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REPORT ON 1919 INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC

ALASKA PACKERS ASSOCIATION

NAKNEK STATION
NUSHAGAK STATION
KVICHAK STATION




BRISTOL BAY, ALASKA



J. F. HEINBOCKEL
Superintendent







ALASKA PACKERS ASSOCIATION
Naknek Station
Bristol Bay, Alaska

REPORT ON 1919 INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC

The Alaska Packers Association owns and operates fifteen salmon canneries in Alaska, nine north of the Alaska Peninsula. These nine canneries are managed by three superintendents and are known by the shipping marks of the establishments.

The Nushagak station, under the superintendency of Captain C.H. Williams, has two canneries, one the so-called  cannery on the easterly, and the other the  cannery on the westerly shore of Nushagak Bay. In addition, in connection with this station the  saltery is operated on Egashak River, a tributary of Nushagak Bay.

The Kvichak station is in charge of Mr. J.C. Bell, with two canneries on the easterly shore of Kvichak Bay, the  cannery near the Koggiung village and the  cannery about three miles below.


The Naknek station, J. F. Heinbockel, superintendent, comprises five canneries, - the    canneries at Naknek, the  cannery at Egegak, about forty miles southwesterly from Naknek, and the  cannery at Ugashik, about the same distance southwesterly from Egegak. The  cannery has in recent years been operated as a salting station, but is fully equipped for canning.




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At all of its three Bristol Bay stations, as well as at three south of the Alaska Peninsula, the Alaska Packers Association maintains medical stations with hospitals in charge of competent physicians and nurses. All employees and all natives are given free medical treatment and medicine.

The stations have intercommunication with each other through wireless telegraphy, but at the Naknek station, the largest and most efficient wireless apparatus has been installed, and practically all wireless communication of the three Bristol Bay stations with the outer world is handled through Naknek.

After arrival on the Alaska Packers Association's steamer "KVICHAK" off Naknek anchorage on May 22, the first cases of influenza at Naknek were reported on May 26 by Dr. Frederick B. Spencer, the company's medical officer at Naknek, and immediate steps were taken to prevent the spread of the disease. All men employed at the  cannery, near which the epidemic broke out, were forbidden to go near the native village, and all natives arriving from other parts were given a good supply of food and sent on their way.

The foremen at the  and  canneries were instructed to forbid any one to visit the  cannery or the native village.

The foreman at the  cannery, Egegak, was also ordered to prevent any natives from the outside from coming

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in and to impress upon the minds of those then located near the cannery the danger of visiting Ugashik, Naknek and other stations where the influenza was raging. It is strange to relate that Egegak was the only village on Bristol Bay that was not troubled with the malady, and the natives there were apparently just as healthy when we left as they ever were.

As stated before, the first cases were reported at Naknek on May 26 and only four male natives were found sick on that day. The following day thirty-eight were reported and so on until the whole village was down with the disease.

A gang of men was selected to help the physician and nurses to distribute food, fuel and medicines and care for the sick. The chief steward received orders to see that sufficient food was cooked daily to supply all natives, whether they were sick or not. All Alaska Packers Association employees worked willingly, but especial praise is due to Dr. Spencer and the chief nurse, Albert Parcel, who were facing an enormous task and who gave their utmost attention and worked untiringly for the afflicted.

On May 30, I made a trip to the Alaska Packers Association's Ugashik cannery, arriving there the same evening. It was found that the influenza had attacked the Ugashik natives, that practically the entire native population was stricken, also six of the white wintermen, and that one

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native had died the previous evening. Orders were issued to treat the natives at Ugashik with the same care and attention as those at Naknek; also to forbid any one to leave or enter the Ugashik village.

Upon return to Naknek it was found that a woman and child had died that day and that many other patients were very low. As it became apparent that there would be many more deaths, a burial squad was appointed and supplied with suitable clothing and gauze masks for protection and to prevent contagion. The company paid extra compensation to the men engaged in this and other relief work.

On June 1, the chief nurse was sent to Ugashik with an additional supply of medicines, etc. While there, the chief nurse performed most excellent work in assisting the natives and the whites affected.

Credit is due to Mr. George Sexton, Secretary of the American Red Cross at Seward. Mr. Sexton sent a wireless message to the Alaska Packers Association's wireless station at Naknek on June 3 offering all stations affected the assistance of the Red Cross Relief Committee and asking for details. On June 4 a wireless answer was sent to Mr. Sexton informing him as to conditions and stating that the sick and children at Naknek were being well cared for and that further messages would be sent if assistance was required. The answer was given in this manner after considering the distance from Seward to Naknek, about eleven hundred miles by sea, or over three hundred miles by the inconvenient

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route with portage by way of Lake Iliamna, and also considering the great lack of transportation facilities between the two places.

On June 4, report of twelve deaths at Ugashik was received.

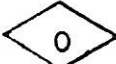

On the same day our wireless operator at Naknek was able to place himself in communication with United States Navy S.S. "UNALGA," then stationed in neighboring waters. The following message was sent:

"CAPTAIN DODGE,
U.S.S.S. "UNALGA":

All natives at Ugashik village sick with influenza, twelve deaths to date. Some wintermen also affected. Can you assist at that station? We can handle situation here at Naknek at present.

(Signed) HEINBOCKEL,
Superintendent, Alaska
Packers Association,
Naknek Station."

No answer was ever received to this message.

Also on this date a sail boat drifted ashore near the Alaska Packers Association's  cannery at Naknek. Three small children, suffering with influenza, came up the beach and reported that two men were dead in the boat. The bodies were given a decent burial and the children taken to the Alaska Packers Association's Naknek Hospital where they recovered and the boat was towed to the  cannery.

On June 5, Doctor Spencer and Captain M. Mortensen of the Alaska Packers Association's steel Bark "STAR OF ZEALAND" made an expedition to Savonoski, a village eight miles

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above Naknek. Matters there were in a very wretched condition and Captain Mortesen with twelve men left again for Savonoski early the next morning with supplies, food and equipments for burying the dead. Twelve bodies were found that day, and as the distance and rough trail precluded the sending of coffins, the bodies were wrapped separately in canvas and buried. Mr. Berglund, superintendent of the Northwestern Fisheries Company at Naknek, sent one man with this expedition to assist. These men returned from Savonoski late in the evening of June 6 and were paid ten dollars each by the United States Marshal at Naknek. This was the only contribution from the Government to our Naknek influenza expenses.

On June 6, received wireless message from the Alaska Packers Association's home office, San Francisco, authorizing its three Bristol Bay superintendents to give all possible assistance to epidemic sufferers.

On June 8, Captain Mortensen with a gang of men again went to Savonoski with food and supplies and buried one more native. Shortly after another trip was made and all remaining natives of the village transferred to the Alaska Packers Association's Naknek station.

On June 8 the following aerogram was sent to Dr. French, United States Commissioner at Dillingham, Nushagak Bay, in answer to his inquiry regarding conditions at Naknek and the necessity of using Government funds:

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"FRENCH,
Nushagak:

About eighty known died at Naknek. Adult population practically wiped out. Ugashik twenty-one dead. Epidemic has not reached Upper Ugashik or Egegak villages yet. Assistance advisable should they be affected. Am giving all possible assistance at my command here and Ugashik. Nurses required to handle orphans. Will advise later what funds are required.

(Signed) HEINBOCKEL"

The Alaska Packers Association never made a request for funds or for reimbursement for work or supplies in combatting this epidemic. Everything was done at the expense of the company.


On June 9 a temporary orphanage was prepared and equipped at the  cannery. An old hospital building was used for the purpose. The native children before entering were bathed and furnished with an entire new outfit of clothing. They had beds with mattresses, blankets and pillows and were placed under the immediate care of a special nurse, who supervised the orphanage and gave especial attention to cleanliness of the institution and its inmates, and also to the serving of ample hot food to the nineteen orphans.

On June 16, received wireless inquiry from United States Navy S.S. "MARBLEHEAD", and on June 19 wireless inquiry from United States Navy S.S. "VICKSBURG" requesting information regarding influenza situation in our vicinity. Replies were sent giving full information of conditions both as to Ugashik and Naknek and reporting the approximate death rate.

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The United States Navy Relief Ship "MARBLEHEAD" arrived at Naknek anchorage on June 19 and two physicians, two nurses and two bluejackets were taken ashore in one of the Alaska Packers Association's cannery tenders. After interviewing Dr. Spencer and inspecting the hospital and orphanage, they left without doing any relief work whatsoever at Naknek. Some medicine was sent ashore later from the "MARBLEHEAD."

The United States Navy S.S. "VICKSBURG" arrived at Ugashik on June 20 and anchored above the Alaska Packers Association's  cannery for about two weeks. Two men from the "VICKSBURG" were left ashore for about ten days as caretakers and buried one body. At this time the epidemic was practically over at the lower Ugashik village, but at the upper village, near the Red Salmon Canning Company's cannery, it was at its height and it was reported that some assistance was given there by physicians and nurses from the "VICKSBURG."

On July 9 the Steamer "LIBBY-MAINE" arrived at Naknek anchorage from Seattle bringing about fifty tons of medicines, fresh vegetables and other provisions shipped by the Alaska Packers Association on this vessel for its three Bristol Bay stations. The receipt of these supplies aided materially in the relief work.

The influenza situation was improving at the Alaska Packers Association's Naknek and Ugashik stations, Egegak still remaining free from the epidemic.

The main source of concern was the disposal of the orphans at the different stations before the departure of the cannery vessels.

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On July 23, the following message was sent to Captain Dodge in answer to his message requesting that all orphans be taken by the Alaska Packers Association from Ugashik and Naknek to the Government hospital at Dillingham, Nushagak Bay:

"Captain Dodge,
U.S.S.S. 'UNALGA':

Will transport orphans from Pilot Station, Ugashik and Naknek to Nushagak at first opportunity.

(Signed) Heinbockel"

On July 24 the Alaska Packers Association's Steamer "KADIAK" took sixteen native orphans from the Upper and twelve from the Lower Ugashik village to Naknek where they were cared for at the company's orphanage. These with sixteen orphans from Naknek were sent on the Steamer "KADIAK" to the Government hospital at Dillingham, Nushagak Bay. At the sailing of the "KADIAK" the following wireless message was sent:

"Dr. French,
Nushagak:

By direction of Captain Dodge of the U.S. S.S. 'UNALGA', I am sending to your orphanage all the orphan natives of Ugashik and Naknek. Steamer to leave on this tide.

(Signed) Heinbockel"

The surviving native adults at the different villages were well taken care of during convalescence, furnished with ample food and medical care. After recovery, they were

given employment making themselves self-supporting. During the coming winter, occupation has been provided for them, such as painting boats and lighters and doing general winter work about the canneries. Good supplies of food and medicines are available at all five canneries connected with the Alaska Packers Association's Naknek station and instructions have been given for the liberal distribution of same.

Before closing wish to state that everything possible was done by the Alaska Packers Association to make the afflicted comfortable. The dead were properly cared for, about forty were buried in coffins at the Lower Ugashik village and all the fifty that died near the NN cannery at Naknek were buried in coffins except about four or five, and these were wrapped in canvas, as were the thirteen bodies at the Savonoski village.

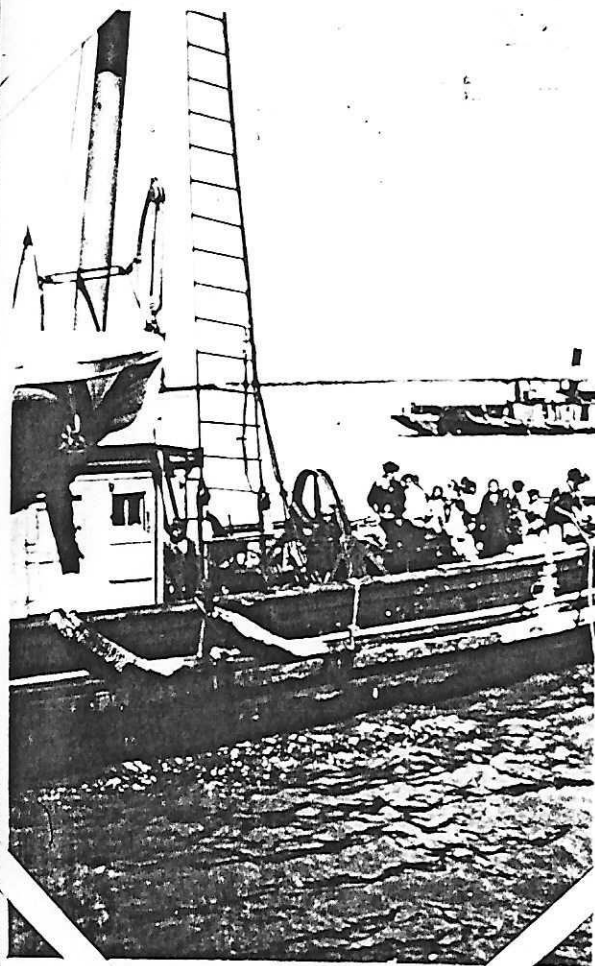
Two large hospital tents were erected on wooden platforms near the Alaska Packers Association's Naknek medical station, equipped with new blankets and bedding. After the epidemic had run its course, these were burnt.

Very truly yours,

J. F. Heinbrekel
Superintendent, Alaska Packers
Association, Naknek Station,
Bristol Bay, Alaska.

San Francisco,
October 20, 1919

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Native Orphans at Naknek, Alaska
Children of Victims of 1919 Influenza Epidemic

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