



# The Alaskan Shepherd



Volume 47 Number 2

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*Some give by going to the Missions*

*Some go by giving to the Missions*

*Without both there are no Missions*

## PILGRIM HOT SPRINGS: BUILDING A FUTURE ON THE PAST

**Editor's Note:** *For the contents of this issue of The Alaskan Shepherd we are indebted to the writings of Father Louis L. Renner, S.J.*

*At the writing of this issue, Pilgrim Hot Springs is not operational. Originally known as Kruzgamepa Hot Springs, it was homesteaded by Mr. Henry Beckus during the time of the gold rush on the Seward Peninsula. At the turn of the 20th century, the hot springs catered primarily to miners and boasted a dance hall, spa baths, a roadhouse and a saloon. Both the roadhouse and the saloon burned to the ground in 1908. Subsequently, the Pilgrim Hot Springs property was deeded to Judge George D. Schofield. Judge Schofield deeded the property to Richard A. Gleeson, Provincial of the Jesuit Province of California. In 1953, the Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska became the legal owner of the property.*

*As of the year 2009, the Diocese and the University of Alaska Fairbanks are working jointly on a plan intended to explore the source of the hot springs and the possible long-term development of its geothermal potential.*  
--Patty Walter

*All pictures are the courtesy of David Schienle, George Bowder, and the CBNA archives.*



*Our Lady of Lourdes Mission silhouetted against the magnificent backdrop of the Kigluaik mountains. The former mission is located some 60 road-miles North of Nome on the left bank of the Pilgrim River. The mission was necessitated in large part by the Great Spanish Influenza epidemic that broke out on the Seward Peninsula in late 1918, leaving many Native orphans. --Photo by George Bowder*

The place now commonly known as “Pilgrim Hot Springs”—because of its location on the left bank of the Pilgrim River and the mineral hot springs that well up at the site—became a popular resort and ranch soon after gold was discovered in the Nome area around 1900. The Eskimo name for the Pilgrim River is “Kruzgamepa,” hence, during earlier years, the place was known also as “Kruzgamepa Hot Springs.” The property lies some 60 road-miles north of Nome.

Around 1916, Father Bellarmine Lafortune, S.J., who had charge of the Seward Peninsula Eskimos at the time, considered Marys

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Igloo to be no longer a suitable center for large-scale missionary activity, including an orphanage. On October 13, 1917, James F. Halpin, representing the Halpin family, who had bought the “Hot Springs” property with the intention of giving it to the Church, deeded it to Father Lafortune as a gift.

On April 22, 1918, Father Lafortune moved to the Hot Springs ranch to turn it into a mission center and orphanage. During the next several years, much of what was at the Marys Igloo mission was gradually moved to the new mission, including lumber from taken-down buildings—and the name itself of that mission. Pilgrim Hot Springs became the new Our Lady of Lourdes Mission.

The development of the new mission was given particular impetus by the severe influenza epidemic that struck the Seward Peninsula in late 1918. In the Pilgrim Springs house diary, Father Lafortune wrote: “The natives were simply mowed down.” The epidemic left many orphans behind. Steadily they were moved from Nome to the new mission-orphanage. On August 15, 1919, Brother John F. Hansen, S.J., arrived to join Father Hubert A. Post, S.J., who had been at the mission for some time already. Five Ursuline Sisters arrived the following day. In October of that year, Brother Peter P. Wilhalm, S.J., came to complete the mission staff.

For two decades, the Pilgrim Springs mission flourished, both as a mission center and as a boarding school-orphanage. Its farm and gardens helped to make the mission, in large part, self-supporting. In 1923, it was the scene of bitter-sweet sorrow. On December 15<sup>th</sup>, Father Frederick A. Ruppert, S. J., in his solo attempt to bring a crate of California oranges to the orphans for Christmas, froze to death about four miles up from the mission on the banks of the Pilgrim River. He lies buried at the mission—as do Sister Irene Arvin, O.S.U., who died there on July 25, 1934; Brother Hansen, who died in Nome on January 29, 1938; and Father Edward J. Cunningham, S.J., who died at the Springs on January 23, 1941.

On September 29, 1930, a footnote to aviation history was written, when the *Marquette Missionary*—with pilot Brother George J. Feltes, S.J., co-pilot Ralph Wien, and Alaska Mission Superior, Father Philip I. Delon, S.J., on board—landed at the Hot Springs. This was the first time an airplane landed there. The party had left Nome for Kotzebue, with the plan that, if the weather north of the Springs should prove to be unfavorable for flying on, they would land at the Springs and attend to business there. Such turned out to be the case.

By 1941, the Pilgrim Springs buildings were in poor repair, firewood in the area had become scarce, and, most important, there were no longer enough orphans to justify the considerable expense of keeping the mission

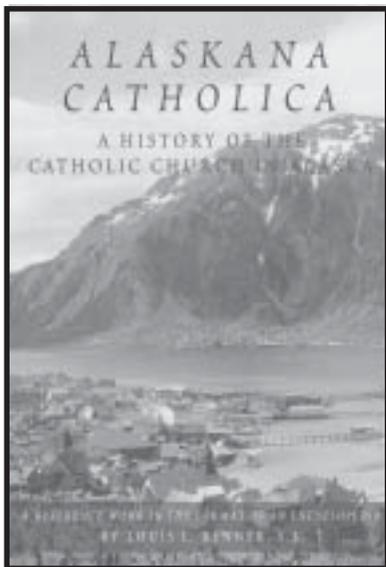


*Pilgrim Springs, Our Lady of Lourdes Mission Boarding House, sits now in a badly dilapidated state on the tundra. In 1935 there were 60 orphans at the mission. By 1941 there were no longer enough orphans to justify keeping the mission open. The Ursuline nuns took the few orphans still there with them, when they transferred to St. Mary’s Mission Boarding School at Akulurak.*  
*--Photo by David Schienle*



*Pilgrim Springs Rectory building as it stood in 2005 when David Schienle took this photo.*

# INSPIRATIONAL AND HISTORICAL



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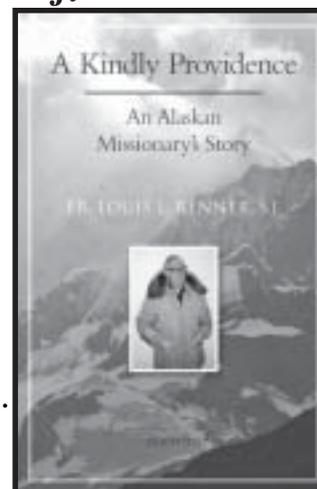
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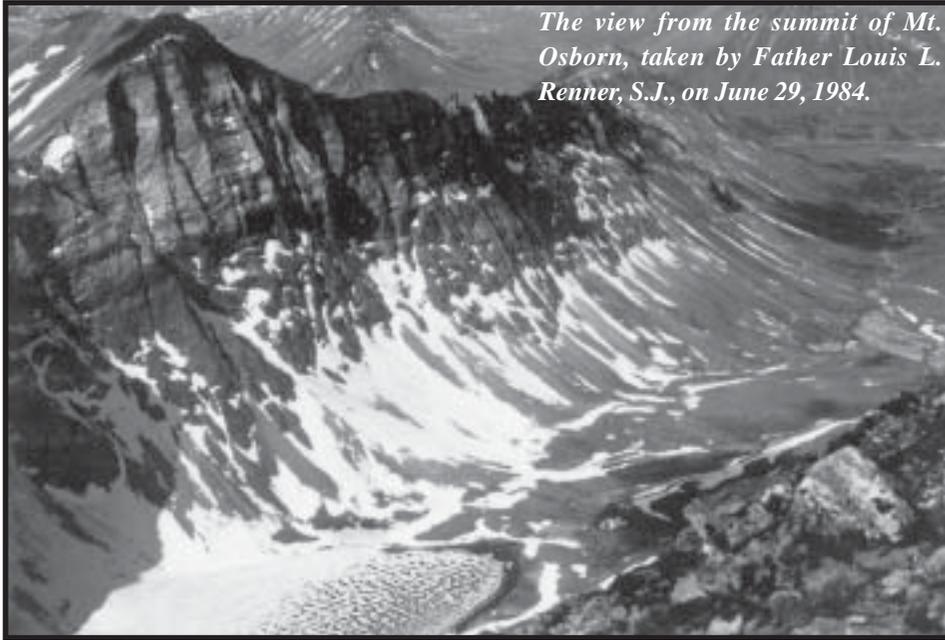
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*The view from the summit of Mt. Osborn, taken by Father Louis L. Renner, S.J., on June 29, 1984.*

Tom Busch writes on his web page of the Kigluaik Mountains:

*The Kigluaiks are a rugged range located about 25 miles north of Nome, Alaska. Stretching 40 miles east to west, these mountains are rarely visited, except for bears, reindeer herds that pass through seasonally, an occasional geologist, and a few backpackers and other travelers a year. Mount Osborn is the tallest of the Kigluaiks: at 4,714 feet, it's the highest point on Alaska's remote Seward Peninsula. Osborn's shorter siblings rise 2,000 to 4,000 feet above mazes of long, narrow swampy valleys, typically less than 3/4 of a mile wide. There are no hiking trails through the mountains. Footing is loose and irregular and often wet in the easiest spots, dangerous in others. It's real ankle-twisting country, highly*

*populated with grizzly bears. Most of the valleys have probably not been visited by human beings in many years. Only individuals trained in arctic survival should venture into the Kigluaiks, even during the summer, and then only after consulting experienced locals regarding suggested routes and hazards.*

One individual, Father Louis L. Renner, S.J., writes of his experience hiking Mt. Osborn in his recently published book *A Kindly Providence*:

An excerpt from *A Kindly Providence* by Father Louis L. Renner, S.J.:

...I mentioned, in passing, that I would like to climb Mt. Osborn, then hike into Pilgrim Springs. It was a clear day. "This weather could change anytime," Tom (Busch) said. "You'd better go for it while it lasts. By 4:30 that afternoon, thanks to my having accepted his spontaneous offer to drive me there, I found myself standing on the bridge spanning the Grand Central River and searching the irregular horizon at the far end of the river valley for the summit of Mt. Osborn. There he stood, old Oz, my destination, back in about twelve miles, a little up and to the left. With the Grand Central having its source on Mount Osborn, there was little danger of my getting lost.

To some, 4:30 PM may seem like rather late in the day for one to be starting on a hike into the mountains. Elsewhere, maybe, but at that far-northern latitude and extreme western longitude, and with double daylight saving time in effect, it was, by actual sun time, little more than early afternoon. There was no wind; and the sun in the limpid blue subarctic sky above, having, at the moment, nothing more important to do, was blazing light and heat down upon me in superabundance. I shrugged into my backpack, crossed the bridge, and, paralleling the left bank of the river, began the gradual ascent of the valley over terrain that was alternately barren, brushy, soggy, and rocky. Mosquito repellent, Muskol, reduced the cloud of mosquitoes accompanying me to little more than a sight and a sound. I was now in grizzly bear country—without a gun. In brushy stretches, I whistled snatches of many things to make my presence known. As it turned out, I saw no sign of bears on that hike. What the area, somewhat to my surprise, lacked in birdlife, it more than made up for in wildflowers. In endless profusion and variety, they bloomed to gladden the eye, to brighten and receive the general austerity of that region. Some seemed to live on air alone, having only rock for soil.

I had set myself a steady, but leisurely, pace and paused only to photograph flowers, scan my surroundings for wildlife, or simply contemplate that vast, solitary wilderness. Still, given the heat of the late afternoon and heavy pack, it took little exertion for me to get dehydrated. Fortunately, crystal-clear, refreshing snowmelt water was tumbling, gurgling, streaming all about me, irresistibly there for the dipping.

After a four-hour trek, I was well into the valley of Oz. The going on the other side of the river now looked somewhat easier; so I took off my boots and socks, waded into the knee-deep stream, and picked and shivered my way over its rocky bottom to the other side. Even at that time of the year and day, the Grand Central was fordable all along its course.

When my watch was about to tick 10:00 PM, I came to where the creek heading in Glacier Lake flows into the Grand Central. This presented an ideal campsite. By now, my boots and pack were getting rather heavy. I pitched my tent for the night. I was now, more or less, at the base of the Osborn massif.

You can read more of Father Renner's trek up Mount Osborn in *A Kindly Providence*.

All donors are truly co-missionaries, since they alone make possible our work for the Lord and His Kingdom.

TO: CATHOLIC BISHOP OF NORTHERN ALASKA (our legal title):

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Date \_\_\_\_\_ 2009

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Please see page 6 for more information about additional parish needs.



Photo taken by Father Louis L. Renner, S.J. *Bering Sea*



Tub photo taken by David Schienle.



**We want to thank in a special way those of you who have included the Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska (our legal title) in your bequests and wills, and those of you who, at the time of the deaths of dear ones, have suggested that in their memory contributions be made to the Missions of Northern Alaska or to the Alaskan Shepherd Endowment Fund. A suggested wording: "I give, devise and bequeath to the Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska, 1312 Peger Road, Fairbanks, Alaska..."**

# Current Parish Needs

You can view additional needs on our website <http://www.cbna.info/currentparishneeds>

The following is a portion of itemized requests made by parishes throughout the missionary Diocese of Fairbanks for specific items the parish currently needs, but does not have the full funding to purchase. Please use the [credit card form](#) on the opposite side of this page if you wish to make a credit card donation for a parish need item. If you wish to donate for a parish need item by mailing a check, please note the restricted item in the memo field.

## *Catholic Bibles for Distribution For Remote Village Parishes*

In the past, we have been blessed to receive adequate supplies of Catholic Bibles to distribute throughout the Diocese. However, we are not currently receiving any more Bibles and do not have the extra funds to purchase additional ones. We would like to purchase the Good News Translation (GNT) Bible which is an “easy-to-read, easy-to-understand accurate translation. It carries the official Catholic imprimatur as well as the Deuterocanonical and Apocryphal Books. Reader’s aids include: section headers, footnotes, book summaries and word lists. Ideal for outreach and sold in case-lots only.” Each case currently costs \$51.60 including shipping to Alaska. If you would like to help distribute Catholic Bibles to the far reaches of Alaska, we would appreciate your donation.

## *Heating Fuel For All Rural Bush Village Parishes*

In the remote village locations where fuel was barged in this past summer, the cost of heating oil can cost as much as \$7.75 per gallon! Even though we are seeing lower prices around the country, these exorbitant prices will remain until next summer’s deliveries.

Thirty-seven (37) rural and remote parishes throughout the missionary Diocese of Fairbanks have relied upon subsidies for many years just for basic ministries and to keep the church and parish houses warm. The rapidly rising cost of fuel this past summer is another hard blow to their overstretched budgets. Any assistance you may provide for heating oil at this time would be greatly appreciated. May God’s peace and joy bless you during this Holy Season and throughout the coming year.

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*--Bishop Donald J. Kettler*

open. In 1935, there were 60 children at the mission, but most of them were non-orphans. On July 31, 1941, Father Edmund A. Anable, S.J., who followed Father Cunningham as Superior of the mission, closed it.

In addition to the Jesuit priests and Brothers mentioned above, the following Jesuits also served at the Hot Springs mission: Fathers Peter L. Baltussen, John A. Concannon, John L. Lucchesi, Gabriel M. Ménager, and Aloysius G. Willebrand, and Brother Carl F. Wickart. Nineteen different Ursuline Sisters, too, served at the Springs.

Though the mission was now closed, the property and the buildings on it continued to belong to the Vicariate of Alaska, then to the Diocese of Fairbanks, after this was established in 1962. At various times and under certain conditions, they were leased out for a number of different purposes. From 1942-45, the U.S. Army housed troops there and built an airstrip. During the 1950s and 60s, several entrepreneurs attempted farming there. In 1969, Pilgrim Springs Ltd. signed a renewable 99-year lease on the property. In the summer of 1980, scientists from the University of Alaska-Fairbanks' Geophysical Institute conducted exploratory studies there to determine if it would be possible to harness geothermal energy from the mineral hot springs. In 1998, Louis Green, Sr., was serving as caretaker of the Springs and gardening there.



*This plastic-lined "hot tub" is in the middle of a field. One could stand in the tub, with the water shoulder-high (about 4½ feet).*



*This mural, depicting Our Lady of Lourdes, is painted on the wall of the chapel. The artist is Fr. John B. Baud S.J.*

*--Photo by George Bowder*

On July 30, 2000, Father John A. Hinsvark, pastor of St. Joseph's parish, Nome, celebrated a Jubilee 2000 Mass in Our Lady of Lourdes chapel for a group of around 130 people on pilgrimage from the Nome area.

For many years, the Pilgrim Hot Springs mission—described by Father Segundo Llorente, S.J., as “an oasis in the heart of the unfriendly Arctic”—has been listed with the National Register of Historic Places.

A chronological sequence of discontinuous entries made by various hands from September 14, 1918, to July 29, 1941, in the house diary kept at the Pilgrim Hot Springs mission weaves the following rich and colorful tapestry of day-to-day life at that mission:

“We begin the foundation of the barn...found wild rice and make our mind to gather lots of it...strange how God's Providence twists our plans...one of our canines made a dash for the goats. He succeeded to break his collar and was on the point of executing his voracious design, when he was apprehended, given a good lambasting and decorated with 2 collars and 2 chains...We chop wood, carry water and hay...the choir consists of a few orphans and survivors. May the Child Jesus bless them...I milk the cows, a work I had not done for at least 28 years...The thermometer is still going down, -68...Our cow, Victoria, dies. God's will be done!...May 7, 1919: The birds such as ducks and geese and robins arrived in numbers...Aug. 4: Early this morning Messrs Bailey and Ibbetson returned from Teller with 12 children. The children are orphans for our care. Almost all were drenched to the skin, but all looked happy...the dog Mink broke his chain and jumped Tango...The Billy goat died during the night...Brother Hansen was hunting and brought home 3 ptarmigans...Mary Mosquito made her first Holy

Communion this morning...Fr. Lafortune and Bro. Hansen went to their fish trap and returned with about 25 lbs. of fish...This morning Bro. Hansen and the Sisters renewed their vows...Jan. 14, 1920: David Kakarook and Annie Maloney were married...Baby Angela died very early this morning and was buried in the afternoon...This morning a regular blizzard began and kept up all day. This evening our new building blew over and lies there a sore-looking wreck...the children enter very early into the spirit of Holy Week. Some cried during the devotions, saying afterwards that they felt sorry for Jesus...Fr. Lafortune left this morning for Noxapaga camps to give the reindeer herders a chance for Easter duty...This evening Sr. Berchmans and some children went out to pick salmon berries. They came back with a goodly picking...Fr. Ruppert, when found, was all wet and pretty well tired out...We hope the Little Flower will help us in getting our electric lights in running order...Fr. Lafortune preparing to tan a few skins...There was a great and beautiful display of northern lights last night...the mule Dan is limping on one foot...some of the little girls were troubled with loose teeth, so Fr. Post had to pull them...the mosquitoes are fierce...This evening Fr. Ruppert arrived in a desolate condition, wet from foot to head and carrying his shoes in his hands...The carpenters are building new toilets for the children...This morning at 7:15 we felt an earth-tremor...Mary of Igloo fame came for a visit...The children said the Beads in Eskimo to show how they are trained in their own language...Fr. Post began taking photos of the children and Sisters...The little girls went to pick willow leaves...the bathhouse caught fire...A storm blew down the little bell and belfry...Coldest night yet, -47...Mary Dosithee is given last Sacraments...Mary died this morning...the lettering on Fr. Ruppert's cross was done today...Dr. Fromm began to look after the teeth of the children...The children are being allowed the phonograph, this being carnival...Five of the boys amused us with their Eskimo dance...First Friday devotion as customary...The mosquitoes are simply wild...Bro. Wilhalm made another fruitless search for Fr. Ruppert's sled...The girls are keeping the horse Billy busy trotting up and down with some of them on his back...After supper we had magic lantern show...Some few girls are found writing very silly letters or notes to some boys in the next villages. A very grievous offense, which was not to pass unpunished...Emma dies after receiving all the last rites. She was a poor orphan...Fr. Post to Nome—replaced by Fr. Lucchesi...Fr. Lafortune teaches Eskimo catechism...June 7, 1926: Fr. Post arrives with 5 Italian aeronauts, who came from Nome in the dirigible balloon...Extra-ordinarily heavy run of salmon...July 21, 1927: A great day. Solemn Pontifical Mass at 8 followed by Confirmations. The Bishop gave the community a description of his trip to Lisieux and Rome, and distributed Beads blessed by the Pope and medals of the Little Flower...March 9, 1941: Fr. Anable appointed to take Fr. Cunningham's place...July 27, 1941: Three children leave for Kotzebue. Two Sisters and 3 children start for outside...July 29, 1941: All children walk to station for Nome.”



*A view of Pilgrim Springs from the windows of Our Lady of Lourdes chapel.*

*--Photo by David Schienle*

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are greatly appreciated.***