A History of the Hope, Alaska Methodist Church/Retreat Center

May 2015

Larry Hayden
Bertha O. McGhee
1903-1999

Biographical Sketch. Bertha O. McGhee was born in Izzard County, Arkansas on New Year's Day in 1903. She graduated from Baker University in Baldwin City, Kansas in 1929. After graduation she worked at the Methodist-sponsored school for Navaho Indians at Farmington, New Mexico.

In 1940 she arrived in Seward to become a house mother at the Jesse Lee Home. During the war years (while the Jesse Lee Home was closed), she worked at the Seward General Hospital from 1942-1944 operating the laundry and food service.

From 1944-1948 she served as the lay pastor for the Moose Pass/Hope charge. She was instrumental in helping acquire the land and building for the church in Moose Pass and from 1944-1946 worked tirelessly in building the church facility at Hope.

She returned to her duties at the Jesse Lee Home after it had reopened in 1948. She served at the Jesse Lee Home until 1952 with a year off for educational leave. Following another six years of service as a bookkeeper at the Seward General Hospital (1952-1958), she served another eleven years at the Jesse Lee home in Seward and in Anchorage. She spent her last two years in Alaska prior to retirement as the secretary of the Anchor Park United Methodist Church (1969-1970).

Resolution. Whereas, Bertha McGhee served Methodist churches and institutions for thirty-one years in Alaska, and

Whereas, her vision, tenacity and dedication led to the founding and construction of the church at Hope that now serves as a retreat center for the camping ministry of the United Methodist Church in Alaska, therefore

Be It Resolved that a photo and biographical sketch of this remarkable woman of faith be installed in the Hope Retreat Center so all who visit may know of her dedication and this particular chapter of Methodist history in Alaska.

By action of the Alaska Missionary Conference of the United Methodist Church
May, 2002

This page shows what is on the plaque in the Retreat Center living room.
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Disclaimer by Larry Hayden:
I regret any misconceptions or inaccuracies that may be included and offer my apologies beforehand. Send corrections or additional information to the author at the conference office.

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The United Methodist Church
May 2015
Welcome to this updated version of the story of the Hope Church, now the Hope Retreat Center, as part of a series of histories for the Alaska United Methodist Conference.

Before detailing the actual building I will attempt to place it in context with the community of Hope and the surrounding land mass called the Kenai Peninsula Borough.

Figure 1: Coming south from Anchorage you can see this sign shortly after Portage.

Resurrection Creek at Hope.
**Geographic Information**

The topography of the area is dominated by the Kenai and Chugach Mountains and the 43 mile long Turnagain Arm, a large tidal estuary which flows into Cook Inlet. Resurrection Creek is one of six major water sheds that provides drainage for the northern mountains of the Kenai Peninsula. The area is generally free of permafrost.

Terrestrial vegetation includes stands of Sitka Spruce, Lutz spruce, Western Hemlock, Mountain Hemlock, Balsam Poplar, and Black Cottonwood trees. Much of the lowland areas along Turnagain Arm and Resurrection Creek and these tributaries are covered with shrubs, including Sitka Alder, Devils Club, Salmonberry, Willow, Pacific Red Elder, Rusty Menziesia, Copper Brush, Blueberry and Huckleberry bushes.

Bluejoint, Hyme grass, lichens, mosses, Liverworts, and mushrooms are also found in the area. The intertidal zone along Turnagain Arm and the mouth of Resurrection Creek contain mud flats covered with tidal grasses.

Terrestrial animals known to inhabit the area include moose, black and brown bear, wolf, wolverine, fox, red squirrel, porcupine, and mountain goat. A large variety of birds inhabit the area, including Raven, Crow, Bald Eagle, Hawks, song birds, and Woodland Owls.

This northern area of the Kenai Peninsula contains commodities of gold, silver, copper, lead, zinc, and molybdenum.

These commodities are what historically brought many people to the area.

The Turnagain Arm Gold Rush of 1895-1898 brought large number of Euro-Americans to the Cook Inlet region, overwhelming the aboriginal inhabitants of the area and profoundly influencing their culture. Turnagain Arm, named by British Captain James Cook, has been part of the Dena’ina Territory, an Athabaskan people of Alaska. Miners, merchants and the legions of camp followers who flocked to the gold fields disrupted Native subsistence patterns, depleting the game and destroying salmon runs by silting the creeks.

The Natives were introduced to alcohol, smallpox, diphtheria, measles, tuberculosis, influenza and starvation and these epidemics brought about a steep decline in the Native population, leading to the abandonment of a few villages on the Kenai Peninsula. Hope was not one of them. Chief Affanasi had a fish camp at the mouth of Bear Creek in the Resurrection Creek drainage. Two native families with a total of 14 people lived at Affanasi Point (also known as Miller’s Point) near the town of Hope in 1900. Chief Affanasi died in 1909.

In 1888 Alexander King from Sacramento set off from Kenai to Turnagain Arm in a dory to prospect for gold. He returned two years later with four pokes of gold and the word of his success prompted several others to prospect in the area. In 1893 Charles Miller filed the first placer claims in Resurrection Creek and along with eleven other miners organized the Turnagain Arm Mining District. On July 25-27, 1895, miners on the Sixmile Creek drainage formed the Sunrise Mining District.

Miners started to build cabins and Hope became a supply base for the Resurrection Creek Drainage. The following spring, the small camp was overrun by several hundred stampeders. The influx of people prompted the residents to organize a town. In 1898 the Alaska Commercial Company opened a store in Hope and also in Sunrise. Mail service was established early with the opening of a post office in 1897. Sunrise became the largest community in the region, overshadowing its neighbor, Hope, which was a “dry” community. By 1939 Sunrise was abandoned, but Hope continued as a small town with an economy based on gold mining, gardening and subsistence.

After the gold rush, the natives made part of their living by supplying game meat to the miners or by piloting boats, as guides and by making things of general usefulness, like snowshoes, boots, etc., and by fishing and hunting for their own food supply.

After the gold rush, most miners and merchants returned to the contiguous states or moved on to the more lucrative gold fields in the Klondike and around Nome. No Native prehistoric or historic sites were found during a 1995 survey of the original Hope townsite. The ruins of two Native cabins are at Affansasi Point.
Connecting to Hope

The City of Seward was founded in 1903. People began to settle on the surrounding land and transportation routes developed to access homes and businesses. The community of Moose Pass was later established just 30 some miles north of Seward. It was along these routes that supplies were taken into Hope and Sunrise.

The route from Seward to Sunrise and Hope was part of the Iditarod Trail until the Alaska Railroad was constructed. Boats traveled into Turnagain Arm at high tide and transported goods and people for a time. A dock was built to aid in the process. The steamer “Utopia” brought prospectors from Seattle to Hope and Sunrise in 1896.

The prospectors named the place “HOPE” (Hope City) in honor of the youngest member of the “Utopia” group: Percy Lee Hope. Freight and passengers that would only go as far as Tyonek, then were transferred to “lighter” boats, such as the “L.J. Perry” (owned by pioneer Alaskan industrialist Captain Austin Eugene Lathrop) which carried the freight from bigger schooners docked at Tyonek into Turnagain Arm to Hope and Sunrise.

The trails between Hope and Moose Pass were widened into one lane roads between 1920 and 1931. This work provided additional income to local people who also mined.

Over the years, the Alaska Road Commission and the Bureau of Public Roads upgraded the rough miners’ trail to a wagon road, upgraded the old military road on the west side of Sixmile Creek into an automobile road and later to a highway. Known as the Moose Pass-Hope Road (and later as the Seward-Hope Road), this route provided the only overland access from Seward and the Alaska Railroad to the communities of Sunrise and Hope.

In 1946 the Sterling Highway was started from Soldotna with the intent of connecting with Seward and Hope Highway and eventually Anchorage. In 1948 highway construction began from Anchorage going south to connect with the Hope, Seward and Soldotna connection. By 1951 Hope was connected to Anchorage by road.

During 1979-1980 the Alaska Department of High-
ways (now the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities) widened and paved the Hope Highway. Driving time for the 87 miles is approximately 94 minutes from midtown Anchorage (Benson & Seward) to the Porcupine Campground at the west end of Hope. The 94 miles from the Kenai River Bridge in Soldotna to the Retreat Center takes about 100 minutes. The 73 miles from downtown Seward to the Retreat Center takes about 97 minutes. These are actual documented times and distances by the author in March 2015. Air distance is about 25 miles from Anchorage to Hope.

The following map is courtesy of Rolfe Buzzell (Figure 2).

When gold was discovered around Fairbanks in 1903 some entrepreneurs convinced Congress to fund building a railroad from Seward to Fairbanks. A railroad from Seward to Fairbanks was started in 1903 and after several unsuccessful starts, was completed in 1923. Anchorage was established in 1915 as part of a railroad construction supply post.

Completion of the Alaska Railroad along the north shore of Turnagain Arm in 1917 ended the lucrative pack train business through Hope and Sunrise. Pack horses had carried passengers and freight from Mile 34 of the Alaska Central Railway over Johnson Pass Trail to Sunrise and Hope. From there, travelers chartered boats to Upper Cook Inlet and continued to other mining sites. The overland link between Seward and Sunrise became part of a trail system known as the Iditarod Trail. Dog teams used the trails in winter;
almost everyone in Hope kept his own dog team. Between 1944 and 1946 the town of Hope cleared land for an airstrip for small planes; before that planes had to land on the beach or on the road.

A new highway bridge over Resurrection Creek was finished in 1969.

During the 1970s state transportation planners briefly considered building a highway bridge across Turnagain Arm between Bird and Sniper’s Points.

**Chugach National Forest**

Congress created the Chugach National Forest in 1907.

Forester Henry S. Graves excluded the town sites of Sunrise and Hope from the CNF by a proclamation dated August 2, 1915. But most everything else surrounding the town of Hope is National Forest. The Kenai Peninsula Borough and the State of Alaska selected lands as a result of the Alaska Statehood Act and Native Corporations made land selections. The Hope Community Planning Council (later the Hope Land Planning Advisory Board) designated some parcels for wilderness preservation.

Because of its access to federal and state land, Hope provides an ideal place for recreation and enjoying nature. When the Alaska Mission was looking for a campsite early in 1951, Hope was considered. Application for a Special Use was made through the Forest Service for 60 acres along the coast in 1952. The site had much natural beauty, good timber, ample water supply, sufficient flat land for recreation and buildings, and good trails for hiking.

The current U. S. Forest Service campground at Porcupine was the location where the Rev. David Blackburn had first selected a site for a camp at Hope.

![Figure 3: Rev. David Blackburn](image)

In 1954 a group of people from the Seattle area came to build the camp. Graham Hutchins was one of those people and provided the following report and photographs in April 2015:

Sixty years ago, in the summer of 1954 a group of very privileged young people participated in a work camp sponsored by the Methodist’s Pacific Northwest Annual Conference. Our destiny and assignment was to build a retreat center and summer camp for the churches in Alaska near the town of Hope, on the shores of Turnagain Arm, a branch of Cook Inlet.

We met for orientation at Epworth Heights, near Seattle and then departed for Anchorage where we met people that would transport us to our destined summer tasks.

Four of us were introduced to this project by our participation in the Wesley Foundation at the University of Washington in Seattle.

Ron Van Noy, a smoke jumper who took the summer off to go with us. He was a geology major at the UW. He now lives in Spokane, Washington, and Surprise, Arizona.

Katie Tarbill...A journalism major... who became our scribe.

Dewey Knowles ...an English major, now living in Boise, Idaho.

Graham Hutchins ... a Philosophy major. Now living in Port Angeles, Washington.
Also participating were:

Kay Magee… a nurse at the Children’s Orthopedic Hospital in Seattle

Cathy Curry….Physical Therapy major at the Univ. of Colorado…from Lind, WA

Mary Jane Curry…Cathy’s sister from Lind…a Home Economics major at Whittier College in California.

Art Dalke…a Mechanical Engineering major from the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho. He now lives in Medford, Oregon

Our Counselor and “Mom’ was Gertrude Knight, from Longview, Washington, who had spent 8 years in the Hope area.

Assisting us and director of the construction of the camp was the Rev. Gene Elliott, pastor of the circuit of churches based in Moose Pass, Alaska.

We could not have built a church camp facility at a more propitious site! A former gold mining town called Hope, on Resurrection Creek, at the foot of three mountains named Faith, Hope, and Charity, and overlooking a body of water with a great tidal system known as Turnagain Arm….a good symbol for repentance! The fact that our efforts were wiped out later by an earthquake might even signify that we are called continually to be born anew and begin again!

To recall this adventure some 60 years later is to renew its excitement for myself and the other participants I have been able to contact. We are now in our 80’s and it seems almost as fresh in our hearts and minds as yesterday. Some of them sent me materials detailing the event that I did not have but am forwarding copies of the photos I took at the time. We are all grateful for the gift of the wider church that provided this marvelous experience for us.

Many facets of our summer there that I was not able to photograph, are described in the enclosed materi-
als located at the Alaska United Methodist Conference Resource Room. Such events like shopping at Doc Nearhouse’s country store, a weekend in Seward as guests of the Methodist Congregation there and the famous Jesse Lee Home, our meeting up with the pioneer Matheson brothers and their tales of the past history of the area and then taking us on a brief gold panning adventure, delightful meals, swimming adventures, jam sessions and our evening vespers, assisting with the first summer camp in our as yet not finished camping facility, and the adventure of dealing with mosquitoes we were convinced were based at Elmendorf field near Anchorage, are but memories again of an unforgettable summer adventure that we treasure.

During that summer we also took an overnight trip to the end of the Kenai Peninsula and I encountered something that brought home new dimensions of our experience that I later wrote up in a church newsletter during my ministry:

It was a small church, and yet its total impact was one of another time and culture than our own. It was the onion dome on it that gave it away. For a few brief moments I observed and pondered the significance of my encounter with it. I was in Alaska on a student work camp with the Methodist Church and we were passing through the town of Kenai, when we stopped to see this little Russian Orthodox Church... Here I was, a student, a recent Christian, in this far corner of the North American continent, on this westernmost expansion of the Christian mission and suddenly I was confronted with the visible and tangible evidence of the easternmost expansion of that same Christian Mission. For those who built this church had come by another route than had we. They did not come as our forefathers did, pushing into the sunset to tell others about Christ and his love...through Europe and finally across the Atlantic, and then a vast continent with wagon trains and settlers and circuit riders to tell the good news. Rather, their journey down the years and across the miles had been up into the forests of Central Europe, then eastward, through the great steppes of Russia and on, and on and on, toward the sunrise, through the great tundras of the north and the vast forests of Siberia, then across the Bering Straits and into a new continent and down its western coasts. Their journey had been fully as long as ours, and though they came here before us, nearly twenty centuries later we meet, having gone opposite directions from Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Golgotha and Antioch. The faith had gone out to the entire world, and now in this place, remote from our common origin. I, a young American Christian stared at a Russian Orthodox Church and wondered. They had come across the miles and years to build a church, as had we, and now we have met... and truly 'the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all...' It was for me, an awesome moment.

It has been a privilege for me and those I have been able to contact to participate in this task of the church in Alaska to remember and document this adventure of the church to build a campsite for congregations in ‘the Great Land’!

Sincerely,
Graham Hutchins
611 Milwaukee Drive
Port Angeles, Washington, 98363

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Rev. Blackburn and others determined that it was too dangerous to have a camp there. They were afraid that children would get caught in the tide. So steps were made to end the agreement with the Forest Service.

Following that, the southcentral area camp site was chosen by the Methodist Mission Superintendent in 1958 to be at Birchwood. (Other Methodist camps were already set up in Juneau, Fairbanks and Nome). The Porcupine Campground managed by the Chugach National Forest Service had very good water, according to Rev. John Shaffer. The bridge to the end of the road at Porcupine Campground bypasses Main Street and results in less traffic through the historic district of Hope itself with big RVs etc.

The Section on Church Extension of the Methodist Church approved a $14,000 grant in 1954 to be divided between the Hope and Argetsinger Camp (Juneau) sites to be used for camp development. Letters were sent from the Methodist Mission office to other denominations indicating the camp was available and seeking partnerships. Mr. Lynn Forrest, an architect from Juneau, agreed to work on the master plans for both camps. The Camp Consultant for the Methodist Church, Miss Elizabeth Brown of Nashville, Tennessee, was of invaluable help to the committee in suggestions on master plans, buildings, camping standards, etc.

Major fires around Hope occurred in 1914 and the early 1920s. In 1947 over 310,000 acres of forest burned between Soldotna and Hope.
Current recreational opportunities include:

Resurrection Road extends five miles south from the Hope Highway.

On Resurrection Road is the Hope Airstrip.

The Wagon Road, also called the Bottom Road, from the Hope Highway to the Resurrection Road is not maintained.

The six mile Forest Service Palmer Creek Road to Coeur d'Alene Campground is open during the summer.

Figure 5: Palmer Valley view, photo by Rev. John J. Shaffer

The Palmer Creek Road from Coeur d'Alene bypasses the Lucky Strike (Hirshey) Mine and is approximately five miles long. It is not maintained and ends at the Swetmann Mine.

The 37 mile Forest Service Resurrection Pass Trail for hikers traverses the mountains to Cooper Landing. It was established in 1966.

The Bear Creek Trail is approximately five miles long and serves mines along the trail.

The five mile Forest Service Gull Road Trail for hikers along Turnagain Arm leads to the remains of the Turpin Sawmill.

In December 1966, the U. S. Forest Service issued a right-of-way permit to Chugach Electric Association for a power line easement and once it was constructed people were able to live year round more comfortably in the Hope area.

The Community of Hope

The Hope miners organized a Turnagain Arm District to protect their claims.

In 1924 the first official town map was made by the U. S. General Land Office; the Hope Townsite Subdivision was laid out and recorded with the Bureau of Land Management, United States Department of the Interior as U. S. Survey No. 1485.

Hope lies at approximately 60° 55” North Latitude and 149° 38” West Longitude.

The community encompasses 48.4 square miles of land. The town of Hope is divided into blocks and lots.

The Hope Retreat Center is located within the Hope Historic District.

Figure 6: A sign of greeting
In 1970 Rosemary Levine (now Knecht) and Darlene Lane started the Hope and Sunrise Historical Society which is housed in the Hope Museum. This would be the place for more in-depth study of the area. During the Historic Building Survey Report in 1990, Averill Gay assisted with proof-reading and by running many errands in Anchorage. She assisted with the measuring of buildings in the survey. She and her Methodist pastor/husband, Rev. Richard Gay, retired in Hope from Anchorage. Rev. Gay was on the Hope Retreat Center Board and on Christmas would offer worship services for the community.

Below is a map drawn by Dr. Rolfe Bizzell for the 1995 Hope Historic Building Survey. Used by permission. Figure 7.
In 1942 the federal government enacted the Gold Mining Limitation Order, L-208, shutting down mining during World War II. After WWII there was little mining in the area. Deregulation of the price of gold in the 1970s prompted a resurgence in mining activity and brought more people into the area.

About 1964 the Hope community voted in alcohol. Shortly afterwards, Alaska experienced the largest earthquake recorded in North America. The ground in the area dropped about 8 feet. The water from Turnagain Arm came within 9 inches of the Hope Church but little if any damage occurred to the building.

Dan Wolfe had the first homestead in the area; Carl and Emma Clark (and son John) had the second homestead (1932), the John, Kent and Clara Kings had the third, and the Millikens had the last one in the 1940s.

Iver “Doc” Nearhouse, who owned the general store in Hope, provided some entertainment with movies once every two weeks; there were also dances and potlatches in the Social Hall; in the winter the men kept busy with hunting, trapping and logging.

In 1967 Hope received electricity, making a generator shed unnecessary in downtown Hope.

The state built a new Hope School just off the Hope Highway in 1988.

![Image: Hope School, photo compliments of Rev. John Shaffer]

About 1988 the Hope Chamber of Commerce was founded to coordinate with the tourist business owners.

**The Hope Church/Retreat Center**

The Disciples of Christ sent Harry S. Munro to Seward in 1916. His area included communities along the Alaska Railroad as far north as Anchorage. He was particularly fond of Hope. He established a Sunday school class that met in the Hope Social Hall. Much later the Methodist pastors from Seward would occasionally visit Hope and have services in the Social Hall. It was George Edward Knight that convinced the Mission Board to build a church in Hope.

Almost all of the following section are quotes coming from the yearly reports printed in the Alaska Mission Yearbooks/Journals starting in 1944.

Bertha O. McGhee came to Alaska on September 1, 1940, on assignment by the Women’s Division of Christian Service, to be a housemother at the Jesse Lee Home in Seward. When World War II was affecting Alaska with the Aleutian invasion by the Japanese, the Home was closed. The children were moved to Eklutna. Bertha was recommended for a Local Preacher’s license by the Seward Church, and Bishop Baxter appointed her at the Annual Meeting in 1944. She was approved for a supply appointment to Hope in 1944 and Moose Pass was added to the circuit in 1945. After the War the Home reopened and she returned to employment there in November 1946. The churches were then served by pastors from Anchorage or the Kenai Peninsula.
At first she stayed in a room in the home of Charles and Gertrude Davis.

In 1944 the Methodist Church purchased Lot 8 in Block 13 across from the school. Carpenter and miner Charles Davis moved a log cabin onto the lot and added a log addition. This cabin and addition were the two-story log Snook Cabin and the one-story log Plowman Cabin. Miner William Snook mined in the Sunrise District as early as 1906 and was living in Hope by 1911. William and Clara Snook had at least two children. The Snooks kept brooder chicks in their attic. Miner Oscar Plowman was in Hope by 1911. In 1914-1915 Edith Plowman taught school for six students in their cabin. In 1938 Dennie McCart rented the Plowman Cabin. The Snook Cabin became a bar. In 1937-1938 school was held in the Snook Cabin. The condition of the lot was poor. The Snook house had burned there some time before and no cleanup had been done since. Tall weeds grew through the rubbish. Mr. Davis took charge of clearing the lot.

“Dad” Davis, a resident of Hope, and Alaska Mission Superintendent G. Edward Knight, did most of the construction work on the church in 1946. The building is a T-shaped, 1.5 story log building with a shed and an L-shaped deck. The foundation is concrete. There is a full basement. The west wing measures 21 feet 6 inches by 30 feet and 6 inches. The east chapel wing measures 20 feet by 19 feet 6 inches. The front faces south. The Hope Retreat Center sits at the intersection of Second Street and A Street now known
as the Hope Loop.

In the fall of 1946 work on the Church was completed. Bertha had moved into the parsonage area earlier and rented the cabin to a new family who were homesteading up on the ‘bench’ but needed a place while they were clearing and building. Plans were made for Opening Sunday. However, on that day a forest fire broke out 6 miles northwest of town and the wind brought it in their direction! The church became the center of supply for meals, warm dry clothing and instructions for changing crews fighting the fire! A week later when the Opening Service was held, the view through the window back of the altar was still clouded by smoke.

Bertha later served as the Anchor Park Church Secretary from 1969-1971. Bertha returned to Alaska in 1978 for a reconnecting visit.

Figure 14: The Hope Retreat Center outhouse was put up in the 1980s.

The Hope Retreat Center was assigned SEW-901 for the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey, a listing of all historic and prehistoric sites maintained by the Alaska Office of History and Archeology. (SEW refers to the Seward Quadrilateral designation on map layouts).
At the 1945 Annual Methodist Conference in Ketchikan, Bertha obtained a piano for the church. Shipping it to Hope was no small undertaking, but once it arrived it was a most valuable asset.

Figure 17: A very early photograph

Bertha wrote that Hope was a marvelous place for gardens and a lovely place to live. The soil and favorable summer weather makes it possible to cultivate lush gardens. Potatoes, beets, lettuce, radishes, cabbage, onions, raspberries and rhubarb do very well.

Figure 18: Flowers can certainly brighten up the yard

Figure 19: This family appears to be leaving the Hope Church; use of photo courtesy of Rolfe Buzzell.

Figure 20: Youth Group enjoying an outdoor session

Figure 21: Sanctuary looking east
Once the Hope church had been set up and became available for use, local people and visitors from other churches began to spend time there. The Baxter church in Anchorage was the first one in the Territory’s largest city to use the Hope building for a retreat center.

Calls to residents of the community in 1945 by Bertha McGhee resulted in little enthusiasm for the establishment of a church, and indeed some resentment. However, a Sunday school was started with one teacher besides Bertha and seven children. The foundation for a church and parsonage had been laid. Through a contract with Dick Turpin, logs for the building were cut and hauled to the lot.

Bertha wrote that “our presence in the community has at least stimulated some thought on the place of the church in the community and what is of more vital importance the place of God in the lives of the people.” Bertha reported that churches in small

Happenings with the Hope Church and Retreat Center

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Bertha wrote that “our presence in the community has at least stimulated some thought on the place of the church in the community and what is of more vital importance the place of God in the lives of the people.” Bertha reported that churches in small
communities have to work under conditions of cliquishness where understanding needs to be built up.

Schools may be inadequate yet are often well-staffed. The church at Hope offered a center of real community inspiration and interest. Bertha mentions in her “Memories of Alaskan Years,” December 1983, that a pastor from Seward’s Faith Chapel came out each week and some folk met with him at the Clark home south of town. She soon realized the people attending Chapel resented her presence.

Methodist Mission Superintendent G. Edward Knight wrote “While they weren’t necessarily hostile, they just didn’t see the need.” Knight wrote that anyone with less than an Irish fighting spirit and a divine call to a mission would have quit.

After Bertha O. McGhee returned to Seward in 1948, she was succeeded by Richard Kellogg, followed by F. Gene Elliott in 1949. Cooper Landing was added to the Circuit Rider Charge in 1947 when Gerald Kennedy was the Bishop. Kennedy is seen reclining on the lawn in the photo on the front cover.

Eugene and Lillian Elliott were appointed to the Kenai Peninsula Mobile Ministry in August 1949. It was reported that “Rev. and Mrs. Gene Elliott had won the hearts of many folks to whom they had brought inspiration and joy.” Seward pastors Clements, Torbet and Knight had been serving Moose Pass and Hope “on an irregular basis” over a period of years before 1944.

G. Edward Knight reported that the Hope-Moose Pass work was being cared for on a temporary basis; we need a man here who will not only cultivate these two communities but who will follow the construction of the new highway in the area to construction camps and homesteaders’ little farms. These new settlers need spiritual and social encouragement. Knight was Superintendent and 1949 was his 8th and final year; after that he was a supply pastor at Hope as needed. Alaska was still a Territory.

Mrs. Gertrude Knight was a chaplain at the Seward Sanatorium. Their son was Arthur and he married LuDean who also helped during the construction at Hope Church. Much later, Art became a Methodist pastor, and their daughter, Susan, also became a Methodist pastor and in 2015 was pastoring the Immanuel Presbyterian church in Anchorage. LuDean, a lay pastor, served on the Alaska Missionary Conference Commission on Archives and History for a while in the 1990s.
A Sunday school and Church at Hope continued over the years. Attendance had doubled by 1950. The church hosted a recreation hour each Monday afternoon for the children. Gene indicated they were fortunate to have a good church building in Hope.

The Elliott family moved the parsonage from Hope to Moose Pass to become better acquainted with the people there and thus be able to start an adult worship service in the Fall. The Methodist Journal reported that the highway would be completed in 1951 and connect Seward to Homer and the states (!). The highway brought new life and activity, and new communities sprang up along the Seward Highway. The life of a homesteader brought problems of adjustment to wilderness life. These people could see the church as extended family and provide a leadership role.

There were five total members in Hope. The value of the church and property was reported in the Conference Journal to be $9,000.

A. Raymond Grant became Alaska’s new Bishop in 1952.

A group of six people from Baxter Methodist Church in Anchorage went to Hope in 1952 for a work camp weekend, doing some cleaning on the logs inside the Chapel. They held a church supper. They bought books on worship and creation and song books and folk game records, as reported by Parish Worker Miss June Marks. Rev. and Mrs. Allen Byrne organized a youth fellowship at Hope in the summer of 1952 while the Elliott’s were on furlough.
June Marks reported that “immediately after conference last year (1952) she went to work on advertising for staff for our Methodist youth camp at Hope. The result was a three-day camp August 28-30 (1953) for seniors and intermediates. This was the first Methodist camp held at Hope Chapel. There were 30 enrolled including staff and there were nine churches and Jesse Lee Home represented.

The development of a Methodist camp at Hope had taken some time. The Journal mentioned that the Conference now had a 50 acre tract under a Forest Service permit and at present were working on a topographic map from which would be made a master plan for eventual development. They were to help work parties with labor and money.

Gene Elliott reported: “this is the first year Hope has had local leadership in the Sunday school. We have a combined intermediate and high school youth fellowship and their orchestra has played for church on several occasions. There was some sharing of experiences, discussion, and quest groups.

In her book *Your Alaskan Daughter*, Harriett Walker publishes letters she wrote telling of life in Hope from June 1953 to June 1954. Her father was a pastor for the United Brethren Church in Coffeyville, Kansas. Her husband Harold came to Hope to start a sawmill business and live the Alaskan adventure. She enjoyed the stained glass window in the Methodist Church. Harriett was hired as a school teacher. Harold organized a Youth Fellowship and there was great interest. He helped the youth learn how to play volleyball. They hosted college work camps who were situated at Dog Nose. Harriett acquired Gertrude Knight’s washing machine and the workers took advantage of it. There was also a good time over ice cream socials. Local residents enjoyed the singing and formal Sunday services. When they left Hope Harold wanted to do supply work in a parish in Nebraska.

Bea Shepard (Juneau resident and AUMC historian for many years, and with Claudia Kelsey wrote the definitive book on Alaska Methodist History – *Have Gospel Tent Will Travel* in 1986), developed a skit on the beginnings of the Alaska Mission Camping Ministry and it is follows:
The Alaska Mission Begins a Camping Program

A Dilemma of Hope

Time is 1958.

Narrator: Dick is a pastor in the Juneau area, and is the Chairman of the Alaska Mission Camping Committee. Wayne is pastor of a four or five year old struggling church in Kenai - and is Secretary of the Mission Camping Committee. The Committee was charged with finding sites and starting up two camps, one in Southeast Alaska to serve the Juneau, Douglas, and Ketchikan churches, the second to serve the rest of the Methodist churches in Alaska.

The Southeast area has obtained a campsite on permit from the Forest Service, but Southcentral is still looking.

Interestingly enough, the committee has an unusual problem in that the Mission already has a campsite near Hope, Alaska. (Note: this is a different area than where the Hope church is located.) A good deal of money has gone into the site and work teams have come to Hope from the south 48 to help erect buildings. There is a good sized building that serves as a cooking and dining area. But after attempting to hold camps at the site, the Mission has put the entire project on hold, and has been putting on its summer Methodist camping program at Kings Lake, a camp operated by another denomination.

Wayne and Esther, the pastor’s wife, are in the living room of their parsonage in Kenai when Dick drives up and comes to the door.

Wayne: Good morning, Dick. Come in and make yourself comfortable. What are you doing in our area?

Dick: Hello, Wayne - and Esther. I’m in Anchorage for a couple of meetings and I decided I’d come by and see if we could talk about our Camp predicament.
Wayne: Well, we need to do something about it, but I'm not sure what. And we have done a lot of talking. Maybe it's a matter of less talk and more action. But what kind of action? None of what we've done seems to be the right thing. Anyway, what do you recommend?

Dick: Actually, I just headed up this way to go do a little more exploring around Hope. It seems like such a good area for a Camp. I was wondering about Sunrise? Have you looked at that area? It was a town once. So maybe it has potential as a campsite. I decided that I'd come by and see if you would go with me to look around. It's difficult to be chairman of the Conference Camping Committee when you live in Juneau. It's O.K. when I deal with the SE Camp. But the Committee is responsible for obtaining a campsite up here, too. And I admit we need one!

Wayne: I'm glad the Conference is deciding to change the Camp Committee set-up. Having two committees, one for this area and one for Southeast will make more sense. After we get these committees organized, you won't feel so responsible for finding a campsite for Southcentral. Anyway, let's go to the Sunrise area and see what's there. I think that's a great idea! I'll be glad to go with you. It IS important that we find a place to hold our camps!

Dick: Yes. Kings Lake is a fine camp. But it's not our camp. And they don't have enough time for us. It's pretty bad to have all our camps in the one week we can use their facilities. I understand that the first year when we didn't have many campers, it went O.K. But each year we get more campers. Last year, I heard that all three age-groups at one time was too much.

Esther: As I see it, we could hold many more than three Methodist camps, anyway. We could have a music camp, a drama camp, nature camp, confirmation - not to mention winter camps - sledding, skiing, whatever. We could have seven or eight weeks of camp during the summer, if we had our own camp. How did we manage to get in this predicament in the first place?

Dick: Well, what it looks like is that the first camping Committee jumped right in before they considered all the problems they might be taking on. They found that beautiful site and grabbed it.
Esther: I understand they came to annual meeting and said “We’ve found the
campsite of the Century. We’ll have the reputation of having the
most spectacular camp in the country!” - June Marks and Gene
Elliott really described the camp in glowing terms!

Dick: I guess that’s what happened. And it really IS spectacular. I guess it’s
TOO spectacular.----- I don’t really understand why the Mission hung
onto the place but refused to use it.

Wayne: Well, I wasn’t here when they had the first camping experiences out
there. But after I heard about the camp I went out and looked it
over. That high steep cliff at one side of the camp was intriguing.
There was a fairly easy trail up to the top. So I went up there. I
walked over to the edge of the cliff and looked down. I got kinda
sick. You could look straight down on a bunch of rocks, and in some
places right into the water. At high tide you do look down into
water.

(A commotion outside. Two children race through the room and out the front
door - one following the other. Outside they jump off the porch. One may trip
and fall.)

Wayne: There’s an answer for you. We wouldn’t have very many camping days
before some kids would do something like that. It would be easy to
run over there and just jump off. And chances are it would be my
kids that would do it.

Dick:-----------or mine ----------

Esther: We did tell the camp committee right after that that we did not like the
site. We didn’t want to take any chances! But they told us there were
other problems with the place, too. It was really too small - and
there was no way we could get title to it. It would never be really
our Camp.

Wayne: And the Forest Service does want to keep some control over the land.
We can’t cut any trees without getting their permission. Could hold
up building cabins and trails and other improvements. But somehow
the committee has done a lot of looking, without finding what we
want.
Dick: Yes. So far, we've looked at five or six sites that were available, but not really right for us.

(Phone rings. Esther answers and turns to Wayne)

Esther: Wayne, it's David Blackburn.

Wayne: Hello, David. ------Yes., sure. Actually, Dick is here right now and we're talking about the camp situation. ------ Do you really? What? Where? All right! Tomorrow? Why not? ------Just a minute. I'll check with Dick. Dick - David says he wants us to go look at that campsite near Chugiak that some realtor in the area has been trying to sell us. I guess she's been attending the new church in Chugiak and keeps telling him it's what we want. Could you go tomorrow about 10 a.m.?

Dick: I certainly can.

Wayne: David, we'll meet you at the Chugiak church at 10 o'clock tomorrow. Great! (He hangs up) Dick, he says it's 160 acres of fairly flat land less than 5 miles from Chugiak. And there's a 35 acre lake included! The lake has a name - Cleo Lake. It's named after the owner's wife, so I think we can change the name. The whole thing is for sale for $18,000. He says it's a mile and a half or so from the nearest road - and that road is a little narrow dirt road - but we can handle that. He said he talked to Fred about it and Fred is sure that if we like it he can talk the Division of National Missions into buying it for us.

Dick: I heard that it was a former fox farm and that we might have to do a little cleaning up after foxes. Some old fox pens and so forth. But I don't think we're going to find a camp already built the way we want it. This may be the answer to our problems. I guess I'll put off Sunrise until after we look at Cleo Lake. Well, I'll head for Anchorage now and see you tomorrow at Chugiak. I assume we're meeting at that store in Chugiak that is acting like a church?

Wayne: Right! Not only is it acting like a church, but it looks like I'm going there when the appointments are read next month. If we buy that camp, I may get pretty involved with the camping program - more
A committee consisting of June Marks, Rev. David Blackburn, and Rev. Gene Elliott was organized to discuss the purchase of equipment, a tractor, and sending a request for conference world service and finance funds. Camp posters were sent to all the churches with camp dates and asking for help with work parties. A Methodist Camp day was set for July 31 when families could go for a picnic dinner, see the camp site, hear what was being planned, etc.

Three sets of promotional slides were sent to the States and one was used in-Territory. Most materials were purchased from Sears and Wards. Construction was to be under the direction of Rev. Quincy Murphree and Rev. Gene Elliott.

In a 1955 report to the Alaska Mission Conference by the Camping Committee, George B. Haley served Moose Pass, Girdwood and Hope. Quoting a portion of the report from Rev. Haley: “With just a few persons one can discern that there can be little optimism connected with Methodism's future here. The church is rather attractive consisting of a place of worship and an adjacent parsonage consisting of a living room, a kitchen, a bath, and a cellar; there are two bedrooms on a second floor. A gasoline generator is needed to supply this church with electricity. We had had an average church attendance of 15 throughout July and August, but there is little hope that this will increase to any appreciable number.

(My (Haley) Activities At Hope): My activities here this summer have been to conduct church school activities at 4 PM, Thursday afternoon; lead an MYF group at 6 PM; and at 7:30 PM conduct a church worship service. Again I have been mainly interested in youth activities and have laid stress here. The church school consists only of a handful of children under ten years of age: I have not progressed too far with them. The MYF consists of about 10 youth who attend rather faithfully each week. We have laid stress on Bible study.

(A Look Into The Future (Haley)): Hope really is too small to cast much optimism. The few people in the community do seem to support their church fairly well, and doubtless more interest can be engendered by the coming minister. I am wondering whether or
not Hope will eventually cease to exist as a community, as ex-mining towns have done in the past. The future holds the answer here."

Norman C. “Jack” Middaugh was appointed Minister for Girdwood, Moose Pass, and Hope in 1955. The Kenai Mobile Ministry was split between Kenai and Moose Pass.

Middaugh reported that “a large part of their ministry in Hope was spent in listening, non-directive counseling, discussions, and study groups. The spirit of the active members of the Hope Church is that of faithful lay missionaries, full of patience and love of people. Here, in a community of individualists, these four Hope Methodists have kept a wholesome optimism and an understanding spirit. Emphasis had been on adult education with the Christian Advocate in every home having a member, and the Christian Home in every home in the community. Plans are underway to refinish the church the summer of 1956. This was a settlement of retired people, vacation people with summer homes, and families on a low income. So it was the opinion of the pastor that Hope was a mission situation, and that the giving locally would be in terms of work, prayer, and talents.” Middaugh mentioned that Hope was the only “dry” community in the Territory.

By 1956 the harbor at Hope was gone, because silt was continually filling it in. The population consisted of 24 adults and 14 children. The Hope Church reflected the community’s decline. All but one of its members had been out of the community during the past year. Although a full program had been impossible, there had been discussion group meetings, calling, and aiding of isolated parents with church school material and education. The building was in serious need of repair.

The Camping Committee became part of the Commission on Education in 1956. As part of the camping plan the commission suggested that permission to retain the Hope Camping Site be extended until December 31, 1956 as it had expired. The commission directed the secretary to write the U. S. Forestry Service with reference to the disposal of the improvements. This was not the church site or building, but the camp site at Porcupine. They recommended that if no buyer for the camp site property was found that the building on it be given to the Girdwood Methodist Church for use in their building project.
Benjamin Arthur Laird was the next pastor assigned to Hope. Work at Hope consisted of regular pastoral calls, weekly services, and regular adult study group sessions led by the pastor. He said “it is an inspiration to any minister to work with laymen who maintain their dedication to Christ in the face of isolation and majority social pressures to the contrary.”

Laird said “the people that attend the church in Hope feel that it is making a real contribution to them. They are few in number but they enjoy very much the Christian fellowship that they have together. Out of a population of about 50 we have 18 attending services at the Wednesday evening worship service. Sometimes the pastor has to overnight because of road conditions. No school because of less than eight students and so no attempt is made for doing a Sunday school as such. The living quarters in this church have been used all winter by a family from Chicken, Alaska.

Improvements could be made by general cleanup and installing an oil heat and cooking stove and replace the wood stove. Some insulation is needed and with a little plumbing work the gravity water system could be put into use again.” Ben hoped a lawnmower could be used to show pride in the facility. Highway directional signs would also be useful. Informational signs could tell the time of the worship services.

Laird further reported that “though the fellowship is small it is a good and enjoyable one in the Hope Church. More emphasis is being placed at Moose Pass. It is hoped that groups making use of it will send work parties to make it more suitable for year round use and set fees for its use.” He reported the church had thirteen local members. The value of the building and property was set at $10,000.

In 1961 Keith Specking and his family in Hope invited the children and the entire Jesse Lee Home staff to a summer picnic at his place. It was a successful event that the staff expected to be repeated. During the winter there were fewer people in Hope than there had been since the gold rush days, when 5,000 were there looking for the “yellow ore.” The population of Hope in 1961 was as few as 15 to 25 and it never quite reaches 100 in the summer. Ben continued to go to Hope two Wednesdays each month. A few amenities had been added to the church to make it more convenient for retreat use.

John Shaffer was the Hope furlough pastor for 3 months in 1961. The Hope congregation was changed in its technical relationship as a church to a preaching point on the circuit. The local school had to be closed as the state required number of eight students could not be reached. The year 1961 was the fourth year of closure. The regular pastor Ben Laird held funeral services for Warren Nutter and Iver “Doc” Nearhouse. Road access had been difficult due to weather conditions. Just a few members enjoyed a strong fellowship as they met in their homes.
Rev. Shaffer preached in Hope on Wednesdays and sometimes stayed and helped volunteers work on projects that needed to be finished. Keith Specking was one of the main volunteers. Barbara Shaffer wrote Hope, Alaska: A Brief History and Overview; unpublished 1968, but can be found in the Hope Library.

While Rev. Shaffer was in the leadership role as Chair of the Hope Retreat Center Committee, he made an agreement with a Baptist minister to rent the church to help pay for improvements. Methodist Conference Superintendent Thom White-Wolf Fassett did not support the agreement. The Baptist pastor voluntarily withdrew from the agreement.

John Shaffer spent about 14 1/3 of his 33 1/3 years in Alaska working with the Hope Church and Retreat Center. During 1981-1988, he was Chair of the Hope Retreat Center Committee while being the pastor at East Anchorage United Methodist Church. Hope was one of his favorite places of all time.

A post-1964 earthquake study reported that almost half of the original townsite of Hope should be relocated to higher ground because of tidal flooding that resulted from sinking of the town during the earthquake. This could have affected the church property also, but it did not. The people were resilient and planned to stay in the community they loved. Shortly after the earthquake Bishop A. Raymond Grant preached a sermon titled “The Community of Hope Moves to Higher Ground.”

In 1965 the furlough pastoring was done by Dr. Rector Johnson from Arizona and Dr. Glen Frye from Michigan. Hope had a larger percentage of its population adversely affected by the earthquake than the other points of the circuit. Every one of the families that attended the church had to have their homes moved to higher ground. The church remained in the nearly deserted area that was the original townsite. The Red Cross helped a great deal with moving of homes and businesses and paying for new wells. Because of the Seward Highway being damaged along Turnagain Arm, the Hope church was served for a while from Seward over temporary gravel fill and wood bridges.

Howard L. DeVore took over from Rev. Laird in 1967. The Chugiak and Kenai parishes used the Hope church for summer retreats. Wintertime population of the town of Hope was 35. Four Methodists were among them. The church building was wired for electricity as a project of the Methodist Youth Fellowship of First Methodist Church, Ames, Iowa. The Center continued to be used for retreat purposes.
While Hope Church remained inactive, pastoral visits were made regularly and the building used by the Lutherans and Methodist Youth under careful supervision for retreat purposes. Kenai Methodist Men and other groups made improvements to the church for retreat uses. When the Turnagain Causeway project was being planned, many thought Hope would become an ideal bedroom community and the church’s ministry would be much enlarged. The project was never built, however.

Figure 42: one of the groups that uses the center

Since 2005 the Anchorage Area UMM have held a yearly Spring Retreat at the Hope Retreat Center.

Figure 43: Dining at a men’s retreat

Figure 44: some of the Anchorage area Methodist leadership
During 1971 the two resident Methodist members in Hope went to Juneau for legislative session work and came back to Hope to work a summer guiding camp. There was a funeral and a wedding and several groups used it for a retreat.

Figure 45: Rev. Roger Thompson

After Rev. DeVore, the Reverends David Fison and Roger W. Thompson were assigned as the last pastors to Hope Church. In 1977 the Hope facility was no longer considered a church. It became a full-time retreat center.

Figure 46: David Fison playing his saw

G. Edward Knight died on April 4, 1975; he was the first resident superintendent of the Alaska Mission.

Figure 47: Rev. Bob Bowers

The Annual Alaska Missionary Conference approved a petition in 1981 directing the Conference Council on Ministries to develop a comprehensive camping policy. The policy was to include a Master Plan for Hope Retreat Center. The Council appointed a Camping Task Force which included Bob Bowers, Jim LaBau, Dan Amerson, Kay Abrams, Billy Still, Leta Brown, Ed Stanton, Lee Nelson and Debbie Pitney. They would reference a previous study done by Art Harrison.

The Board of Trustees of the Alaska Missionary Conference had already started the process of determining which land was owned by whom and who held title. The General Board of Global Ministries offered a Quit Claim Deed to the Alaska Missionary Conference on January 21, 1998 (Book 117, Page 235). Articles of Incorporation for the Hope Retreat Center were submitted to the State of Alaska for non-profit status on June 1, 2001. (Primary Code 8660; File No. 73511-D.) The retreat center at the time could handle up to 30 people. Reservations were made through the Conference office. Several improvements were made in 1985.

A work team from Richardson, Texas helped out in 1986. Usage of the facility was up 50% over previous years. User fees from the retreat center were adequate to cover expenses and make improvements.

Bea Shepard developed a skit on Bertha McGhee who was present at the annual conference and said a few words. Here is the skit:
Bertha McGhee


Time: 1944

Narrator: Bertha McGhee was a housemother at the Jesse Lee Home in Seward when World War II broke out. The army ordered the Home to be closed. After a furlough to the States, Bertha returned and was appointed supply pastor at Hope - with the assignment of starting a church in a small mining town that had never had a church. Bertha started by calling on everybody in town.

(Bertha goes around knocking on doors.)

Bertha: Good morning. I'm Bertha McGhee. I am going to start a Methodist church in Hope and I want to invite you to the first service which will be this coming Sunday at 11 o'clock. ---- Oh. Well, I want you to know that you will be very welcome if you decide to come.

Bertha: Good morning. I see that you have children. I want you to know that I'm starting a Sunday School this coming Sunday at 9:30 at the Davis cabin, and I'd be happy to have your children come to it. Oh. Well, there isn't a Catholic Church in Hope, is there? Catholic children will be just as welcome as any other children ---- I hope they will come ---- And you would be welcome to come to the worship service at 11 ----.

Bertha: Good morning. I'm Bertha McGhee, and I am starting a Methodist Church at (Door slammed in her face?) Oh my goodness!

Bertha: Good morning ---- (Etc.)

Narrator: The Sunday School got off to a good start. In no time at all, all of the children in Hope were attending regularly, including the Catholic
The Hope Retreat Committee wanted pastors to tell their members about using the Center for quality small group experiences.

Figure 48: Dennis Holway, Janice Stamper, Kelli Williams, Lori Staats

During 1986 use of the facility increased over 100%. The Southern Baptist had regular meetings on Sunday morning with about 20 people involved, but they ended their service to the residents of Hope on January 1, 1987. There were at least two weddings.

A work team from First United Methodist Church in Richardson, Texas made many good improvements to the retreat center. Special thanks was given to Randy Pippin of Kenai for coordinating and working with the group. Volunteers from Soldotna and Anchorage made several improvements.

Another church building had been built in the Hope community, it was non-denominational. Slides and prepared materials about the retreat center were made available for the asking through the Alaska Missionary Conference office.

Rev. Richard and Averill Gay decided to retire near the Center and offered to help as needed.

Figure 49: Rev. Richard Gay and Averill

The worship service was another matter altogether. The people in Hope had never had a church and they didn’t really feel the need for one. One Sunday morning, however, something unusual happened.

Several rough-looking men come in and take seats. Bertha looks up in surprise.)

Bertha: My goodness! Welcome to the Methodist Church!

Miner: Well, we heard the President say on the radio that everybody should go to church this Sunday and give thanks for V-E Day. So we’re here.

Narrator: After the war ended Bertha return to Jesse Lee Home. Several pastors tried to fan the embers of a church in Hope, but the church building there, erected by Dad Davis and Ed Knight, was finally designated a Conference Retreat Center, and the church program was abandoned.

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Figure 50: Part of the living room

Figure 51: View out the sanctuary window looking southeast

Figure 52: a nice fire pit

Figure 53: Sanctuary window with stained glass window above the oil fuel tank

Figure 54 the stained glass windows from inside
The Springfield District of the Central Illinois Conference sent a work party under the leadership of Harry and Barbara Deffley. The party successfully installed a waterwell pump, dug a trench from the well to the retreat center, installed piping and valves and reconnected the existing toilet facilities to the supply lines and drainfield. The indoor toilet facilities added a touch of convenience to the rustic atmosphere of the retreat center.

Major failures of the heating system, water system and septic systems occurred during 1991. Users had to bring their own water and use the outhouse. An Engineers Inspection reported the building was in very good condition. The full report was placed in the
Mission Office. More maintenance and improvements are needed. Hope is a place where the pace is slow, the atmosphere rustic, inspiration ever evident, recreation opportunities abound, a place of special solitude that replenishes and uplifts the spirit. A group from Alaska Children’s Services spent five days cleaning the Retreat Center from top to bottom and was much appreciated by the user groups that followed.

Dale Sissons from Whitney UMC, Boise, Idaho, spent a month painting the whole inside of the center, upgrading the plumbing, clearing brush, and helping to stabilize cracks in the foundation. He also found time to fish most weekends. He collected user fees that helped pay the bills.

Duane Chase was instrumental in getting the grant for the bioCycle™ septic system.

In 2000 a new Hope Retreat Center Task Force was created consisting of: David Beckett, Duane Chase, Jim LaBau, Pat Robinson, Janice Stamper, Betty Burke, Dale Kelly, John Meyn, Lori Staats, and Susan Williams.

Figure 59: Susan Williams and Rev. Bob Bowers

With a loan of $7,000 from the New Ministries Committee of the Alaska Missionary Conference and the time and talents of 25 individuals from North Louisiana Area United Methodist Churches, the center was refurbished and made ready for an anticipated increase in use. The volunteers built a 20x30’ porch-type platform deck, a handicap ramp, front steps and a landing. They put on a new roof and doors on the woodshed, and they did many smaller jobs.

The Hope Community continued to acquire more year-round residents. Now the residents are drawn there for rural tranquility. The suggestion was made by Conference leaders to include some Hope people on the Conference Retreat Committee.

Another $7,000 was borrowed with the intent that it would be repaid by the Outdoor Ministries Committee, upon receipt of a grant in the year 2000. These funds were used to buy materials. A deep-water well was drilled on the property and capped until the septic system was in place.

Figure 60: Rev. Duane Chase and Bishop Ed Paup

Three VIM teams from Oklahoma in June 2001 replaced and renovated the roof. They also raised and enclosed a new dormer. Harry Reichert helped with the framing. The Task Force was renamed Board of Directors. Volunteers were sought to help on projects. In 2003 the final engineering study regarding the new septic system was completed and approved by the DEA [sic. Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, Division of Environmental Health]. Volunteers wrote a Rasmuson Foundation grant which ended up going through many revisions and finally a site visit was planned for final approval. Fees were increased. A rededication service was planned which was to include an honoring of the memory of Bertha McGhee. Tom Burgin, a resident of Hope, had been hired as custodian and to keep an eye on the property.
In 2005 improvements continue. Volunteers filled and leveled the front lawn. The center became self-supporting. The Board of Directors rented the Center for 135 days in 2005. Keith and Jackie Campbell were instrumental on many improvements. Dick and Jane Smith recruited many people into the Conference Camping Program and spent many hours putting in the baffles/insulation/vapor barrier/drywall along with installing the vinyl windows upstairs with help from the entire Meyn family.

Volunteers made more repairs and acquired furnishings, and removed cottonwood trees. A VIM (Volunteers In Mission) team replaced the sanctuary and kitchen floors. This VIM team from western North Carolina was led by Jack Koontz. They also helped remodel the town library and local school. John Meyn worked very closely in getting and organizing many VIM teams since 1981.

A color 3-fold brochure was created for promotion in 2011 by members in the Camping Ministry program. The Wesley Motorcycle Riders composed of Superintendent Dave Beckett and eight others made the trip from St. John United Methodist Church to the Hope Retreat Center raising $300 and awareness of the retreat center.

Susie and Dennis Holway made window covers for the sanctuary which saved heat and became a beautiful addition. For many years the Hope Retreat Center has been a member of the Hope Chamber of Commerce in order to strengthen the ties with the community.

More than 260 people used the facility in 2010.
Figure 63: The curtain designs and colors
In 2014 the Chugiak UMC youth group work team built raised bed platforms, rebuilt porch steps, and designed and created various towel holders from alders collected from Mt. Hope. They hauled off ten truckloads of timber and cut down two cottonwood trees. More landscaping was done.

Figure 64: the raised platforms

The Hope Retreat Center was designated an Advance Special in 1984. The Advance is a project of The United Methodist Church that allows people or organizations to contribute money to many agencies and pastors around the world. More details can be found at their website: [www.umcmission.org](http://www.umcmission.org). Those wishing to make direct contributions can designate Advance Number 3020590 for direct benefit of the Hope Retreat Center. Mail donations to: The Advance, 475 Riverside Drive, Room 350, New York, NY 10115: or use email: [advance@umcmission.org](mailto:advance@umcmission.org).

The Hope Christian Church currently has a beautiful log building and offers services on Sunday afternoons.

Figures 65 and 66: Now the only church in town

And so the future is yet to be written. What will be your story in this continuing saga of the Hope Retreat Center?
Figure 67: Aerial view of Hope area circa 1920s from the collection of Candy Waugaman, provided by Dr. Rolfe Buzzell
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Other books by Larry Hayden:

Soldiers for God and Country – A Brief History of American Military Chaplains and their Connection with Methodism in the Anchorage Alaska Community
A Descriptive History of Birchwood Camp
Anchor Park United Methodist Church, 3 volumes, 1954-2014

Available at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Loussac Library, University of Alaska Anchorage Consortium Library or the research room at the Alaska United Methodist Conference office on Patterson Drive. They can be downloaded from the AUMC website www.alaskaumc.org under “About Us, History” tab.
Enjoying the outdoors on the deck of the Hope Retreat Center

View from Indian across Turnagain Arm at the scenery surrounding Hope (at waterline in middle)