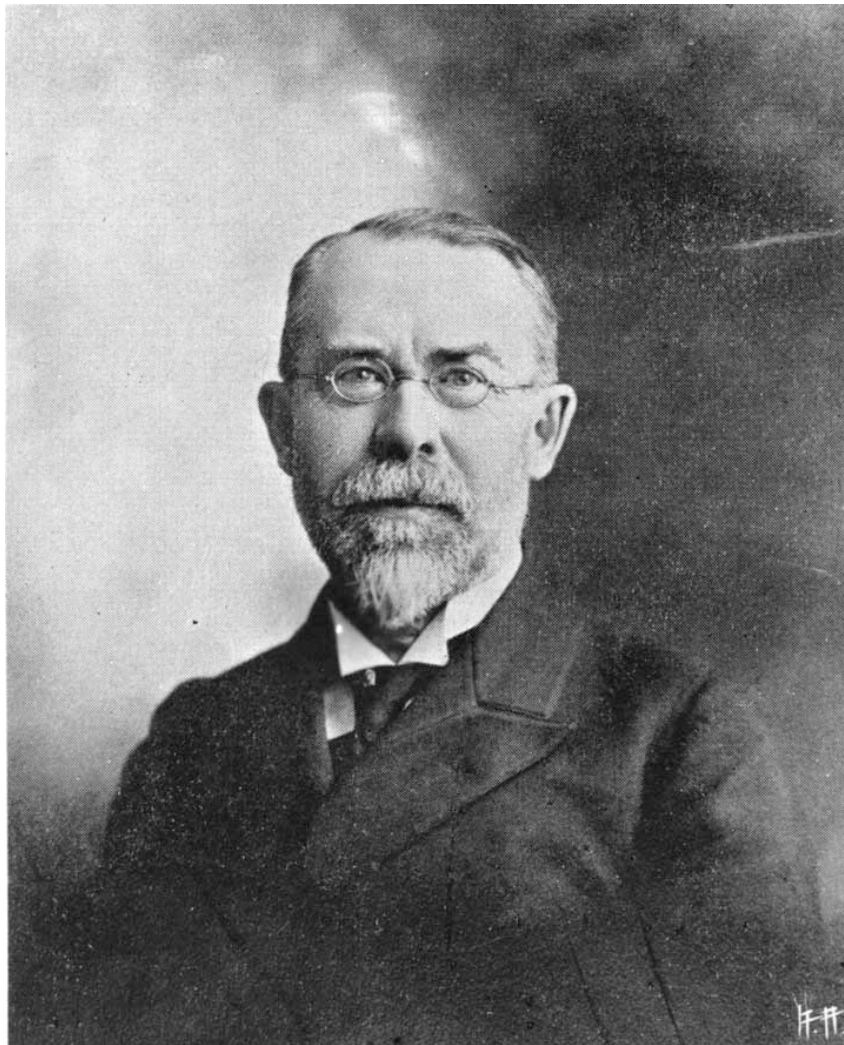


REV. SHELDON JACKSON
Alaska's First General Agent of Education
1834-1909



Rev. Sheldon Jackson, Alaska's first General Agent of Education, was Vice President of the Alaska Geographic Society when Seattle photographer Frank LaRoche made this portrait on May 15, 1899. Alaska State Library.

Collection Name: Alaska State Library Portrait File. Photographs. ASL.
Identifier: ASL-Jackson-Sheldon-1
Title: Rev. Sheldon Jackson, D.D., LL.D., Vice President Alaska Geographic Society, May 15, 1899.
Description: Title taken from image. Image: Photo by La Roche, Seattle.
Creator: LaRoche, Frank



A Presbyterian mission boarding school, Chilkat Mission, was built in Haines after the Americans purchased Russia. It burned in 1895. Alaska State Library.

Collection Name: Alaska State Library Place File. Photographs. ASL.
Identifier: ASL-Haines-Housing-4
Title: Chilcoat [Chilkat] Mission, Alaska.
Description: Title taken from image. Verso: Boarding school, burned in 1895. Haines Mission Mr. and Mrs. Willard, House and Bell.



Alaska State Library - Historical Collections

At Yakutat, the Mission School nurse gives students a lesson in brushing their teeth. The school was later the Covenant Church. Fhoki Kayamori photo, ca. 1912-1941. Alaska State Library.

Collection Name: Fhoki Kayamori. Photographs, ca. 1912-1941. ASL-PCA-55

Identifier: ASL-P55-395

Title: Brushing teeth, Mission School, Yakutat, Alaska.

Description: Interview notes: The nurse giving the children a lesson on brushing teeth outside of the Mission School, later the Covenant Church.

Creator: Kayamori, Fhoki



Anchorage Museum of History & Art. Library & Archives.

In the early part of the 20th century, students at Nome met in the First Congregational Church building. O.D. Goetze Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art, Library and Archives.

Collection Name: O. D. Goetze Collection

Identifier: AMRC-b01-41-400

Title: Eskimo school, Nome, Alaska.

Description: Title taken from front. Group of school children and adults stand outside First Congregational Church in Nome, Alaska, used as school building. n.d. Photographer: O. D. Goetze.

Creator: Goetze, O. D. (Otto Daniel)

Corporate Name: First Congregational Church (Nome, Alaska)

Location: Nome (Alaska)

Region: Northern Alaska

Time Period: 1896 to 1913



Alaska State Library - Historical Collections

The Russian government continued to support Russian Orthodox mission schools such as this one in Unalaska even after the Alaska purchase agreement. In this circa 1900 photo, the man on the right is identified as Petr Popov; the priest at center is Aleksandr Kedrovskii. Alaska State Library.

Collection Name: Michael Z. Vinokourov Photograph Collection, ca. 1880's-1970's. PCA 243

Identifier: ASL-P243-1-109

Title: Group of Unalaska school children and three men, ca. 1900.

Description: Man on right is Petr Popov with Priest Aleksandr Kedrovskii, second from right.



In 1885, the first public school in Juneau was held in the building that was later the Log Cabin Church. Winter & Pond, Alaska State Library.

Collection Name: Winter and Pond. Photographs, 1893-1943. ASL-PCA-87

Identifier: ASL-P87-0908

Title: Public school, Juneau, Alaska, ca. 1895.

Description: Group portrait of teacher and pupils outside the first public school in Juneau, in the building that became the Log Cabin Church, ca. 1895.

Creator: Winter & Pond



Lester D. Henderson, Commissioner of Education, 1917-1929.
Alaska State Library

Description: Lester D. Henderson, Commissioner of Education May 10, 1917 to June 30, 1929.
Title taken from verso.

Verso (news item): May 5, 1917 - Lester D. Henderson, Juneau superintendent of schools, was today appointed the first Commissioner of Education for the Territory of Alaska under the recently enacted law to provide for a uniform school system. The appointment was made, as provided by law, by governor John F.A. Strong, and the senior senators from each of the four judicial divisions: Senators Heckman, Aldrich, Hubbard, and Gaustad. Mr. Henderson will take office on May 10.

More about Sheldon Jackson and Alaska's early schools:

In 1884, twelve years after the United States purchased Alaska from Russia, a Presbyterian minister named Sheldon Jackson offered himself and was selected as Alaska's General Agent of Education. The federal government was intent on ensuring an education for all children in Alaska, regardless of race, and Jackson was charged to make that happen on the meager budget of \$25,000. His territory was so large that its land mass equaled one-fifth of today's continental United States. So Jackson relied on the then-common custom of funding missionary schools through government contracts.

To stretch his budget, Jackson divided Alaska into regions and invited various Protestant denominations to open and operate mission schools under the umbrella of his office. The Baptists were directed to the Cook Inlet area and Kodiak Island. Along the Yukon River, a mission field for the Anglicans of Canada, the Episcopalians were invited to continue that work. The Aleutians were allocated to the Methodists; the Kuskokwim to the Moravians; Prince of Wales Island to the Congregationalists; and the Kotzebue region to the Friends Church. In Nome, missionaries of the Lutheran and Covenant Churches labored. The Presbyterian Church was already deeply planted in Southeast Alaska. That denomination added St. Lawrence Island and the northern Arctic Coast. The Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches, already long established in certain villages, were encouraged to continue their work in educating children.

Popular thinking at the time included the Indian reform theory that Natives could become "civilized" through immersion into the English language and late 19th-century American values. Morals were to be taught along with the three Rs, and practical subjects such as sewing, baking, and carpentry. Jackson endorsed the idea of immersion

education, but drew the line at removing children from their families and home villages and placing them in boarding schools, as was the common practice for Native American children in the West.

However frugal Jackson's plan, within the church-based system of these early schools, the government attempted to "un-teach" Alaska Native children what they knew of their ages-old cultures, from language, dance, and potlatching, to the view of "self." Beginning with this first assimilation effort, generations of Native children were compelled to learn English and abandon their first language. In many villages, mission teachers prohibited potlatching, taking away one of the most significant traditional celebrations, and quieting the use of language in song and dance. It also removed one of the main sources of teaching tradition to youth. The great-grandparents of today's schoolchildren were humiliated or even punished physically if they spoke in the language of their birth.

Alaska historian and author Stephen Haycox offered insight into Sheldon Jackson, his times and his intent, in a historical perspective published in Spring 1984 issue of *The Pacific Historian*: "Reconstruction of the historical context in which he developed his ideas helps demonstrate that Sheldon Jackson had what he considered the best interests of Alaska natives at heart in his activities as general agent of education. His belief in the efficacy of acculturation through education, particularly in English, made him typical of late nineteenth-century Indian reformers in America, but in his insistence that Indians be schooled in their traditional villages, he recognized the validity of important aspects of aboriginal culture."

The government withdrew its funding of missionary schools in the face of growing unease about the constitutionality of supporting religious organizations with federal money. In Congress, an amendment to the 1893 Indian Appropriation Act stopped the practice of funding the mission school contracts. In its place, a racially segregated school system placed non-Native children in territorial schools and Native children in Bureau of Indian Affairs schools. Meanwhile, a handful of Russian mission schools, still supported by the Russian government, continued to operate even after Alaska was transferred to the United States. The last Russian school closed in 1916. A year later, in May 1917, territorial Governor John F. A. Strong appointed Lester D. Henderson as the

first Commissioner of Education. The separate-but-equal schooling law remained in place until Alaska reached statehood in 1959.

Meanwhile, Native and non-Native populations were shifting with major events such as World War II and building of the trans-Alaska pipeline. Whereas nearly half of Alaska's population was Native in 1930, twenty years later, only a little more than a quarter was Native. In 2005, Native Americans and Alaska Natives made up 19 percent of the state population—about 1 in 5 people—the highest rate for this race group of any state in the nation.

In the mid-20th century, a cultural rebirth began among Alaska's Native people. Restraints against cultural celebrations such as potlatches had fallen away. Young people began to seek traditional knowledge and practice in art, language, dance, and song. Elders' stories from their lifetimes as well as those given to them were recorded.

Across Alaska, languages were reviving as well. In the 1960s, linguist Irene Reed and others worked with Yup'ik speakers to help preserve their language. Later, through the Alaska Native Language Center, they were the first to develop a modern writing system for Central Yup'ik, leading to the state's first school bilingual programs in four Yup'ik villages.

Today Native children throughout the state have ample opportunity to learn their first language—in the formal classroom setting as well as in the home. Some areas of the state are seeing greater successes than others. While Central Yup'ik seems to be flourishing, in the Tlingit region, the numbers of fluent speakers is diminishing. The Alaska Native Language Center on the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus hosts an expanding library of printed materials and taped interviews and histories in Native languages, and university-level classes in Native studies include language classes.

It's only been about 130 years since Sheldon Jackson divided Alaska among the churchmen. And while various denominations of the Christian faith have deep and abiding roots where they were planted, Native worshippers have found freedom to merge their cultural and traditional knowledge with their faith. Native believers debate the expressions of dance and drumming in their services among themselves, while trying to stay Christ-centered. Others are free to pursue traditional spiritual practices that have survived the centuries. The cultural deconstruction that began with the arrival of the first

European fur hunters and traders seems to have completed its turn, and among Alaska's Native cultures, the revival continues.

Sheldon Jackson died in 1909. In Sitka, the Sheldon Jackson College bears his name. On the grounds, Alaska's oldest concrete building houses the Sheldon Jackson Museum, grown from the seed of Jackson's own collection of Native art and artifacts. In Alaska's history books, he is on record for his activism in lobbying for Alaska's first Organic Act, establishing its formal government. The history books also record his part in establishing Alaska first educational system, and the long memories of those whose lives he touched include positive and negative reactions. He is also remembered for his attempts to benefit Alaska Natives by creating a domesticated reindeer farming industry in northwestern Alaska. Historians like Stephen Haycox, who underline context in reconstructing history, shed light on Jackson's ultimate intent in all that he undertook: to help.

"Sheldon Jackson as a Presbyterian and federal official in Alaska differed from his contemporaries in significant ways on behalf of cultural diversity," Haycox wrote in *The Pacific Historian*. "Whatever his shortcomings, he should not be viewed as having abused his office and its funds. Jackson's achievement in Alaska was a major one and should be understood without such a confusion, so as fully to appreciate his role as father of the American effort in Native education in Alaska."

Links:

Sheldon Jackson profile:

www.netstate.com/states/peop/people/ak_sj.htm

***Christianity History & Biography*, Sheldon Jackson: "Out Yonder on the Edge of Things":**

www.ctlibrary.com/ch/2000/issue66/7.30.html

***"The Northern Alaska Eskimo and the Presbyterian Church,"* by Rev. H. Gene Straatmeyer, May 1979:**

www.yukonpresbytery.com/YukonPresbytery/histories/Straat1.html#Anchor72

Alaska Native Heritage Center:

www.alaskanative.net/

Alaska Native Language Center:

www.uaf.edu/anlc/

Alaska Native history, education, languages, and culture:

www.alaskool.org

Haycox, Stephen W. “Sheldon Jackson in Historical Perspective: Alaska Native Schools and Mission Contracts, 1885-1894,” *The Pacific Historian*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 1:

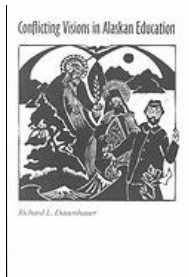
www.alaskool.org/native_ed/articles/s_haycox/sheldon_jackson.htm

Visit the library for more information:

Alaska’s libraries include plenty of audio, visual, and written material about Rev. Sheldon Jackson and his times. Visit your local library or go online to see what’s available in holdings all over the state. Take these simple steps:

1. Access **SLED** (State Library Electronic Doorway) at <http://sled.alaska.edu/library.html>.
2. Click on the listing for **ALNCat** (the Alaska Library Network Catalog) to view the Basic Search window.
3. Go to the Keyword field, and type in **SHELDON JACKSON EDUCATION**.

More Reading:



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Lazell, Arthur J. *Alaskan Apostle: The Life Story of Sheldon Jackson*, New York: Harper, 1960.

Thomas, Tay, *Cry in the Wilderness*, Anchorage: Color Art Printing Co., Inc., 1967.

Tower, Elizabeth A., *Reading, Religion, and Reindeer: Sheldon Jackson's Legacy to Alaska*. Anchorage, AK, 1988.