

OUR 49th STATE

SOUTHERN BAPTIST work is young in Alaska. Our buildings are incomplete and unimpressive. Our doctrine is not the most popular in a pioneering state, but our people have a mind to work, and seeing the needs of evangelism has done wondrous things through God's leadership.

Through the co-operation of our local newspapers, radio, and TV stations, the city populace knew an evangelistic crusade was going on. The 1959 Crusade put us a step forward in public acceptance.

Most important of all were the 311 additions to our churches. This represents 163 souls saved. These 311 will be directly instrumental in leading many others to a saving knowledge of Christ. The Crusade has meant kingdom growth in Alaska. It has accelerated Southern Baptist development.

The 34 preachers and song leaders covered a vast territory in this evange-

listic enterprise. It is 1,300 air miles from Ketchikan to Kotzebue. Many of our Alaska towns did not know what a revival was until Southern Baptists came in. Many people have asked, "What are 'Southern' Baptists doing way up here in the North?" Now they know. We are here to lead as many souls to Christ as we can.

The Crusade was a great benefit to the pastors and lay people who have long been faithful to the work of the Lord here in the Far North. We have 34 churches and missions in Alaska. They are hundreds of miles apart. Only by personal sacrifice can some of our fellow pastors and church leaders experience the joy of fellowship in conferences and conventions once a year. Some must wait 18 to 24 months to see their fellow workers again.

It is seldom that the Southern Baptist Convention meets within 5,000 miles of Alaska. Since we cannot go to the

Convention, the Home Mission Board has brought the Convention to us. Christian fellowship during the Crusade was truly sweet.

The men who came to Alaska for the Crusade came with enthusiasm to reach men for Christ. That enthusiasm was contagious. Our churches have a new determination to complete our task for the glory of Christ. The visitors were understanding and sympathetic. They encouraged our work. They shared good advice from their many years of experience.

Such invisible contributions will continue to be a blessing for years to come. The evangelists pledged to help our missions financially. Even more promising were their commitments of personal prayer on our behalf.

Now is the time for Baptists to make a dynamic effort for Christ in this new state.

cabin of a homesteader here and there along the way spoke to our hearts also of spiritual need. This train trip leaves no doubt but that Alaska is pioneer country.

We next discovered Fairbanks, a city of 55,000 people. Carl Elder, pastor of Hamilton Acres introduced us to the great need for mission work, and it was here we received a deep appreciation of what is being done through the Home Mission Board. The native Baptist mission for Eskimos, St. John's Church for Negroes, Calvary Church, and Hamilton Acres are hard-working units of our Baptist work there.

Traveling by plane we next visited Fort Yukon. Here we felt that real mission work was in action. At the same time we were humbled by the evidence of deep consecration on the part of the O. W. Marsons. Included in the hardships which they face is the 78

degrees below zero temperatures during the winter.

The final chapter of my dream was written at North Pole, Alaska. Here I was introduced to Santa Claus' House and a progressive Baptist church. I shared the first service with Dr. John L. Slaughter of South Carolina. The large majority of the members are young couples attached to the armed forces. The serviceman is a real aid to the North Pole church. Rev. Charles Brown, pastor from Missouri, has a lovely wife and two daughters.

On my trip to Alaska I delivered to Brother L. A. Watson some strange "cargo." It contained over 300 rolls of Life Savers, 300 wash cloths, pins, fish hooks, and an assortment of other items. This was collected in Vacation Bible school at the South Norfolk Church when we observed "Eskimo Day" in June. Letters have been received from

Fort Yukon and Kodiak in appreciation for the gifts.

Yes, my dreams were fulfilled, yet even now I continue to dream of many indelible impressions that I shall never forget. How can one ever forget the need on each turn of the way—isolated homesteaders, small, out-of-the-way villages, and the struggle for gold instead of for God. The sacrifices made by pastors to preach the gospel disturbs my dreams. Many of them have to work at one or more secular jobs to support their families and cope with high prices.

The optimism of L. A. Watson and General Missionary Ben Hill is of high caliber. They know the country, the problems, the possibilities, and are driving with full force to establish work in every needy spot of Alaska. The Home Mission Board is extending the name of Christ to the last frontier of the American homeland.