

## COUNTRY WOMEN IN ALASKA

*Editor's Note: We find that Ontario women are keenly interested in news of what country women are doing in other parts of the world. Here we have a story from Canada's very close neighboring country, Alaska.*

HERE IS the largest peninsula in the North American continent (586,400 square miles). The United States bought it from Russia in 1867—at less than two cents an acre! In 1912 Alaska became an “incorporated territory” of the U. S. A. with a delegate sitting in the House of Representatives in Washington. By 1913 the women of Alaska were voting—seven years before the Constitutional Amendment gave enfranchisement to women in other States of the Union.

The population consists of 98,808 white Americans, 14,089 Indians, 15,882 Eskimos and about 300 Aleuts.

Twenty five years ago few Alaskans knew what a Home Demonstration Club was. Today, by following methods used in the other states in the U. S. A. the programme for women in Alaska has grown from an early Institute type of instruction in sewing and cooking to organised club work with programmes based on local needs, and taught by project leaders, trained by Extension Agents. Now Homemakers' Clubs are active in 75 neighbourhoods, with a membership of more than a thousand women. They offer the women of Alaska a circle of friendly neighbours, a united group to carry out community improvements, and training for civic leadership and effective citizenship.

Moreover, this State, far away in a harsh climate, is a keen supporter of A.C.W.W. and gives practical help to women and children in other parts of the world. An international project of which one Homemaker's Club is justly proud, is the sponsoring of a Greek baby, through the “Save the Children Federation”. Their particular infant was “without a father and his mother was hard-pressed until she was able to find work as a governess”. During that time packages from this small Alaskan Homemaker's Club “kept the baby clothed and fed and sustained the Mother's confidence in mankind”. The members received grateful letters — and photographs of the baby! In addition they sewed layettes for the general use of the Federation and their yearly fair booth display was based on the ‘Save the Children’ theme.

In Alaska there are still many more men than women. So in 1948 when one of the Homemakers' Clubs was being organised, some of the bachelors, who formed a large part of the population, thought that they too should be considered as homemakers! They attended some of the meetings and one bachelor cooked

a luncheon for the club at his home. Life was not easy where this particular club was formed. Those who lived north of the river “had to cross by wading, balancing on a footlog, or by a carriage suspended from a cable stretched across the river”, in winter they crossed on the ice. A bridge has since been built and the club continues to flourish, three charter members still being active in the work. Money making efforts for the community have included raising \$200 to build a school through two ‘home talent shows’. An annual event, in which the whole community joins, is the June fish fry, on the beach.

And how the women long for summer! Their 1956 Spring Newsletter says: “All Alaskan women, rural, or not, probably have been experiencing ‘cabin fever’ or ‘mid-winter blues’. Their council president advises “a positive attitude could cure us” — and says “We dread spring in a way, with all the mud, but wishing for summer won't make it so, so use these months constructively to catch up on all the things you put off the rest of the year. Work with your children and teach them the dignity of labour and the joy in creativeness.”

As we have already seen, “joining” may not always be easy in Alaska and transport often remains a difficulty. Their Newsletter wishes every incoming Club president or project leader could attend the Council “Short Courses”. But the advent of television has proved most useful, several clubs having given programmes arranged by the Council, which have shown other members how to present their own projects. Most of the lectures and demonstrations cover familiar ground. “How to iron a man's shirt rapidly” has universal appeal wherever shirts are worn, but meetings to teach how to butcher moose do have a more specialised interest!

Most unique is the Kotzebue Mother's Club. The women meet once a week to do skin sewing, chew mukluk soles, twist sinew and tan muskrat skins. They have 57 members, no less . . . These wonderful women also give foster homes to small children from outlying villages whose mothers are in TB sanatoriums. Four mothers a week are appointed to see that the families of those at home recuperating are getting proper food and that their clothes are clean and mended.” A bake sale at another Alaskan Club raised money for “a family whose husband and father was dying of leukemia.”

Many Alaska members are active in their sponsorships of 4-H clubs. One branch which had organised a sewing club paid the railroad fare for one of the 4-H girls to attend the ‘Round-Up’ at the State University.