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**American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

**Title**

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**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7g69q8mt>

**Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 40(2)

**ISSN**

0161-6463

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**Publication Date**

2016-03-01

**DOI**

10.17953/aicrj.40.2.madden

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# Sitka's Cottages Community in Alaska History and the Development of the Alaska Native Brotherhood

*Ryan H. Madden*

The Totem Park and Indian River were the places all the kids loved to play. Sometimes all the kids would get together and play games all day. Or we little girls would pack our doll buggies with our playhouse toys and go down to the Park to play house all day. This was when the Navy ships or tourist ships were not in. When the tour ships were in we all used to get dressed up nice, so we could meet tourists and walk through the park with them. We thought we were the greatest Indian guides.

—Carol Feller Brady, Tlingit Elder and Cottages resident, 1927–1939

Just as in Carol Feller Brady's time, the lure of Alaska still brings many visitors to Sitka, although summers now bring thousands rather than hundreds.<sup>1</sup> Many of those visitors come via large cruise ship. They shop in the downtown area before making the half-mile trek to Sitka National Historical Park. Along the way to the park's entrance visitors pass some clearly marked historical sites, such as the Russian Bishop's House and the Sheldon Jackson Museum, but unfortunately the last two blocks, Kelly and Metlakatla streets, lack historical markers letting the visitors know of the fascinating history associated with the area that Carol Feller Brady describes as the world of her childhood. Indeed, from 1887 to the 1940s the "Cottages Settlement" was a distinct community within the larger community of Sitka, but it was also apart geographically from the main population center.

The Cottages community was designed as an example of ideal assimilation: to aid the graduates of Sitka Industrial and Training School to transition into the lifestyle

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that the mission school's teachers preferred for them.<sup>2</sup> Yet residents still maintained strong ties to Alaska Native communities and continued traditional subsistence activities. Moreover, as this article will show, other aspects of traditional Tlingit culture also continued to inform, or were adapted to, daily life at the Cottages, including dwellings that housed extended families, ceremonial community gatherings where oration was prized, and respect for Elders and their mentoring roles. Along with continuity, there was change at the Cottages; leadership styles that could be employed in a quickly changing world flourished. Certain activities that were promoted at the school and the Cottages, such as basketball, became a part of Alaska Native culture and a source of pride. Despite the acculturation goals of missionaries, ties with other Alaska Natives continued, and ultimately groups were formed that would be instrumental in fighting for Alaska Natives' rights. Most importantly for Alaska history, both the Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB) and the Alaska Native Sisterhood (ANS) began there. According to former Cottages resident Ellen Hope Hays, a Tlingit Elder, "the Cottages . . . became the instrument . . . of smooth change."<sup>3</sup> The Cottages thus had long-term impacts in sustaining Alaska Native culture and advancing Alaska Native rights.

Before the formation of the Cottages, throughout the nineteenth century American federal Indian policy had undergone significant changes, moving from separation to concentration to Americanization. Native Americans met each of these policies with various types of resistance, but with westward expansion, fueled by the doctrine of manifest destiny, they lost more and more of their population as well as their land. Sparked by books like *A Century of Dishonor* (1881) and groups such as Friends of the Indians, towards the end of the century reformers called for the federal government to change its Native American policy and employ a more humane approach.<sup>4</sup> The federal government ultimately approved a two-pronged approach of land management and education. The land policy, under the so-called Dawes Plan, called for reservations to be broken up into plots for Native American nuclear families to inhabit. The goals of allotment were to put an end to communal land ownership and promote the ideals and economy of independent farming and the patriarchal nuclear family.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, the Native American education program was part of a crusade by a coalition of reformers who, through education, aimed to assimilate Native Americans into Anglo-Protestant society.<sup>6</sup> It centered on boarding schools for Native American children, with Lieutenant Richard Pratt's Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania providing the paradigm. Carlisle and its curriculum became the model for schools sponsored by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. By 1902 there were twenty-five federally funded non-reservation schools across fifteen states and territories, with a total enrollment of more than 6,000.<sup>7</sup> From the 1880s through the 1920s Native American education was based on institutions where traditional ways could be replaced by those sanctioned by the government. In this way, the policymakers believed, young people would be immersed in the values and practical knowledge of the dominant American society while also being kept away from any influences imparted by their traditionally minded relatives.<sup>8</sup>

From the time he first came to Alaska in 1877, a mere decade after the transfer of Alaska to the United States, Reverend Sheldon Jackson was the key figure in bringing

federal Indian policy to the District of Alaska and to Sitka. He visited Wrangell and toured Southeast Alaska, then returned to the Lower 48 to raise money for what became the Sitka Industrial and Training School.<sup>9</sup> He promoted and later used, in part, the Carlisle model that took students away from their homes and put them into a rigidly disciplined educational system. He believed this approach, modified to fit Alaska, offered Alaska Natives the hope of surviving non-Native encroachments into their territory.

In 1881, Reverend Jackson made his second trip to Alaska and established several mission stations in the southeastern part of the district. The next year, 1882, Jackson raised and delivered \$5,000 to John Brady for a school building project at Sitka. As a result of the combined efforts of Brady and Jackson, a school building was completed in 1882. The next year, Senator Benjamin Harrison, a fellow Presbyterian and friend of Jackson, introduced a bill to Congress to provide funding for the education of children in Alaska. Jackson was keen on this legislation and lobbied hard for its passage. In July of 1884, Jackson led a tour of 150 delegates from the National Education Board to Southeast Alaska. He was also designated as a missionary to the congregation in Sitka by the Presbytery Board of Home Missions. After the education board delegates returned home, Jackson stayed in Sitka and organized the First Presbyterian Church of Sitka and the Presbytery of Alaska.<sup>10</sup> Jackson's lobbying efforts and tour-leadership proved successful. Later in 1884 Congress appropriated the funds for the education of children in Alaska, while Commissioner of Education John Eaton, another fellow Presbyterian and friend, appointed Jackson as General Agent of Education for Alaska.

Jackson had an ambitious plan not only to start schools, but also to work for "good government" in the district.<sup>11</sup> His political efforts to ensure the latter made Jackson controversial in Alaska. In fact, in May of 1885 Jackson was arrested in Sitka for obstructing a public road during his expansion effort of the school. Eventually he was cleared of the charges, but the incident made it clear that not everyone in Alaska was pleased with Jackson's power. After his appointment as general agent, Jackson went about the work of establishing government schools, which by 1893 numbered fifteen. Jackson's objectives for the schools were consistent with the policies and ideas of Indian reformers of his day. But, as historian Steven Haycox points out, Jackson made adjustments for the Alaska situation—not all schools for Alaska Natives removed the children from their communities.<sup>12</sup>

Unlike many areas in the Lower 48 states, where Native American subsistence resources were quickly vanishing, in Southeast Alaska resources were abundant and Alaska Natives had long been self-sufficient through subsistence activities. Moreover, Alaska Native art was not completely discouraged if it could fit into the capitalistic economic model. In Jackson's view, the shining light of Alaska's educational system was the Sitka Training and Industrial School (later renamed in his honor), where Alaska Native children from throughout Southeast Alaska would enroll. Jackson's goals were clearly aligned with the federal Carlisle model, with a strong emphasis on reading, writing, American civics, and industrial and moral training. Within a decade, physical training was also added to the curriculum, part of the "muscular Christianity" movement sweeping across America. All of this training, Jackson thought, should be

**FIGURE 1.** Sheldon Jackson Sitka Industrial Training School, Sitka, Alaska, 1887. William H. Partridge Alaska Collection, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections, UW26296.



extended to “the heart as well as the mind and hand.”<sup>13</sup> What was to become of the products of such training? In part, his answer to that question would lead to the development of the Cottages settlement. As Cyrus Peck Jr., a Tlingit Elder and a former Cottage resident, reported, “Sheldon Jackson wanted to plan a colony to get them away from the old way of life . . . graduates moved in here when they got Americanized.”<sup>14</sup>

The School, the School’s museum, and the Cottages settlement were designed to appeal to potential donors. The Alaska Natives in the Cottages were to represent the success of the Sheldon Jackson School’s Americanization program to other Alaska Natives, to Sitka, and to visitors from afar. One can image a visitor strolling by the educational institution, enjoying the anthropological displays at the museum, and then seeing the fruits of the Presbyterian mission at the Cottages settlement. In 1895, Dr. Bertrand Wilbur, a Presbyterian medical missionary in Sitka, noted that the formation of the Cottages was a “perpetual argument in favor of Christianity and education.”<sup>15</sup>

The first two cottages were built during 1887. By 1905 they numbered fifteen. Each cottage had a sign naming it in honor of the individual, congregation, or society that had donated to its construction. Not surprisingly, given Sheldon Jackson’s New York roots, northeastern names like Bryn Mawr, Jamaica Plains, New York, and Wellesley appeared on cottages many thousands of miles removed from their namesakes. The community became known as “the Cottages” or as the “Cottage Settlement,” but other names were also used, including the “Model Cottages,” the “Home Cottages,” “Cottages by the Sea,” the “Mission Village,” and “Westminster Addition.”<sup>16</sup> The streets of the Cottages settlement were named Metlakatla Street for Alaska Native leader Peter Simpson, a Tsimshian from Metlakatla and, as we shall see, a very influential resident; and the later-developed Kelly Street, named for Superintendent Kelly of the school.<sup>17</sup>

In order to obtain a cottage an Alaska Native couple had to agree to the “Declaration,” in which they promised to follow the Sabbath, educate their children, refrain from tobacco, liquor, and gambling, and renounce Alaska Native customs.

RULES AND REGULATIONS OF THE MODEL COTTAGE  
SETTLEMENT,

SITKA, ALASKA

“DECLARATION OF RESIDENTS”

We, the people of the Westminster Addition to the Village of Sitka, Alaska, in order to secure to ourselves and posterity the blessings of a Christian home, do severally subscribe to the following rules for the regulation of our conduct and town affairs:

To reverence the Sabbath and refrain from all unnecessary secular work on that day; to attend divine worship; to take the Bible for our rule of faith; to regard all true Christians as our brethren; and to be truthful, honest and industrious.

To attend to the education of our children and to keep them at school as regularly as possible.

To totally abstain from all intoxicants and gambling and never attend heathen festivities or countenance heathen customs in surrounding villages.

To strictly carry out all sanitary regulations necessary for the health of the place.

Never to alienate, give away, or sell our land, or building lots, or any portion thereof, to any person or persons who have not subscribed to these rules.<sup>18</sup>

The housing system was meant to be self-sustaining, and Cottage residents were expected to pay back the cost of the cottage. By 1895, the cottage owned by Rudolph Walton, a Sheldon Industrial Training School graduate, offered proof of the success of Jackson’s plan, at least according to the August 1895 description of “The Model Cottages” that appeared in Sheldon Jackson School’s publication *The Alaskan*. Written by Dr. Bertrand Wilbur, the article features Mrs. Walton and describes a typical American middle-class domestic scene while her husband, Rudolph Walton, was away at work. Proofs of a “civilized life” were in the “room which is a parlor and sitting room, about twelve feet square—carpeted, sofa at one side, rocking chair, table and book case, as we should find in any comfortable home.” Wilbur concluded from this visit that “nowhere can Christianity prosper so much as in the homes.”<sup>19</sup>

Wilbur’s concern with material and physical surroundings was not atypical of the philosophy of his day and those ideas certainly impacted American Indian policy at the time. In fact, the pioneer in Indian education, Richard Pratt, had penned an essay on the “potency of environment” in Native American education.<sup>20</sup> There was a belief among many intellectuals and reformers in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century that physical space affects and in some ways determines social and cultural behavior. Thus space becomes a geographical issue as well as an intellectual concept that can determine the fate of individuals and societies.<sup>21</sup> Given those precepts, one can see why and how the Cottages became situated where they did: Cottage life was

to be separate from, as well as an example to, the Tlingit village and Sitka. In many ways the Cottages were a unique opportunity for reformers and educators of the day to assess the success of their model.

Clearly, the Cottages were an answer to the question of what happens to Alaska Natives who become, in the minds of the missionaries, civilized and educated. Historian Paige Raibmon, in her important study of the Pacific Northwest in the late nineteenth century, points out that many “whites wanted graduates to lead a civilized life but they did not want them to interfere with their economic position.”<sup>22</sup> In order for the Cottages to survive economically, certain accommodations needed to be made. Alaska Native art sold to tourists did not put mission graduates in economic competition with Anglo-Alaskans. For example, Cottage resident Rudolph Walton became well known for his silver work, which was seen as an inspired answer to the question of how graduates would make a living.<sup>23</sup> Given the already limited economic options open to Alaska Natives, in what was quickly becoming a Jim Crow type of atmosphere in Alaska, missionaries could hardly deny their followers’ access to the relatively lucrative tourist and collectors’ markets even if it meant tolerating, and even promoting, the persistence of tradition.<sup>24</sup> Yet despite all efforts, as will be explained, life in the Cottages was never under the complete control of the missionaries and their agenda.

The 1920 federal census for “the Cottages,” recognized as a community separate from Sitka, lists twenty-one occupations: eleven fisherman, three boat builders, two carpenters, two engineers, one fireman, one laborer, and one “Presbyterian running a chicken farm.” The last was presumably a visiting Presbyterian missionary.<sup>25</sup> These occupations hardly tell the whole story; Cottagers were unique in balancing their activities among the various pressures of living between the worlds of Sitka, the Tlingit village, the Sheldon Jackson School, the Presbyterian Church, and the Sitka National Historical Park.

The original ideal of the Cottages was for a rigid separation between the more traditional Tlingit world of the Village and the new community; however, most evidence points to an ongoing and interesting relationship between those two worlds. Many Cottagers, like Carol Feller Brady’s grandmother, were rooted in both: “My Grandma Cameron (her Indian name was “Yon-Do-Skay”) would come to visit. Although they spoke only Tlingit, it was interesting to watch their actions as they sat visiting. Their visits must have been real breaks for both of them just to get away from the daily routine of housework, picking and putting up berries, and sewing moccasins to sell when the tourists’ boats came in.”<sup>26</sup>

In that it housed an extended family that included Walton’s mother and grandmother, the Waltons’ cottage became a smaller version of the Tlingit “community house,” providing an excellent example of how Tlingit kinship patterns could be maintained in the Cottages.<sup>27</sup> However, despite the family connections, most children in the Cottages did not grow up speaking Tlingit; many felt frustration when their village friends could keep secrets from them when speaking Tlingit.<sup>28</sup>

Joyce Walton Shales, granddaughter of Rudolph Walton, surmised that “most of the residents . . . had one foot in each world; they had strong relationships with their family and kin in the Tlingit community and they were trying to meet the demands of

the Presbyterian missionaries who felt that the Tlingit needed a complete makeover.”<sup>29</sup> As Gil Truitt, a Tlingit Elder, former Cottage resident, educator, and sports historian, recalled, “I don’t think the Cottage people and the Village people were ever separated, except by the distance. Because we mingled back and forth . . . we were always at the same activities. The only thing that separated us was the distance.”<sup>30</sup>

Cottagers continued to participate in commercial and subsistence activities that took them away from the Cottages and provided interaction with villagers. Many went to the annual sealing camp on nearby Biorka Island. *The Thlinget*, the Mission’s paper, reported, “The native people are out at Biorka Island in full force . . . Both the native village and the Cottages are almost deserted.”<sup>31</sup> These activities linked Cottagers to historical subsistence practices and kinship networks, and prompted former Cottage resident Cyrus Peck Jr. to recall that “every spring they would move out to Biorka Island. All young men enjoyed that kind of life . . . We fit easily into both places.”<sup>32</sup>

In another example of the ongoing relationship between village and Cottage residents, many sources, both written and oral, mention the Thanksgiving celebration as a centerpiece of Cottage life, an occasion when several hundred people from the Cottages and the village would come together for blessings, games, speeches, and, of course, the meal. Newspapers from the town of Sitka and from the school were reporting on the celebration as early as 1905, when *The Alaskan* reported that “the ‘Cottagers’ entertained about two hundred of their friends as a Thanksgiving festival last Thursday at Cottage Hall. The dinner was thoroughly enjoyed by all those who partook of it and will be long remembered.”<sup>33</sup> The next year the same paper reported “The ‘Cottage Folks’ as is their wont on Thanksgiving gave a public dinner at the Cottage Hall at which some three hundred attended. The dinner was topped off with speeches bristling with fun, then the tables were cleared and games played until long after the curfew hour.”<sup>34</sup> An article from the December 1914 *Verstovian*, the Sheldon Jackson School’s newspaper, gives us the best idea of how important the Thanksgiving meal was for Cottagers and others. The paper noted that “the Cottage Women’s Missionary Society took charge.”<sup>35</sup> The large hall was “cheerfully decorated, with tables spread to seat two hundred people . . . all the felicitous groupings of families, old friends, schoolmates and acquaintances, and add to this the dignity of the ANB as guests. Venison from the near-by forest, in prodigal abundance and prepared as only the skilled native housewife can prepare it; pies, cakes and bread, in quantities sufficient to have fed twice the number, and all prepared by the Cottage Native Housewife.”<sup>36</sup>

Tlingit Elder and former Cottage resident Ellen Hope Hays recalled that Cottage Hall “was a place of change,” which says volumes about how much the life story of a structure also can tell about the people it served.<sup>37</sup> Built by “The Cottage Club,” comprised of leading Cottagers, with the help of the Presbyterian Church and the Sheldon Jackson School, when completed the Hall’s various uses helped mold the Cottages into a community. The hall became a center for not just the annual Thanksgiving Dinner, but varied social events, band practice, choir practice, basketball, and dances sanctioned by the church, and provided a much needed dimension to the community.



Cottage Hall became the subject of controversy. Gil Truitt recalled that “some Cottagers who went down south to further their education learned how to social dance. When they returned they taught the young ladies how to dance and they were having dances at the Cottage Hall. Some of the older people, including staff at the Sheldon Jackson School, were shocked that men had their hands on the waists of the women. And that’s what really caused the hall to be closed.”<sup>38</sup> Ellen Hope Hays added, “the school put a padlock on the hall due to the modern dance. The church had control over this hall and they didn’t like what was happening. They didn’t have as much control as they would like to have had so the place was locked.”<sup>39</sup> Joyce Walton Shales’s dissertation shows that some of the Presbyterian leaders after Jackson and Wilbur were influenced by the Jim Crow attitudes prevalent towards Native Americans in the early twentieth century and that they sought to institute even more paternalistic control.<sup>40</sup> As Cyrus Peck Jr. pointed out, Peter Simpson’s reaction to the closure of Cottage Hall gave the event additional significance. He declared, “That’s alright, we’ll build our own hall.”<sup>41</sup> This led to the building of the Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall in 1914. Cottage Hall was torn down in 1924.

The Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB) is a nonprofit, fraternal organization established in 1912.<sup>42</sup> The first charter for the Alaska Native Brotherhood was formed in Sitka, Alaska, by a group known as the “Founding Fathers.”<sup>43</sup> In 1912, Peter Simpson (Tsimshian) became chairman of the committee that was eventually to form the Alaska Native Brotherhood and the committee’s only non-Tlingit member. Simpson is well known for his famous question to the Tlingit land-claims activist William Paul at the 1925 ANB convention: “Willie, who owns this land?” When William Paul replied “We do,” Peter Simpson retorted, “Then fight for it.” The title of Fred Paul’s biography of his father William, *Then Fight for It*, derives from this exchange.<sup>44</sup>

Simpson (1871–1947) is not only considered the father of the ANB but also “the father of Land Claims” in Alaska, the long process that led to the 1972 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). Gil Truitt has noted that the “founding of the ANB goes back to Peter Simpson. There were a number of things that really were not right as far as Native people were concerned. Society was not right, social conditions were stacked against the Native people and it was formed for political reasons to give Native people more power and eventually that’s what happened.”<sup>45</sup> Truitt saw that the ANB push for education and civil rights went “back to the influence the Cottages had on the organization. There were some very progressive people living in the Cottages. Peter Simpson being one and Ralph Young, also was a very strong-willed person. Frank Price also lived in the Cottages. Those three are always mentioned today as being most influential in the ANB in its beginning. Today they are quite revered when people start talking about history.”<sup>46</sup>

Clearly, Cottage patriarch Peter Simpson was a man of great gravitas. A Canadian-born Tsimshian, Simpson grew up in Metlakatla, Alaska, but his Tsimshian ancestors were from Metlakatla in northwestern British Columbia (BC). In 1887 approximately 800 Tsimshians from “Old Metlakatla” in BC founded the community of “New Metlakatla” in Alaska, under the leadership of the Anglican minister William Duncan, founder of the Christian communities at both Old and New Metlakatla. In

1888, Duncan agreed to send several young men from New Metlakatla to the Sheldon Jackson School. Simpson was among that group. During this time Simpson also became an active member in the Presbyterian Church.<sup>47</sup>

Four years later, in 1892, Simpson led a small group of Metlakatla men and their families to found the community of Port Gravina, on Gravina Island just across Tongass Narrows from the small village of Ketchikan. The main focus of Port Gravina was the sawmill that Simpson operated. The community also included a school and Presbyterian church. A shipyard was also planned for the community. Unfortunately, Port Gravina would not last. In 1904, a fire broke out while most of the residents were in Ketchikan celebrating the 4th of July. The sawmill, the dock, and most of the other buildings along the town's wooden boardwalk were destroyed. While most of the residents of Port Gravina either moved to Ketchikan or Metlakatla, Simpson headed north to Juneau, where he worked on a ferry between Juneau and Douglas. He eventually moved to Sitka and joined up with another group of young men he knew from Metlakatla when they moved to Sitka to attend the training school.<sup>48</sup>

During his second time at the training school, Simpson studied parliamentary procedure and organization, and *Robert's Rules of Order* would later be used in ANB meetings. Although Simpson was busily involved in the affairs of his people, he also had a big family of fifteen children. He married Mary Sloan, a Tlingit of Sitka, whom he met at the training school. They lived in a cottage on the land given to them by the school.<sup>49</sup> Gil Truitt remembered that Simpson, whom Cottagers greatly respected, repeatedly preached "get an education and life will be easier."<sup>50</sup> The ANB founders were strongly influenced by the Presbyterian missionaries. This influence was seen in the emphasis in ANB policy on Christian ideals and morality. Ten of the founders were themselves not only members of Presbyterian congregations but were also regarded as leaders in church communities.<sup>51</sup>

Significantly, these early societies provided a training ground in techniques that would be used in later civil rights battles. They elected officers—presidents, vice presidents, secretaries, treasurers, and others. They held business meetings conducted by rules of parliamentary procedure. The societies had definite goals, social as well as religious; they campaigned for worthy causes, and raised funds to further their causes through missionary-approved methods, such as bazaars and "basket socials," where parishioner-made baskets were sold. This type of group organization, itself Church-approved, offered a ready-made mode of tackling Alaska Native issues.

After its founding, the ANB set about implementing an ambitious agenda of nonviolent change that would have a major impact on Alaska history. Citizenship, political action, education, schools, land claims, labor relations, and anti-discrimination were some of the major issues that the ANB would tackle, often with great success. This was demonstrated in 1926, when William Paul, running as a Republican in nominally Democratic Alaska, was elected to the territorial legislature. Paul did not, of course, depend entirely on the Alaska Native vote. He had important support from the Republican party organization. But the Alaska Native backing, organized through the ANB and the ANB paper the *Alaska Fisherman*, which he and his brother Louis published, was crucial. Subsequently, due to the ANB and in particular Alaska Native

Sisterhood leadership by Sheldon Jackson graduate Elizabeth Peratrovich, Alaska's 1945 Anti-Discrimination Act was passed, which was similar to the later national 1964 Civil Rights Act.<sup>52</sup>

The Cottages also had a Presbyterian Woman's Missionary Society. Ellen Hope Hays recalled that they "were the people that made things happen with the Church socially. They also formed the Alaska Native Sisterhood (ANS) in 1923. And they called themselves the 'backbone.'"<sup>53</sup> They raised funds to support the ANB and ANS and they knew how to organize. Without them the ANB would have had a very hard time. In October of 1909, *The Thlingit* newspaper noted that "the society was organized Nov. 15, 1905 by Mrs. John G. Brady and Miss Esther Gibson. The majority of the members are the women of the Cottage Settlement who have been former students of the Sheldon Jackson School."<sup>54</sup> Clearly, the Cottages were the crucial staging ground for both the ANB and ANS.

However, political activism was not the only legacy of the Cottages. Certain activities, such as basketball, were promoted at the school and the Cottages, which then became a part of Alaska Native culture and a source of pride. In a truly amazing phenomenon, basketball, invented in 1891 by Dr. James Naismith in Springfield, Massachusetts, crossed the continent and came to be played in distant Alaska as early as 1905. Tracing the relationship between Protestant religion and sports during this period helps us to understand how this swift migration could occur. By the 1880s, as the Cottages community was being formed, American Protestant churches were endorsing the culture of physical vigor. Representatives of emerging liberal Protestantism saw it as a way of helping to develop character and manliness. The ideal man was both strong and responsible, and dedicated to serving others. More widespread was the evangelical idea that men who were strong—spiritually, morally, and physically—were necessary to carry on the rugged task of foreign missions or missions in far-off Alaska. At home, evangelical leaders, hoping to bring more men into the churches, began to build the alliance between sports and evangelism. Church camps and various organizations for boys that emphasized physical fitness and the outdoors arose in this era for similar purposes. The union of sports and Christianity was part of wider American cultural developments. The ideals of muscular Christianity were applied to women as well as to men. The YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association), the Campfire Girls, and the Girl Scouts all reflected the new popularity of this outlook.<sup>55</sup>

One tactic in the missionaries' campaign to transform Alaska Native cultures, then, used sports as a means of instilling in Alaska Native children the traditional American values embodied by the Protestant work ethic. This fusion of sports and Christianity also became one of the most significant legacies of the policy to educate and assimilate Native American children in boarding schools. Initially, physical education in Indian boarding schools was presented as a means by which the students could build character while participating in constructive and worthwhile behaviors. Over time, boarding school students came to use sports as an expression of Native American pride, and as something that was pleasurable in ways that did not always conform to the utilitarian and progressive mission of boarding school educators. Beating white teams in sports such as basketball gave all students a sense of common pride, and being a team player

was at least as important as achieving individual excellence.<sup>56</sup> When the children left their boarding schools and returned to their villages, many of them carried with them the knowledge of a new sport, basketball.

The story of how sports came to be part of the curriculum at boarding schools is part of a larger historical trend that on the local level in Alaska also played out in Sitka and the Cottages. The Sheldon Jackson School shared this widespread curriculum and sports became a part of the Cottages culture, which eventually led to the ANB team that included Cottage residents Ray James, Louis Simpson, and the coach Peter Simpson. Sheldon Jackson School was the key to the Cottagers' relationship with basketball. Gil Truitt recalled that "Sheldon Jackson was one of the institutions that had some of the finest basketball teams in the territory. Some of the greatest players came from that school. And those young men were heroes to all of us."<sup>57</sup> Apparently the Sheldon Jackson administration was quite accommodating to Cottagers and basketball. Truitt remembers "being very young when the coach at Sheldon Jackson, Ralph Weeks, knowing that a lot of us couldn't buy a ticket to get into the games, it cost 10 cents, so he made agreements with us that we would clean up the gym after the game and that's how we got into the games."<sup>58</sup> Carol Feller Brady recalled that "the whole town would turn out."<sup>59</sup> Those games certainly had an impact on Cottagers like Truitt, who went on not only to play, but to become the foremost authority in Southeast Alaska on basketball history.

Basketball became the preferred sport in the Tlingit Village as well and Truitt recalled that "friends were in both places, we competed against each other in basketball. We were one people. So there was never really separation. The ANB Hall would bring all of us together . . . it was a great gathering place."<sup>60</sup> Basketball also influenced the type of hall built by ANB/ANS camps throughout the region—all of which enclosed basketball courts, resulting in a structure that also well served organizational and celebratory activities. Most ANB chapters sponsored local tournaments and arranged schedules with the teams of other communities.<sup>61</sup> In some ways, basketball represented not only a game, but the beginning of new traditions in Sitka. Sports became a part of the diverse Alaska Native cultures and, as Gil Truitt so aptly stated, "provided a pride that flowed over into other activities."<sup>62</sup> To this day, it is not uncommon to find Tlingit elders playing in the city league while their sons, daughters, grandsons, and granddaughters play in different divisions in the same league.

The recreational life at the Cottages certainly involved more than basketball for the children of the community. Sitka National Historical Park was a handy playground that included trails, open fields, and structures like the Russian blockhouse, which made it an attractive place for children. Cottage children used the park for games like baseball, touch football, or kick the can. Cottager John Hope remembered: "We'd go down there and we'd have a lot of fun playing in the open fields. . . . We didn't know much about football, but we'd play our version of it."<sup>63</sup> Somewhat ironically, "Cowboys and Indians" was another popular game among the Cottage children. When these games drew the attention of tourists, some of the boys converted them into a show in the blockhouse. According to Cottager Isabella Brady, the tourists were interested in "the Indians dancing with tomahawks and stuff so they just would dance in the

blockhouse and pass the hat around and they got some money that way.”<sup>64</sup> According to John Hope, one of the actors, they sometimes charged ten cents admission, and the tourists would not only sit for the show but also ask questions.<sup>65</sup> Thus, this form of recreation turned into a way to make some money.

Music became part of the cultural life of the Cottages and, like many other aspects of Cottage life, the roots were at the Sheldon Jackson School. Like athletics, music was incorporated in the school’s curriculum by missionaries as a means of Americanization. Musical training was thought to instill the discipline of mind so admired by Protestants. The Sheldon Jackson School band’s music was tied to religious and American themes to promote the school’s assimilation goals. But the people of the Cottages made the music their own and clearly came to enjoy the community feel. The Cottagers even formed their own band that was renowned in Southeast Alaska and traveled throughout the area encouraging other Alaska Native communities to form bands. Cyrus Peck Jr. recalled how music spread throughout Southeast Alaska as “they learned music at the training School” and later “Angoon had their own band; Hoonah had a band, Klawock, and Juneau.”<sup>66</sup> Gil Truitt recalled that music was “one of the major activities at the Cottages. Almost every household had musicians; my father played the French horn, my mother played several instruments, including the piano. Every household had musicians. The James family would come up on Sunday afternoon and start to play, and women, within 15–20 minutes all the musicians wound up in front of that house, and it became a picnic.”<sup>67</sup> The Cottage band even traveled to the Seattle World Fair in 1909 as part of the Alaskan Yukon Pacific Exposition.<sup>68</sup>

According to federal census records, occupations for Cottagers included fishing, boatbuilding, carpentry, and engineering for canneries, fireman, and general laborer. But it was also a place for Alaska Natives to be exposed to skills they could use in a quickly changing environment. Cyrus Peck Jr. saw that the “community became a stepping stone for a lot of people. My father . . . was a builder and a boat builder; every once in a while Peter Simpson would hire him to make and build things.”<sup>69</sup> As with many other aspects of Cottage life, Peter Simpson was a central figure. Gil Truitt explains that “I will always respect the name of Peter Simpson, he was a great individual and a big influence on what happened, not only in Southeast but in the State.”<sup>70</sup> Simpson was well



**FIGURE 2.** Group photo of cottage community members in front of Cottage Hall, with Cottage Band in back rows holding instruments and children in front row, Sitka, Alaska, circa 1900–1915. Elbridge W. Merrill photographs, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections, AWC2243.

schooled in industries at Metlakatla, where there was a sawmill, cannery, printing shop, boat-building shop, and a merchandise store. All of these businesses were incorporated as the Metlakatla Industrial Company. The businesses not only provided employment, but also served as centers to learn the skills necessary to operate them. Simpson brought these skills with him to the Cottages after attending Sheldon Jackson School.

Despite the western-style work taking place at the Cottages, subsistence activities were also a major part of Cottage life. Unlike Indian policy in other parts of the country, the unique conditions in Alaska forced missionaries to make adjustments to the tactics used elsewhere. The case of subsistence activities is an ideal example. Whereas the Dawes Plan called for land reform and a transition from traditional Native American subsistence activities to commercial farming, such a plan was just not possible in Alaska, especially in Sitka where commercial agriculture could not provide a living. Thus, while missionaries pushed for an agenda of assimilation, they could not discourage traditional subsistence activities. The Cottagers continued traditional subsistence activities of hunting and gathering in the Indian River area. As Louis Simpson noted, "Indian River was right out the back door."<sup>71</sup> Gil Truitt remembered that without subsistence many Tlingit would not have survived. "Today it's considered a treat but to us that's what we grew up on. So when people say that today they really mean it, without that subsistence we never would have survived. There really was no difference from what we were experiencing and the Village people. The big difference is we had Totem Park, Sheldon Jackson and Indian River."<sup>72</sup> Thus the Cottages became the park's closest neighbor, and the park became a favorite subsistence and recreational site for its people.<sup>73</sup>

Amelia Cameron's use of the park and her traditional knowledge is a prime example of how Indian policy was different in Alaska due to the continuation of subsistence activities. Mrs. Cameron, who lived to be 104, was among the most influential role models and teachers at the Cottages settlement on the collection and preparation of traditional foods. She was great-grandmother to Gil Truitt, a grandmother to Carol Feller Brady, and a maternal great-aunt to Ellen Hope Hays, Fred Hope, John Hope, Herb Hope, and Margaret McVey. She and her husband, Don Cameron, raised John Hope during their time at the Cottages, providing him with a wealth of traditional knowledge about the park's natural and cultural resources. Interestingly, even though she was a part of the Cottages community, Cameron never learned much English and continued to carry out the seasonal round of traditional subsistence activities at Indian River well into her elder years.<sup>74</sup>

John Hope recalled that "Our favorite beach was at Teachers Island: that's where Mrs. Cameron used to go to get cockles. And the cockles, of course, they squirted up and she would have a sharp stick and she would be poking in the sand and whenever they squirted up to us she'd gather the cockles. Right along the River itself they had what they now call Indian Celery. Mrs. Cameron used to go there and gather it and that's one of the delicacies you eat. In those days they had sort of a strange combination, sometimes dipped in sugar after they peeled it and sometimes in seal oil and sometimes a combination of the two."<sup>75</sup>

Apart from subsistence activities, the Indian River area was also where Cottagers interacted with tourists. They made a small amount of money by selling local goods



**FIGURE 3.** *Indian River Falls as seen from below the footbridge, Sitka, ca. 1887. Bertram C. Towne photographs, University of Washington Libraries Special Collections, UW8116.*

such as foods, fur, shells, and crafts to the tourists. They never made a lot of money, but every little bit helped for a group of people with limited economic means. Isabella Brady recalled, “I used to sell shells at the entry way of the park before it all got changed, and my mom and dad used to go out to get shells—abalone shells, sea urchin shells and I had my little enterprises.”<sup>76</sup> Cottage resident Jenny Willard had a stand that sold beadwork, moccasins, canoes, pin cushions, and curiosities. Ellen Hope Hays remembered that “she worked on it all the time. Just before Kelly Street she had her sales house. She’d put her items on display. Mrs. Cook also had a sales tent with the same kind of things. There were at least two or three of them, business entrepreneurs.”<sup>77</sup>

The Cottages did not exist in a vacuum; some of the same issues impacting other Alaska Native Communities were also felt there. As Ellen Hope Hays recalled, some families experienced deaths due to disease.<sup>78</sup> Others were impacted by alcohol, and still other families chose to move from the Cottages.<sup>79</sup> Cyrus Peck Jr. recalled that “after 1924–25, things began to change after old man Howard moved his shop into the village. The glory days were its earliest days.”<sup>80</sup> Gil Truitt sadly related that “many of the people, including my parents, my uncle’s parents, perished because of alcohol, as did a number of households at the Cottages.”<sup>81</sup>

Sitka National Historical Park was also changing as government presence in the park grew stronger during the Great Depression. Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) crews came to the park in the 1930s, where they worked on road and trail maintenance

and landscaping the park's entrance. A primarily Native CCC crew also worked on the park's collection of totem poles.<sup>82</sup> Global events and the onset of World War II would bring even more changes to Alaska, Sitka, and the Cottages. Certainly the military presence was pronounced. In 1943, for example, 300,000 troops were in Alaska, and there were 300 military installations of various kinds. More than 3 million dollars in federal funds were spent in Alaska during 1943 alone.<sup>83</sup> While some saw this influx of troops and money as a much-needed boost to Alaska's development, others saw it as an end to the charms of Alaska.

Overall, the effects of the Second World War in Alaska proved to be an economic boom greater than any gold rush. The Alaska Railroad was modernized; airfields and roads were expanded; new docks and wharves were built and after the war, turned over to the territory. The Alaska Highway was constructed, and the permanent population grew from a 1940 estimate of 74,000 to 112,000 in 1950.<sup>84</sup> For Alaska Natives the Second World War had many important impacts, such as the spread of the ANB, which politicized areas beyond Southeast Alaska. Many were now exercising their right to vote and actively using American citizenship for the first time.<sup>85</sup>

Sitka and Cottages would experience their share of wartime change. Sitka was filled with wartime construction projects that included a naval air station and a massive causeway. These works intensified the need for Indian River gravel found next to the Cottages. One Cottager recalled that gravel trucks seemed to rumble along Metlakatla Street night and day.<sup>86</sup> This removal of gravel from the river had an immediate impact on the Cottagers' subsistence activities as it churned the salmon spawning beds and accelerated erosion in the lower river. World War II also brought Cottagers into contact with GIs from the Lower 48. Gil Truitt and others "idolized a lot of those service men who were here. We saw some great athletes. When the service men were here that was the first group of non-Natives who treated us so nice. Because we were interested in sports and they were athletes. We looked up to them and they paid attention to us."<sup>87</sup> But Ellen Hope Hays saw that "there was such change in our community during WWII" as "men were getting to be older" and "the nephews were off to war if not sick with TB so, it was an end. The many changes began to happen during the war and right after the war."<sup>88</sup>

Soon after the war, beginning in 1956 and ending in 1966, the National Park Service embarked on "Mission 66," a federally sponsored, agency-wide program to improve deteriorated and dangerous conditions in the national parks. Planners and architects developed the concept of the "visitor center" to streamline and standardize visitor services at federal parks nationwide, with approximately one hundred new visitor centers being built. The program brought dramatic changes to Metlakatla Street. Between 1955 and 1963, the National Park Service purchased the properties along the park side of Metlakatla Street. Many of the Cottages were demolished and replaced with landscaping, parking, and, in 1965, a new visitor center to replace the old trail entrance.<sup>89</sup> Internal forces that combined with changes in Sitka, the Sitka National Historical Park, and those brought by World War II brought the Cottages community to an end.

The Cottages of Sitka were a place where adapting to a quickly changing world had a historical impact that would carry long-term meaning for Alaska Natives, particularly regarding politics and lifestyle. In hindsight, over the years of its existence, there were



happy moments for many Cottagers: sports, games, music, times in the park, and relationships with non-Cottage Tlingit are remembered in a positive light. Basketball was important in bringing the community together. Also, even with Americanization policies, subsistence activities of Cottages residents were not abandoned. While aspects of traditional culture in terms of the roles of elders, oration at community gatherings, and subsistence activities continued, the Cottages residents, in particular Peter Simpson, were instrumental in forming the ANB and ANS. The ANB celebrated its centennial in 2012 and the political influence of Alaska Native participation lives on. In a 2010 speech to the Grand Camp Convention, US Senator Lisa Murkowski credited a strong and well-organized Alaska Native turnout for her successful write-in bid for office.<sup>90</sup> As Gil Truitt stated, it was in the Cottages that Alaska Natives “started . . . to ask questions” and “became more vocal” in seeking their civil rights.<sup>91</sup> In the end, the lasting legacy of the Cottages is the Alaska Native leaders who would fight for greater recognition of Alaska Native rights.

## NOTES

1. Carol Feller Brady, *Through the Storm towards the Sun* (Sausalito: Scope Publishing, 2004), 36.
2. The Sitka Industrial and Training School was renamed Sheldon Jackson School in 1910 after the death of its founder, the Reverend Sheldon Jackson.
3. Ellen Hope Hays, “Interview,” Sitka National Historical Park Project Jukebox, <http://jukebox.uaf.edu/Sitka/program/htm/ElHa.htm>.
4. See David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1995), 5–28; Brian Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991), 156–60; *American Indian Policy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Vine Deloria Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 15–35; Fredrick Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880–1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 41–83.
5. John Bloom, *To Show What an Indian Can Do* (Twin Cities: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xv.
6. Bloom, *To Show*, xii.
7. See Carolyn J. Marr, “Assimilation Through Education: Indian Boarding Schools in the Pacific Northwest,” American Indians of the Pacific Northwest Collection, University of Washington Digital Collections, <http://content.lib.washington.edu/aipnw/marr.html>.
8. Marr, “Assimilation Through Education.”
9. Stephen W. Haycox, “Sheldon Jackson in Historical Perspective: Alaska Native Schools and Mission Contracts, 1885–1894,” *The Pacific Historian* 28, no. 1 (1984): 18–28, [http://www.alaskool.org/native\\_ed/articles/s\\_haycox/sheldon\\_jackson.htm](http://www.alaskool.org/native_ed/articles/s_haycox/sheldon_jackson.htm).
10. Haycox, “Sheldon Jackson,” 23.
11. *Ibid.*, 22.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. Cyrus Peck Jr., “Interview,” Sitka National Historical Park Project Jukebox, Sitka, Alaska, <http://jukebox.uaf.edu/Sitka/program/htm/ElHa.htm>.
15. Letters from 1895, Dr. Bertrand Wilbur papers, Sheldon Jackson College archives, Sitka, Alaska. Also see Joyce Walton Shales, “Rudolph Walton: One Tlingit Man’s Journey through Stormy Seas, Sitka, Alaska, 1867–1951,” PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1998, <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/831/items/1.0055571>.

16. Kristen Griffin, *Early Views: Historical Vignettes of Sitka National Historical Park* (Anchorage: US Department of the Interior in Alaska, 2000), 88, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.31951d01984572f;view=1up;seq=1>.
17. Ibid.
18. "Cottages," folder 25, Sheldon Jackson College archives, Stratton Library, Sitka, Alaska.
19. Letters from 1895, Dr. Bertrand Wilbur papers.
20. Bloom, *To Show*, 44.
21. Ibid.
22. Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 164.
23. Ibid.
24. See Terrence M. Cole, "Jim Crow in Alaska: The Passage of the Alaska Equal Rights Act of 1945," *Western Historical Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (1992): 429–49, doi: 10.2307/970301.
25. 1920 Sitka Census, Cottages Page, US Census Bureau, Kettleson Memorial Library, Sitka, Alaska.
26. Feller Brady, *Through the Storm*, 16.
27. Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*, 167.
28. Feller Brady, *Through the Storm*, 19.
29. Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*, 167.
30. Gil Truitt, "Interview," Sitka National Historical Park Project Jukebox, Sitka, Alaska, <http://jukebox.uaf.edu/Sitka/program/htm/ElHa.htm>.
31. *The Tlingit*, October, 1909, Sheldon Jackson College archives, Stratton Library, Sitka, Alaska.
32. Peck Jr., "Interview."
33. "The Alaskan," December 2, 1905, Sheldon Jackson College archives, Stratton Library, Sitka, Alaska.
34. "The Alaskan," December 1, 1906, Sheldon Jackson College archives, Stratton Library, Sitka, Alaska.
35. *Verstovian*, December, 1914, Sheldon Jackson College archives, Stratton Library, Sitka, Alaska.
36. Ibid.
37. Hope Hays, "Interview."
38. Truitt, "Interview."
39. Hope Hays, "Interview."
40. Shales, "Walton." See chapters 6 and 7 for a description of Walton's relationship with Wilbur and Walton's reaction to increasing paternalism.
41. Hope Hays, "Interview."
42. Some of the ANB accomplishments include claiming Native citizenship and voting rights, school desegregation, and the extension of workers' compensation, pensions, and aid to children to Alaska Natives, together with protections against discrimination and land claims. See Will Swagel, "Alaska Native Brotherhood 100-Year Anniversary: A Century of Progress," *Alaska Business Monthly* (September, 2012), 66-67, [https://issuu.com/alaska\\_business\\_monthly/docs/september-2012-alaska\\_business\\_monthly?backgroundColor=](https://issuu.com/alaska_business_monthly/docs/september-2012-alaska_business_monthly?backgroundColor=). Also see Peter Metcalfe, *A Dangerous Idea: The Alaska Native Brotherhood and the Struggle for Indigenous Rights* (Fairbanks: The University of Alaska Press, 2014).
43. Gertrude Mather Johnson, "The Life of Peter Simpson," in *Haa Kusteeyi, Our Culture: Tlingit Life Stories*, ed. Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 665–76.
44. Truitt, "Interview."
45. Ibid.
46. Johnson, "The Life of Peter Simpson," 667.

47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., 665–76.
49. Truitt, “Interview.”
50. Johnson, “The Life of Peter Simpson,” 670.
51. Cole, “Jim Crow in Alaska,” 330.
52. Hope Hays, “Interview.”
53. *The Tlingit*, October, 1909. Sheldon Jackson College Archives, Stratton Library, Sitka, Alaska.
54. John Bloom, *To Show*, 3.
55. Ibid.
56. Truitt, “Interview.”
57. Ibid.
58. Feller Brady, *Through the Storm*, 21.
59. Truitt, “Interview.”
60. Ibid.
61. Truitt, “Interview.”
62. Thomas F. Thornton, *Traditional Tlingit Use of Sitka National Historical Park*. (Sitka: National Park Service Final Report, July 31, 1998), 111, [irmafiles.nps.gov/reference/holding/451274?accessType=DOWNLOAD](http://irmafiles.nps.gov/reference/holding/451274?accessType=DOWNLOAD).
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. Peck Jr., “Interview.”
66. Truitt, “Interview.”
67. Ibid.
68. Peck Jr., “Interview.”
69. Truitt, “Interview.”
70. Thornton, *Traditional Tlingit Use*, 34.
71. Truitt, “Interview.”
72. Thornton, *Traditional Tlingit Use*, 60.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid., 114.
76. Hope Hays, “Interview.”
77. Ibid. In Hope Hays’s own words: “That was at the throws of the TB epidemics. I had several sisters at home who died of TB. And my grandparents died of TB and many of our community were dying of TB it was not uncommon to see it. I had it three times so I wasn’t in school consistently . . . miraculously it was captured.”
78. Griffin, *Early Views*, 96.
79. Peck Jr., “Interview.”
80. Truitt, “Interview.”
81. Griffin, *Early Views*, 96.
82. Cole, “Jim Crow in Alaska,” 330.
83. See *Alaska at War, 1941–1945*, ed. Fern Chanonnet (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2008).
84. Ibid.
85. Griffin, *Early Views*, 95.
86. Truitt, “Interview.”
87. Hope Hays, “Interview.”
88. Griffin, *Early Views*, 96.
89. “ANB Celebrates 100 Years,” *Daily Sitka Sentinel*, October 5, 2012.
90. Truitt, “Interview.”