ This article is a revised version of a lecture given at the Western Jurisdiction Commission on Archives and History Bi-Annual Meeting and the Historical Society of The United Methodist Church at Alaska Pacific University on June 27, 2017. Special thanks to Dr. Priscilla Pope-Levison for her invaluable critiques and suggestions.

² *Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Woman’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the year 1889-90* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1890), 80.

³ *Ninth Annual Report*, 80. Emphasis mine.

danger, opposition, and even death, it was the women of the WHMS who advanced the cause of Methodism in Alaska. During its existence from 1880 to 1940, the Society aimed to missionize Alaska through educational initiatives that joined American Protestant values with ideals of citizenship, designed to integrate Alaska Native peoples into American society. These initiatives included industrial schools that taught American Protestant domesticity to indigenous women and children, as well as formal classroom education that attempted to replace indigenous cultures with an idealized American culture.

Society historian Ruth Esther Meeker described the Woman's Home Missionary Society as "rooted in the past and linked to what the brethren frequently mentioned as the 'peculiar gifts and capabilities of women.'"⁴ The Society was recognized by the General Conference in 1880,⁵ and was officially recognized in the *Discipline* in 1884.⁶ The first president of the Society was then-First Lady of the United States, Lucy Webb Hayes. The Society was focused on missionary efforts in the United States and its territories to which women were specially equipped. While foreign missions were important, the United States and its territories were vital mission fields, for "[in] the homes of a people are the hidden springs of national character, and a stream cannot rise higher than its fountain-head."⁷ The home became the locus and microcosm for Christian civilization. Thus, training schools, publications, evangelistic efforts, activity among poor blacks and whites, and social activism were a few of the many ministries enacted by the Society, intended to redeem the home life of the United States. Most of what the Society did was in service to Christian education, which was "the watchword" of the Society.⁸ When the doors to Alaska were opened, the Society promoted education as the key to winning the territory for Christ.

This education was informed by a set of values, which were shaped through the ideological force of maternalism. Priscilla Pope-Levison, in a recent article, described maternalism as it was applied by nineteenth-century Methodist women. By examining the deaconess movement and the Woman's Home Missionary Society, and especially the popular literature and novels written by and for Methodist women, Pope-Levison argued that

maternalism was not simply a compromise to mollify a male church hierarchy but an ideology that these women embraced and perpetuated among a wide swath of the

⁴ Ruth Esther Meeker, *Six Decades of Service 1880-1940: A History of The Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Cincinnati: Steinhauser, 1969), 1. She later described the "peculiar gifts and capabilities" as the "feminine mystique."

⁵ R. E. Smith, *The Woman's Foreign and Home Missionary Manual* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1912), 17, digitized by the Internet Archive in 2011 with funding from Drew University and a grant from the American Theological Library Association. Accessed at www.archive.org on 7 Nov 2015.

⁶ Russell Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, *American Methodism: A Compact History* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 128-129.

⁷ T. L. Tomkinson, *Twenty Years' History of The Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church 1880-1900* (Cincinnati: The Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1903), 1.

⁸ Tomkinson, *Twenty Years' History*, 4.

faithful. In other words, the maternalistic ideology disseminated by women in the [WHMS] and the deaconess movement . . . restricted women by their own rhetoric and strategy to “mothering not governing.”⁹

In other words, maternalist ideology cast the women of nineteenth-century Methodism as mothers in and to the church and the nation. Pope-Levison’s analysis ends in the nineteenth century, but the ideology and rhetoric continued well into the twentieth century, and, in many ways, remained the ideological core of the Home Mission movement. As will be shown in this lecture, mothering was central to the Society’s efforts to educate and Americanize Alaska Native children.

While maternalism kept women in subordination to men, the Alaska mission was a unique laboratory for the subordinationism to be tested and stretched. Between 1881 and 1891 the Society allocated nearly \$50,000 dollars to the Alaska mission.¹⁰ According to the *Annual Reports*, this money was donated by the women of the Society and collegial parties, but not from the Methodist Episcopal Church’s missionary committees. The Alaska Bureau Secretary for the Society, Lydia Daggett, connected the Society’s mission efforts with Sheldon Jackson, the general agent of education for Alaska for the United States government. Jackson commissioned and supported official male teachers and paid them through government funds. The Society commissioned female helpers, sometimes the spouse of the teacher, and supported her in the mission.¹¹ What had the Methodist Episcopal Church given? According to Lydia Daggett, “The great Methodist church has expended the magnificent sum of *thirty dollars*, for mission work done by the wife of a Government teacher, who gave her services to our Society and her life—a martyr to discomfort and lack of medical attendance,” referring to the death of Society missionary Ethelda Carr in the mid-1880s. Daggett excoriated the church for ignoring the peoples of Alaska for two decades. Her conclusion, however, was not for more involvement from the Methodist church. Rather, she argued, “*Humanity and Christianity call aloud for [consecrated] women*” to go to Alaska and to give more money.¹² Daggett had no hope that the Methodist church would expend such money or efforts, and she heartily critiqued the brethren for their disinterest. Further, her rhetoric cordoned Alaska as a mission specifically for Methodist women,

⁹ Priscilla Pope-Levison, “‘Mothering Not Governing’: Maternalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Methodist Women’s Organizations,” *Methodist History* 55.1&2 (October, 2016 & January, 2017): 32. “Mothering not governing” is a phrase taken by Pope-Levison from Carolyn DeSwarte Gifford, “Introduction,” in *The American Deaconess Movement in the Early Twentieth Century*, ed. by Carolyn DeSwarte Gifford (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987).

¹⁰ Funding is listed in each of the *Annual Reports*, though the exact amount given between 1882-1885 is unclear.

¹¹ *Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Woman’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Year 1885-86* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1886), 93.

¹² *Sixth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Woman’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Year 1886-87* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1887), 56. Emphasis original.

and not for the larger Methodist Church.

Such ideas were furthered when the leadership of the church supported a proposed but ultimately defeated constitutional amendment that would have made government support for religious education unlawful. The intent of this failed piece of legislation was to block Roman Catholics from receiving government aid for education.¹³ Though the legislation was not passed, the church, in supporting the effort, ruled that its missionary societies and auxiliaries would no longer accept government financial assistance.¹⁴ This nearly struck a death-blow to the Society's Alaska mission. However, the Society sustained the work through reclassifying the Alaska mission and through internal fundraising. Of note is the fact that support for the male missionaries, previously covered by the United States government, passed to the women of the Woman's Home Missionary Society.¹⁵ In other words, the breadwinning that had been provided by the government and might have been provided by the leadership of the Methodist Episcopal Church was provided by the women of the Woman's Home Missionary Society.

As mentioned previously, the Society partnered with Sheldon Jackson, an ordained Presbyterian who was the general agent of education for Alaska. This partnership informed and shaped the strategies and values of the educational initiatives. Before becoming fascinated with Alaska, Jackson had worked as an educator to the Choctaw Nation as early as 1858.¹⁶ This experience among the indigenous Choctaws formed his ideology concerning indigenous peoples and the methods of Americanizing indigenous youth. Such efforts included a strong disciplinary element designed to drive out Native culture and replace it the values of Protestant American civilization.¹⁷

The first place Jackson visited and worked in Alaska was Wrangell in

¹³ "Home Rule or Rome Rule," September 15, 1889, and "Against Sectarianism," December 26, 1889, *New York Times*. Accessed at <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archivefree/pdf?res=9800EEDF1130E633A25756C1A96F9C94689FD7CF> and <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archivefree/pdf?res=9802EFDD1E30E633A25755C2A9649D94689FD7CF>.

¹⁴ *Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church Held in Omaha Nebraska May 2- 26, 1892*, ed. by David S. Monroe (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1892), 167.

¹⁵ *Twelfth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Year 1892-93* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1893), 43-44; *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Year 1893-94* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1894), 87. The government support lasted for approximately six years (between 1886 and 1892). While short, this period was where the Alaska mission saw four husband and wife teams and two unmarried female missionaries in two different regions (see *Fifth Annual Report*, 93; *Sixth Annual Report*, 55; *Ninth Annual Report*, 10, 81; *Tenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Year 1890-1891* [Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1891], 74, 75).

¹⁶ Robert Laird Stewart, *Sheldon Jackson: Pathfinder and Prospector of the Missionary Vanguard in the Rocky Mountains and Alaska* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1908), 38.

¹⁷ Norman J. Bender, *Winning the West for Christ: Sheldon Jackson and Presbyterianism on the Rocky Mountain Frontier, 1869-1880* (Albuquerque: U New Mexico P, 1996), 7. Bender cites a letter from Jackson to his parents which explains that he did not like the punishment, but was encouraged by the other teachers to administer the whippings.

1877.¹⁸ Jackson’s primary aim was to have a system of government established in Alaska instead of military regulation. After much effort and failure, a bill passed in Congress in 1884 that established a local government for Alaska. The bill was an important step for work in Alaska, as it gave authority to the president to appoint leadership within the territory. With its passing, \$25,000 was given for Alaskan education, and soon thereafter Jackson was appointed general agent for education in Alaska.¹⁹ As general agent for education Jackson appointed teachers for the children, and he set his sights on Protestant men who would bring civilizing religion with them.

Of special importance for connecting Jackson with the Protestantization of Alaska is the Comity Agreement Jackson struck with several Protestant denominations, which divided Alaska into jurisdictions for each denomination to missionize without encroaching upon other Protestant denominations. Comity agreements were common in the nineteenth century, as they “[prevented] disagreements among the mission personnel and [reduced] confusion among converts and potential converts by a duplication of effort in the mission field.”²⁰ The Comity Agreement was developed during the mid-1880s, and was supported by the denominations and the government.²¹ This established the regions the Methodists were originally supported to missionize, which was primarily the southwestern region.

In summary, the Society practiced maternalism in its mission, which led them to exert feminine, motherly influence upon the nation and church. Although the women of the Society were subordinate to the male leadership of the denomination, the lack of support from the leadership of the Church in the first few decades of the mission provided the women of the Society an avenue to challenge the men and even call their leadership into question. Additionally, Sheldon Jackson’s influence on the Society’s and wider Methodist education philosophies cannot be overstated. Like many in the era, Jackson promoted a form of Protestantism that conflated white American values with purported Christian morals. Jackson provided the framework by which the Society educated Native peoples. Society education promoted industry, resourcefulness, and the Protestant Christian religion—all while attempting to remove indigenous culture. This framework is the focus of the following analysis.

The education strategy of the Society problematized Native culture and elevated the culture of white American Protestants as the primary force for the redemption of the world. This redemption was accomplished through a maternalistic lens, whereby the women of the Society mothered Native peo-

¹⁸ Claus-M. Naske and Herman E. Slotnick, *Alaska: A History of the 49th State* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 64.

¹⁹ Naske and Slotnick, *Alaska*, 65.

²⁰ Julie Manville and Ross Maller, “The Influence of Christian Missionaries on Alaskan Indigenous Peoples,” pp. 3-26, in *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*, vol. 5, article 8 (2009), 5, accessed via ATLA database, 16 April 2016.

²¹ Maria Shaa Tláa Williams, “The Comity Agreement: Missionization of Alaska Native People,” *The Alaska Native Reader*, 153.

ples, who, in the view of the Society, desperately needed Christian domesticity. Consider, for example, this excerpt from the Annual Address given by Mrs. E. L. Albright to the Society on November 1, 1903:

For many centuries the progress of humanity seems to have depended on the progress of one great branch of the human family—the Aryan branch. From time to time its advancing civilization has come face to face with the most primitive races; and in such cases the Aryan civilization must do one of two things: it must exterminate or civilize. With the American Indian for many years the process of extermination by force of arms prevailed; but an aroused Christian sentiment protesting against this abuse and wrong has for some years been insisting upon an extermination of savagery through Christian education. We believe that “as savage tribes they must die, but that as individuals they may be saved by a new birth into a better and nobler life.” In the mission schools sustained by our Society we are teaching Indian children and their parents to speak English, to become self-supporting, to establish Christian homes,—teaching that will enable them to take their place side by side with white men as American citizens. These schools also make it possible for a better class of white citizens to live among them without damage. An educated Indian is a civilized man, and as capable of caring for himself as the majority of the world; but he needs to be taught many things that his civilized white neighbor learns either by inheritance or association A problem similar to our Indian problem presents itself in Alaska, with the opening of the new era in that country following the development of the industries of fisheries, canneries, lumber-camps, and gold and quartz mining. The question is before us as to whether the native population, some of whom are savage tribes, shall be left to produce under the encroachments of the incoming whites a new crop of costly cruel Indian wars, or whether Christian education shall make of them useful factors in the new civilization²²

Note the language used in the Address: Nativeness was a pestilence that needed to be exterminated. The burden was to save the people from themselves. A primary way the Society intended to save Native peoples was through training in domesticity.

The domestic training of the Society was predicated on the notion that Native culture was by definition heathenish and literally unclean. Society missionary Ethelda Carr, memorialized in a previously quoted message by Lydia Daggett, died from the harsh conditions and disease. Such a death was viewed as evidence of the inherent uncleanliness of Native culture. Missionaries, business people, and prospectors brought numerous diseases previously unknown in Alaska. One health professional at work in the early to mid-twentieth century explained the cause and effect of these epidemics:

For more than a century, Native Alaskans had been victims of smallpox, influenza, typhoid fever, respiratory diseases, and the rampant tuberculosis and measles Traditionally, people who lived from the bounty of the land cared for their orphan children, but these diseases had devastated whole villages, including otherwise healthy adults who would have taken care of the children. Many white people came to Alaska to treat victims of the diseases that other white people had brought.²³

²² *Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Year 1902-03* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1903), 83-84.

²³ Penelope S. Easton, *Learning to Like Muktuk: An Unlikely Explorer in Territorial Alaska* (Corvallis, OR: Oregon State UP, 2014), 25.

Outside the scope of this lecture is the healthcare initiatives the Society implemented during their time in Alaska, influenced by similar ideological foundations as the educational endeavors.

Though the Society held Native cultures in low esteem, they frequently defended Native cultures when government activity threatened their survival. The reindeer plan at Sinuk, which introduced reindeer from Siberia for training in farming and herding,²⁴ truly epitomized the tensions and contradictions the Society expressed concerning the Natives during this era. The conversations and statements about the Alaska work in the *Annual Reports* are, however, ambivalent. The advocacy against government destruction of Native land, foodways, and culture was strong within the Society literature. Some reports would laude Natives for their unique and impressive history of survival,²⁵ or cite a government official who praised the superior intelligence of the Natives in Alaska.²⁶ They offered scathing indictments of government activity in Alaska, which stole from the Natives’ “rightful heritage”²⁷ and made them “paupers . . . fed and clothed by the government,” and subjected these “brothers and sisters” to the scourge of drunkenness and disease directly caused by government presence in the territory.²⁸ Yet, these indictments and advocacies were influenced by the underlying presuppositions concerning the limits of Native intelligence and agency and the need for a civilizing, Americanizing gospel.²⁹ The tuberculosis that ravaged Native communities was concluded to be their own fault, a theory supported by the fact that no white people “so far as we know [were] ever touched by the *great white plague* . . .” The subsistence lifestyle destroyed by government activity had left the Natives at an industrial crossroads, for they had “neither the skills nor the tools . . .” to survive in the growing industries of the territory.³⁰ There was no acknowledgment of Native agency in their own survival or Native consultation for planning. The “brotherhood” rhetoric and its egalitarianism were specious.³¹ In reality, the “poor Natives” were viewed as perpetual children in need of constant care and maternal supervision lest they destroy themselves.³² Thus, in order to confront the problem of Native-ness as early

²⁴ *Twenty-Sixth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Woman’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Year 1907-1908* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1908), 132; and Hanson, *Alaska Native Translations*, 22.

²⁵ *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Woman’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Year 1910-11* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1911), 143, 181.

²⁶ *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Woman’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Year 1908-09* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1909), 53.

²⁷ *Thirtieth Annual Report*, 182.

²⁸ *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report*, 129-130; *Thirtieth Annual Report*, 181.

²⁹ *Twenty-Eighth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Woman’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Year 1907-1908* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1908), 139.

³⁰ *Twenty-Eighth Annual Report*, 139, 140. Emphasis mine.

³¹ *Thirtieth Annual Report*, 182.

³² *Thirtieth Annual Report*, 181; *Twenty-Seventh Annual Report*, 130.

as possible, the Society focused heavily on the education of Native children

Perhaps one of the most recognizable and important projects in the history of Protestant missions in Alaska was the result of this educational scheme. The Jesse Lee Memorial Home and Industrial School was imagined, funded, supervised, and supported by the Society. In explanation of why Jesse Lee was the chosen namesake of the home, Daggett reasoned, "Because the indomitable courage and perseverance of Jesse Lee, 'The pioneer of Methodism to new England,' planted Methodism in the extreme East of our land, it was thought eminently proper that his name should be placed on the first piece of Methodist property in the extreme West."³³ The prospect of the Jesse Lee Home excited not only the Society but also the peoples in Alaska. Before the original building was even erected in 1889, students had been sent to Unalaska from as far as 600 miles away.³⁴ So large was the demand that the number of students exceeded the number of desks.³⁵ The building of the Home was constantly delayed. Shipping had to be done by companies outside of Society reach, and these companies prioritized other materials over missionary lumber.³⁶ Despite the delays, money continued to be given for the Home and other work.

The account listed in the introduction concerning the sewing machine highlighted the type of education the Native children were receiving—the education of civilization. In order to be useful, these children needed to become civilized and taught skills beneficial to American society. Abandoned were traditional skills and resources. The Gospel of the civilized had rendered these childish things put away. Even for work among the gold miners and other workers in Unga, non-Christian books and materials were requested for evening schools in order to "aid our missionaries in leading these people to a better life."³⁷

Civilizing work occupied most of the attention of the Society. The primary proof of the successful Christianizing and educating of the students was their civilized disposition and usefulness. Consider the report from the Unalaska mission (during the delayed construction of the Jesse Lee Home) in 1891:

One of the most satisfactory things is the gratitude [Native students] manifest for any kindness shown them. Almost without exception they are willing and glad to aid in doing the work of the house. They are remarkably quick to learn what they are best adapted to, and what they greatly prefer to do, and yet are not unwilling to do anything required of them . . . Miss Richardson says of one who came to the Home: "She had been living out of doors; would stay out for days and nights, sleeping in out-houses or wherever she could find a place. She had a strange looking face, with small, black eyes, and one of the most wicked expression I ever saw . . . Mr. Tuck found her in a hole in the ground. She refused to come out. When he attempted

³³ *Sixth Annual Report*, 56.

³⁴ *Eighth Annual Report*, 76-77.

³⁵ Meeker, *Six Decades of Service*, 294.

³⁶ *Tenth Annual Report*, 74.

³⁷ *Tenth Annual Report*, 74. In fact, Daggett asked that the materials sent "not be strictly religious, or they will not be used."

to take her out she used her [sic] finger-nails and teeth upon his hands vigorously. He succeeded in getting her out and home, and from that time to the present her improvement has been marked. Even the expression of her face is changing. The old wicked, fiendish look is fast disappearing. She goes about her work singing and seemingly happy.”³⁸

This work was supported by the United States government, through Sheldon Jackson, until 1892, when the General Conference supported the proposed constitutional amendment that removed government support for religious education.³⁹ While the action nearly crippled the mission to Alaska, a combination of skilled leadership and slow mail service to Alaska meant those serving in the territory were unaware that their funding had been cut off.⁴⁰ When the missionaries finally received word, they were able to petition personal friends to help continue the work, as they “could not turn [the students] out for the vultures in human shape to destroy.”⁴¹ The Jesse Lee Home received much long awaited and much needed improvements, supplies were sent for continued work and sustenance, and the last government appropriation was received. In addition to added safety and comfort, the Society was surprised by the financial support it received from the Alaskans in the schools. The funding from within and turning the operation into a “largely self-supporting” endeavor greatly excited the Society. The good news prompted a bit of boldness, as the Society responded to the previous year’s statement from the Missionary Society by saying, “. . . even though the field be small, there are souls there to be saved . . . it is impossible for our Society to do any work there without the presence and moral support of the Missionary Society . . .” and recommended that the missions in Alaska be joined to the Pacific Coast Conferences so that funding, ministers, and teaching could expand.⁴² The General Missionary Committee unanimously agreed to all of the recommendations of the Society, adding a note of “sympathy and moral support.”⁴³ Near the turn of the century, the Methodist Church began its support of the Alaska mission in earnest.

By 1894, the Bureau for Alaska was back to work, finally supported by the brethren and the WHMS. Lydia Daggett had moved on, succeeded for one year by Mrs. H.M. Teller, who was subsequently succeeded by Anna Beiler.⁴⁴ The sigh of relief at the continuation of the mission was short. A new enterprise was necessary—a home for boys. In its earliest days, the Jesse Lee Home was focused on girls. With the presence of government schools, the Home provided industrial and domestic training. It was “established among ‘the brightest and best class of natives’ in the Territory. It provided a

³⁸ *Tenth Annual Report*, 75.

³⁹ *Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church Held in Omaha Nebraska May 2-26, 1892*, ed. David S. Monroe (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1892), 167.

⁴⁰ Meeker, *Six Decades of Service*, 291.

⁴¹ *Thirteenth Annual Report*, 87.

⁴² *Twelfth Annual Report*, 43-44.

⁴³ *Twelfth Annual Report*, 117.

⁴⁴ *Thirteenth Annual Report*, 20; and Meeker, *Six Decades of Service*, 292.

safe place for ‘friendless girls’ who within a few years could be trained ‘for missionary work among the heathen tribes.’” The Russian Orthodox maintained a boarding school for Native boys, and the idea of women training and missionizing girls and boys was promising for the Society.⁴⁵ The home for boys also functioned as an industrial school, where boys were taught how to garden and raise chickens.⁴⁶ The acclamation of Alaska Native communities into the newly established American society through conversion and industrialization were keys to Native survival in this educational philosophy.⁴⁷ The skills and practices that had sustained Native communities for centuries were again replaced by American commercial enterprises and ideals. One *Annual Report*, concerning the new home, argued, “[In] the past [the indigenous population] subsisted by hunting and fishing; but now they [need] education to enable them to labor for the Americans, who have established commercial stations upon the islands, and employ the natives in lading and unloading.”⁴⁸

Some children were orphaned and abandoned as a consequence of the introduction of liquor into the territory by American tradesmen.⁴⁹ The raising up of able, Christian Native young men was envisioned as a cure for the lowly state of the peoples. The training of girls was necessary, but if no boys were saved and trained, how could Christian families be wrought? Thus it was “very desirable that we should do something for the boys to bring them under Christian influence and training, so that by and by *Christian* homes will be dotted all over that great land.”⁵⁰ The WHMS believed that raising Native boys in an environment of idealized Protestant masculinity would ensure the survival of the Native Christian family.⁵¹

The United States elevated the very status of the Native population, or so surmised Mrs. Beiler: “were they not under the Stars and Stripes, would be classed among the most benighted of heathen people.”⁵² By 1896, the effects

⁴⁵ Raymond L. Hudson, *Family After All: Alaska's Jesse Lee Home, Volume I, Unalaska, 1889-1925* (Walnut Creek, CA: Hardscratch Press, 2007), 21, with uncited quotations of Lydia Daggett from 1888.

⁴⁶ *Thirteenth Annual Report*, 88.

⁴⁷ Hudson, *Family After All*, 14.

⁴⁸ *Seventeenth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Year 1897-98* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1898), 25.

⁴⁹ This was a national issue, and not just among indigenous peoples. The fight for temperance and dry communities was in full swing. However, relief supplies for those homes crippled by alcoholism were difficult to come by, particularly by already marginalized communities. See especially *Sixteenth Annual Report of the Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Year 1896-97* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1897), 105-106.

⁵⁰ *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Year 1894-1895* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1895), 109. Emphasis original.

⁵¹ It should not be ignored that it was women who focused on raising the Native boys to model an idealized Protestant masculinity.

⁵² *Fourteenth Annual Report*, 29.

of the civilizing Gospel were purportedly evident in the lives and homes of the converts:

The joyous news of seven conversions has been reported to us. The difference with these Aleuts is just as it is with us. When Christ comes into a human soul, and the “Spirit bears witness” that they are his children, a radical change takes place, and is manifested in the spirit of the home. They “go and tell the story” as soon as saved, until the whole household is permeated with peace and joy.⁵³

These radical conversions were only possible through the work of Homes like Jesse Lee and the home for boys, for they taught the children how to be good Christians and good Americans, as Mrs. Beiler relayed from a letter from an unnamed commissioner of education in 1896:

The school at Unalaska is made up mainly of girls that are in the Jesse Lee Memorial Home. Being regular in attendance, they have made very rapid progress during the year. Indeed, this is one of the model schools of Western Alaska . . . Especial attention is invited to the schools on the seal islands. They have been in operation over twenty years, and yet they have not succeeded in teaching a pupil to read or write a word in the English language. Radical changes are absolutely necessary in these respects, if it is the desire of our Government to civilize, educate, and improve this people. They should not only be taught the rudiments of the English language, but also habits of industry, economy, cleanliness, and morality. That these people are quick to learn and susceptible to rapid improvement is demonstrated by the charity school at Unalaska.⁵⁴

Another government official wrote to Beiler:

An illustration of what can be done: [*sic*] That it is not impossible to establish schools that will be entirely successful in teaching these people to speak, read, and to write the English language, but to train them in more upright and useful methods of domestic life, is shown by the history of the Lee School at Unalaska. At this school have been gathered children from all parts of the Aleutian Chain, and some from the islands of St. Paul and St. George, whose intellectual advancement seemed hopeless. Before two years had passed, these children were able to make themselves well understood in English, while their improvement in manner and character was simply astonishing. This I know from personal observation. The success of the Lee School is due to the personal equation of the individuals presiding over it, and to the fact that the children are removed from their native home influences.⁵⁵

The alleged “unbiased standpoint” from which these observations were made were indicative of the educational philosophy concerning the civilizing education Native children ought to receive.

In 1887 Sheldon Jackson had prepared and implemented his “Rules and Regulations for the Conduct of Public Schools and Education in the Territory of Alaska.” In this, he directed that “The children shall be taught in the English language, and the use of school books printed in any foreign languages will not be allowed. The purpose of the Government is to make citizens of these people by educating them in our customs, methods and

⁵³ *Fifteenth Annual Report of the Woman’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Year 1895-96* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1896), 106.

⁵⁴ *Fifteenth Annual Report*, 106-107.

⁵⁵ *Fifteenth Annual Report*, 107.

language. The children are primarily to speak, read and write the English language”⁵⁶ American teachers influenced by Jackson demanded the Natives be absorbed into white American society. The Stars and Stripes flew above every Home the Society operated as a visual reminder that its residents were trained for God and country.⁵⁷ Such education exterminated certain languages completely.⁵⁸

Native agency in survival and acclamation was largely non-existent in Society educational initiatives. Rather, the maternal ideology envisioned a respectable type of Native person and community, with the indigenous peoples essentially mothered into American society. Consider this statement concerning the Jesse Lee Home in the Annual Address of the WHMS by Martha van Marter in the late 1890s:

A single gleaming lighthouse has been set on Alaska’s shores by our Society, and as is their way, the women have begun the work at the fountain-head of the home. Boys and girls, saved out of the most dreadful heathen conditions and superstitions, are being civilized and trained into young soldiers of the Cross [We] have good hope and promise that at least *some* of these young Alaskans will one day be missionary teachers and preachers among their own people.⁵⁹

The vision was expanded a few paragraphs later:

To faith’s prophetic eye, vast changes may be wrought in twenty years of the twentieth century. These desert islands have begun to blossom as the rose. Native teachers trained in the Industrial Homes of the Society, native nurses trained in the hospital, which is soon to be a realized hope, go in and out among the people, while little chapels of worship rising here and there, tidy and comfortable Christian homes from which the voice of praise and prayer daily ascend, all reveal the blessed fact that our labor has not been in vain “in the Lord.” The faithful workers in the Home now planted on Alaskan soil, under the care of this Society, have been making ready for just such a harvest as this during toilsome years, and with the cumulative power of good behind, and labors shared and supplemented in the native homes by native teachers, what have we not the right to expect for these, our very own home heathen?⁶⁰

While the vision considered for the good of Native people, it was not necessarily a good the indigenous Alaskans envisioned for themselves. Instead, the agency of Natives was removed in favor of civilizing them out of their “heathen” ways and integrating them into the very society that was attempt-

⁵⁶ Sheldon Jackson, “Rules and Regulations for the Conduct of Public Schools and Education in the Territory of Alaska,” June 14, 1887, National Archives and Record Administration, Washington DC, RG 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Alaska Division, quoted in Hudson, *Family After All*, 17-18.

⁵⁷ *Sixteenth Annual Report*, 22. Much pride was placed in the flag that flew over the Jesse Lee Home, which was 12’ by 20’, raised atop an 80’ pole. See *Sixteenth Annual Report*, 108.

⁵⁸ Michael E. Krauss, “Native Languages of Alaska,” in *The Vanishing Languages of the Pacific Rim*, ed. Osahito Miyaoka, Osamu Sakiyama, and Michael E. Krauss (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 408.

⁵⁹ *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Woman’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Year 1898-99* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1899), 80. Emphasis Original.

⁶⁰ *Eighteenth Annual Report*, 83.

ing to strip away their agency. The ideology of early Protestant missions in Alaska, especially with the Society, fetishized and problematized traditional Native cultures, and sought to eradicate those cultures. This ideology was present well into the twentieth century. Writing in 1929, a retiring superintendent of the Unalaska mission wrote:

The native Aleut is timid. Like his Oriental ancestor, he shuts himself up within a wall of reserve and mistrust. He seems to doubt the motives of a man of Caucasian blood. Naturally misunderstanding and mistrusting the white man, the Greek Catholic Church, to which he belongs soul and body, continues to grind into him other superstitions and beliefs that put him on a level with the heathen of India or of Indo-China. The credence he gives to evil spirits, signs, and omens is pathetic. To break through these superstitions and beliefs is no easy task, but the missionary must do it if he would bring the light of salvation and the uplift of civilization to the benighted lives of these our Aleut Americans Has the Mission at Unalaska a task? Yes, make the village a fit place in which to live Win the children and youth from a religion that destroys rather than builds; make Christians and American citizens instead of adherents to a foreign religion and country. Through preaching and teaching, through music and play, through industrial work with the children and mothers, through the medium of good will and helpfulness, the Aleut can finally be won for Christ and loyal citizenship to the United States, of which he is now just a nominal part.⁶¹

To the Society and its associated ministers, it was the Natives who misunderstood and mistrusted whites, not the other way around. Native-ness was problematized and white-ness was idealized. These ideas dominated the educational ideologies and practices of the Society during its nearly six-decade mission to Alaska.

This article has examined the Woman’s Home Missionary Society’s education mission to Alaska, arguing that the Society aimed to reach the peoples of Alaska through educational initiatives that joined American Protestant values with ideals of citizenship. Through teaching industry, non-contextual agriculture, and formal classroom learning, the Society attempted to replace indigenous cultures and values with a white, Protestant, American culture. These policies, influenced by Sheldon Jackson, formed the pedagogical ideology for the Society’s education initiatives throughout their nearly sixty years in the territory.

This analysis is not an *ex post facto* critique of the Society. Instead, this has been an account of the Society’s educational activities as they perceived them. The importance of such analysis extends beyond mere historiography, however. In 1999, the *Anchorage Daily News* reported on an ecumenical meeting sponsored by the Alaska United Methodist Conference that explored what it means to be Native and Christian.⁶² In June of 2010, the conference adopted a vision that included priorities concerning Native Outreach and a

⁶¹ *Forty-Eighth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Woman’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Year 1928-29* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1929), 178-179.

⁶² See the archives of the *Anchorage Daily News*, Mike Dunham, “Ecumenical Meeting Explores Native Christianity,” *Anchorage Daily News* (November 6, 1999), E-6.

focus on young people.⁶³ Such priorities reflect focus points that have been objects of concern for Methodists in Alaska for over a century. On June 26, 2017, Dr. Bob Onders, president of Alaska Pacific University, relayed to the Methodist Historical Society his commitment to the education, well-being, and health of Alaskans through the university, historically tied to Methodists. The Woman's Home Missionary Society's ideology and procedures in education demonstrate that words like "education," "well-being," and even "health" are not monolithic words without value. They are given value and meaning through underlying assumptions and philosophies. Recognition of the ideologies, assumptions, and philosophies of the past are paramount for Methodists in Alaska strategizing for the future. Or, to use a slogan of the Woman's Home Missionary Society, it is "Looking Backward, Thinking Forward."⁶⁴

⁶³ "The Vision and Mission of the Alaska Conference," June 5, 2010. Accessed at <https://alaska-kaumc.org/the-vision-and-mission-of-the-alaska-conference/>.

⁶⁴ *Forty-Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Year 1925-1926* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1926), 84.