

MT. EDGECUMBE: *A Legacy of Alaska Native Vocational Education*



“Learn by doing is our slogan and superior projects are proof of our learning.”



MT. EDGECUMBE:

A Legacy of Alaska Native Vocational Education

Indian Health Service



SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium



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Cover photographs top left to right, Mt. Edgecumbe Shop Students ca 1950s (G. Nelson photograph), Arron Isaacs (KCAW photograph), Car in Snow ca. 1950 (G. Nelson photograph), PHS building ca. 1950s (G. Nelson photograph), George Nelson ca. 1952 (G. Nelson photographs).

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Timeline of Events

Treaty of Cession, Purchase of Alaska	1867
Mission School Era (federally funded)	1867 to 1883
Mission School in Wrangell founded	1877
Sitka Industrial Training Mission School for Boys Established in Sitka	1878
Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, PA & First Manual Training School established in St. Louis.....	1879
Alaska’s First Organic Act Passed, District of Alaska, & Alaska Division established in the Office of Education, Department of Interior, Sitka Industrial Training Mission School moves to present-day Sheldon Jackson School Campus	1884
Sheldon Jackson appointed Alaska’s Superintendent of Education	1885
Bureau of Education takes over most Mission Schools in Alaska	1894
Nelson Act passed.....	1905
Bureau of Education employees medical staff under Alaska Indian Service	1907
Sitka Industrial Training School renamed Sheldon Jackson School.....	1911
Alaska’s Second Organic Act Passed/Alaska becomes Territory of Alaska	1912

Smith-Hughes Act passed	1917
Meriam Report	1928
Responsibility for Native Education transfers from Bureau of Indian Education to Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).....	1931
Indian Reorganization Act	1934
Indian Arts and Crafts Board established under Department of the Interior	1938
Johnson-O’Malley Act	1936
Navy’s recommends Naval Air Stations at Sitka, Kodiak & Dutch Harbor, Alaska	1937
World War Two & construction on the Sitka Naval Operating Base begins.....	1939
Japonski Island designated site for Sitka’s Naval Operating Base	1942
U.S. Army Coastal Defenses establishes fortifications around Sitka Sound	1942
Public Health Service moves headquarters to Juneau, Alaska	1943
G.I. Bill of Rights/ Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944	1944
Alaska Indian Service changes name to Alaska Native Service.....	1945
World War II ends & construction ceases in Sitka	1945
Public Law No. 478 signed by President Truman to transfer Sitka Naval Base (450 acres) to the Department of the Interior (BIA)	1946
Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital in Alice Island opens February 2	1947
Mt. Edgecumbe School opens February 22.....	1947
Mt. Edgecumbe becomes a fourth class U.S. Post Office	1947
Teacher J. Loyd Ripley begins to develop Vocational Shop Department	1947
George Nelson hired at Mt. Edgecumbe to be carpentry instructor.....	1948
Mt. Edgecumbe receives full accreditation	1948
Shop constructs miniature houses and bus shelters.....	1947/1950
First two Vocational Shop houses (VS-1 & VS-2) completed.....	1952
Public Law 83-568, Public Health Service takes responsibility of healthcare from BIA creating Division of Indian Health	1955
Public Health Service Buildings 2 and 3 (PHS-2 & PHS-3) completed.....	1957
Public Health Service Building 4 (PHS-4) completed	1958
Alaska becomes State of Alaska	1958
Public Health Service Building 5 (PHS_5) completed	1959
Division of Indian Health renamed Indian Health Services	1969
Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.....	1971
Hootch v. Alaska State-Operated School System	1972
Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act passed	1975
BIA closes Mt. Edgecumbe School.....	1983
State of Alaska reopens Mt. Edgecumbe High School.....	1985
Southeast Regional Health Consortium takes over Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital Campus	1986

Introduction

Mt. Edgecumbe is not only a magnificent, often snow-capped mountain in the viewshed of the community of Sitka, Alaska, it is the namesake for Alaska's regional hospital and state-wide, state-run boarding school. The Mt. Edgecumbe hospital and school share a unique and celebrated legacy that intertwines health, education, and community on a small island for the benefit of Alaska's Native citizens. While much of the landscape has changed and the community of Mt. Edgecumbe comprised of hospital and school employees no longer exists, a few remnants, including four Public Health Service (PHS) buildings remain representative of a period post World War II through the 1970s. These four humble structures signify the rebuilding efforts of Alaska and our nation post-war while simultaneously, they symbolize new paradigms of the time in attending to Alaska Native health and education needs. Most impressively, they are an example of an innovative and collaborative vocational learning experience, as they were built by students at Mt. Edgecumbe Boarding School in the 1950s to serve the housing needs of the community. Located on Tongass Drive on Japonski Island, Sitka, Alaska, the houses are currently utilized by the SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC) as office buildings.



Together, the PHS buildings are referred to as *PHS Buildings on Tongass Drive Historic District*. In their grouping, the buildings have been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places for their association with the tuberculosis epidemic and important developments in post-World War II building technology and educational programming. This publication reviews the history leading to what became the Mt. Edgecumbe Community with a focus on the PHS buildings and the Mt. Edgecumbe Vocational Carpentry Program of the 1940s and 1950s.



Mt. Edgecumbe and Sitka 5-21-49 (Alaska State Library - P01-4409)



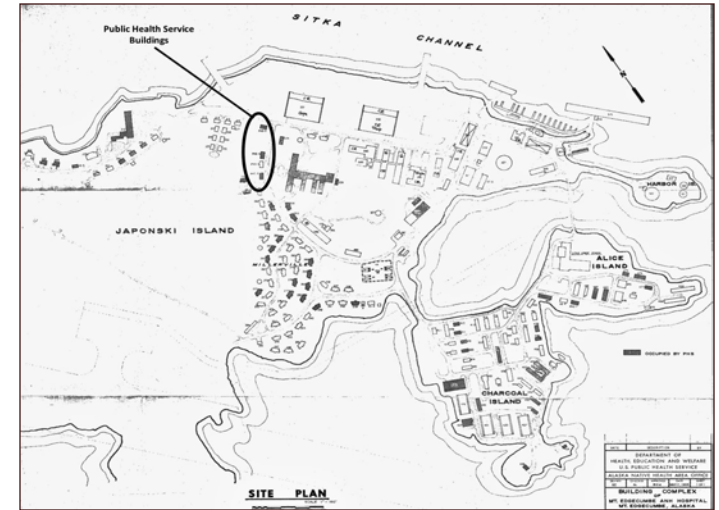
Public Health Service Buildings, Mt. Edgecumbe Medical Center Campus, 2019

¹The spelling of *Mount* versus *Mt.* Edgecumbe has been interchanged through the years. During personal interviews, participants noted the use *Mt.* as correct in referencing the High School and Hospital, and *Mount* referring to Mount Edgecumbe, the volcano on adjacent Kruzof Island. For consistency, the form "Mt." was used the duration of the publication except in quotations.

²Initially referred to as the Alaska Indian Service under the U.S. Department of the Interior, in 1945, it was renamed the Alaska Native Service (Ongtooguk, n.d.).

Sea Level Consulting, LLC (SLC) developed this publication on behalf of Indian Health Service (IHS) and SEARHC, per regulatory stipulations between IHS and the Alaska State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to mitigate the transfer of these historic properties from federal to private ownership.

To preserve the history of the PHS buildings and their association with Mt. Edgecumbe School, SLC sought stories from those who attended Mt. Edgecumbe School, worked at Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital, or were part of the Mt. Edgecumbe community circa the 1940s through 1970s. This publication briefly discusses the history of Alaska Native education and healthcare, the creation of Mt. Edgecumbe Boarding School and Hospital, and influences in Alaska and the United States (U.S.) in service to Alaska Natives. The responsibility of operating these facilities fell to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), also known as the Alaska Native Service (ANS). They operated in cooperation with the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service. The relationship between the hospital and school is unique to the history of Alaska; as are the community bonds developed in this era, inspired by hard work and island-living.



Mt. Edgecumbe (BIA - Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbook, TAHETA 1949)



BIA - Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbook TAHETA 1949

Under BIA management, Mt. Edgecumbe School's curriculum emphasized vocational programming. In recognition of the four PHS buildings, this publication will focus on the history of the Mt. Edgecumbe School Vocational Carpentry Program, and those involved in the buildings' construction. These buildings reflect an extraordinary example by which education and community may serve for the betterment of an individual student and that of society. The techniques and influences of construction undertaken, and relevance to vocational course objectives, demonstrate a distinctive type of prefabricated or modular structure that ran concurrent with housing trends and needs at the time of construction.

Native boarding schools have an evident association to the historical trauma and suffering of the Indigenous people of North America. Forcibly removing children from their village homes, maltreatment for speaking their native language, and abrupt enculturation are some of the atrocities experienced by Native Alaskans and Americans for decades. Without regard to such distressing aspects of our American history, this publication is limited in context to the development and years in which the BIA managed Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital and Boarding School, from 1947 to 1983, and attributes of the boarding school's programming as researched by the author and recollected by former students, teachers, medical staff, and residents of the Mt. Edgecumbe community.

The first year of Mt. Edgecumbe School included the first edition of *TAHETA*, the school yearbook. *TAHETA* cleverly refers to the student body comprised of "Tlingit, Aleut, Haida, Eskimo, Tsimshian, and Athabaskan" Alaska Natives. In foresight to the exceptionality of this era, the forward of the first 1947-1948 edition of the *TAHETA* reads:

"In this our first yearbook, the "TAHETA," we have attempted to show our activities and accomplishments in making this one of the best schools in Alaska.

We sincerely hope that you will use this book as your reference guide for the history of Mt. Edgecumbe and in recalling many pleasant memories of days gone by.

Our sincerest thanks to William F. Stuart for the above photograph of Mt. Edgecumbe and for the many group pictures in this copy of "Taheta" (BIA-Mt. Edgecumbe School Yearbook TAHETA, 1948)."

Part I

A Brief History of Alaska Native Education and Healthcare 1867 to 1946

Alaska Native education and health care is uniquely entwined throughout post-contact American history. Due to devastating disease among the population, and the desire by the federal government to assist Alaska Natives to assimilate and partake in economic opportunities, vocational programming was instituted to teach students various trades that would serve them later in life (Olsen, ca. 1954-1958).

Alaska, under U.S. possession, began with the Treaty of Cession and the purchase of Alaska from Russian hands in 1867. Sitka, located on Baranof Island in Southeast Alaska, became headquarters for newly established *Department of Alaska*. The Army, then the Navy with U.S. Naval Revenue Cutter vessels, maintained military control of the Department. In support, Congress set aside Japonski Island, across the narrow channel from Sitka, as a naval reservation with a coaling station to provision the Naval Cutters (DeArmond, 1995).

Alaska was sold without consideration of territorial treaties as had occurred with Native Americans of the Continental U.S. However, the same principles of enculturation noted in the *1819 Civilization Fund Act* prevailed and guided relations with Alaska Natives. With the passage of this act, the federal government established a second legal basis for federal responsibility of schooling for American Indian/Alaska Native children, although it was still the missionaries who attended to Alaska Native care. This led to a period from 1867 to 1883 considered the *Mission Era* in Alaska, whereby Swedish Evangelical, Moravian, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Congregational, and Roman Catholic Churches established schools throughout Alaska (Ongtooguk, 2004). In 1869, the first appropriation from Congress for education in the Department was allocated; however, the allocation was never put into use as no agency was found to administer the funds. By 1880 the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions established the Sitka Industrial Training School for boys. The school moved to a new 160-acre campus in 1882 adjacent the current Sitka National Historical Park. The Fort Wrangell Industrial School and the Pribilof Islands School were a similar to Sheldon Jackson School, while other schools across the state were precarious in quality (Hopkins, 1962).



Home Economics at Sitka Industrial Training School
(SITK 26390, Sitka National Historical Park)



Tlingit Carpenters Sitka Industrial Training School
(SITK 26390, Sitka National Historical Park)

In 1884, Congress passed Alaska's First Organic Act shaping Alaska as a U.S. District. However, without an elected legislature, the district governor was appointed by the U.S. President and no monies were appropriated to support healthcare of Natives. The Act delegated responsibility to provide schooling "for children of all races" to the Office of the U.S. Secretary of the Interior (Hopkins, 2008).

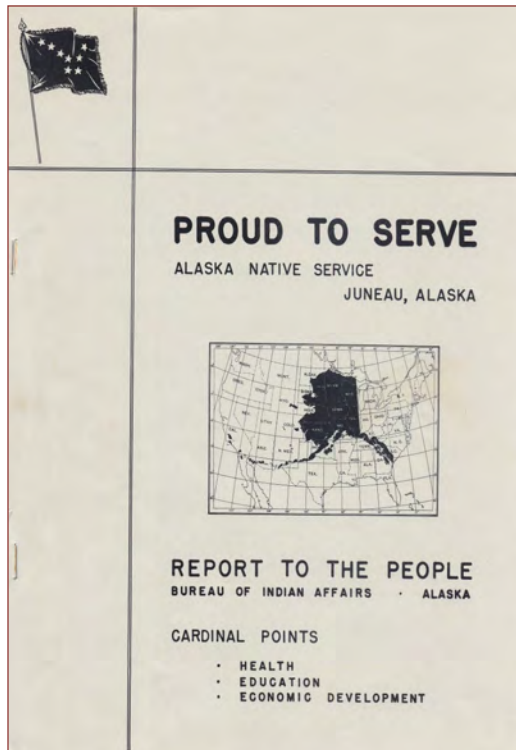
Four years later, Native education was delegated to the U.S. Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), a unit within the Department of the Interior (DOI). This duty fell upon a Presbyterian Missionary, Reverend Sheldon Jackson, who in 1885 appointed himself Alaska's first Superintendent for Education. The Nelson Act of 1905 established a separate system of education for Alaska Natives, giving the BIE and eventually the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) nearly exclusive control over Alaska Native education until well after Alaska Statehood (University of Alaska,

³Secretary of War John C. Calhoun created the Office of Indian Affairs under the guidance of the Department of War. By 1829, the Office of Indian Affairs was sanctioned by Congress. In 1888, the U.S. Bureau of Education, Office of Indian Affairs, under the U.S. Department of the Interior began to manage Alaska schools. By 1947, the Office of Indian Affairs officially became known as the Bureau of Indian Affairs. To reflect the parallel purpose and organizational structure that the Bureau of Education has in relation to other programs within the Office of the Assistant Secretary—Indian Affairs, the Office of Indian Education Programs was renamed the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) by departmental manual release no. 3721 of August 29, 2006 (U.S. Department of the Interior, Indian Affairs, 2020).

Fairbanks, n.d.). In 1907, the BIE in Seattle began employing physicians and nurses in Alaska (Metcalf, 2005). In 1911, through a federally-funded contract, the Sitka Industrial Training School was renamed the Sheldon Jackson School. As measles, influenza, and tuberculosis severely threatened the survival of Native populations, Sheldon Jackson School and other missionary schools also served Alaska Natives with medical facilities and vocational school training in nursing and industrial skills.

In 1912, passage of the Second Organic Act established Alaska as a territory. The new territory was granted its own legislature elected by Alaskan voters; however, the President continued to appoint the Governor. Alaska Territorial Governor, Lyman E. Knapp, lobbied Congress for funds to build hospitals and hire physicians to attend to the sick. With influence and support from PHS and BIE, in 1915, Congress appropriated \$25,000 for “medical relief” and BIE physicians were stationed throughout Alaska to teach proper hygiene and provide healthcare. In policy, BIE declared, outside of incorporated towns, a school district was to be considered a health district (Metcalf, 2005).

The Secretary of the Interior shall make needful and proper provision for the education of children of school age in the Territory of Alaska, without reference to race, until such time as permanent provision shall be made for the same and the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars, or so much thereof as may be necessary is hereby appropriated for this purpose (Nichols 1924).



ANS Report to BIA ca. 1950, (M. Easton collection)

In 1917, the Smith-Hughes Act passed thereby providing federal funding for vocational education programs. With its origins from the German educational system byway of the country’s Council for Industrial Education (Foght, et al., 1918), the U.S. began to adopt the concept of vocational training in the late 1800s. Rather than providing broad-based academic education, vocational programs sought to prepare students for a particular trade, craft, or career. The advent of World War I and the increase in demand for skilled industrial labor brought a surge in growth to vocational training programs.

In 1931, authority for treatment of Alaskan Natives transferred from the BIE to the BIA. In Alaska, the BIA was commonly referred to as the Alaska Native Service or ANS. Under the ANS, teachers were given the support they needed to care for students, including first-aid manuals and pharmaceuticals. By the onset of WWII, the federal government had appropriated nearly half a million dollars for healthcare. The BIA/ ANS employed 16 doctors, 33 hospital nurses, 30 field nurses, and 65 other medical employees (Druxman, 1949).

Under the BIA, Alaskan Natives were likewise affected by the investigations and legislation generated by the Meriam Report of 1928, which detailed the poor conditions of tribal economies and “destitution in Indian country” (Meriam 1928). Using the Meriam Report as a catalyst and a blueprint, John Collier, Sr., the BIA Commissioner from 1934 to 1945 initiated a shift in “Indian” policy in the U.S. (Barnhardt, 2011). Nearly all new programs implemented had the goal of providing Indian self-determination in economic development, social services and education. On June 18, 1934, President Roosevelt signed Public Law 73–383, also referred to as the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, “Indian New Deal”, or the Wheeler-Howard Act, thus ending the longstanding federal policy of acculturating and assimilating Native people through a boarding school system and introduced Native history and culture to the curriculum. Also enacted

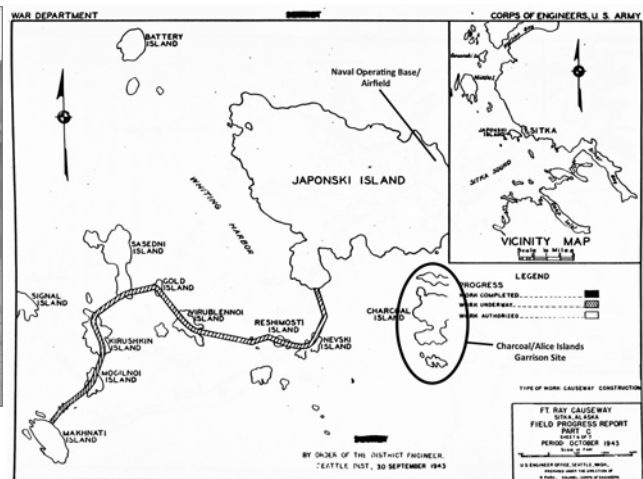
and amended in 1936, was the Johnson-O'Malley Act stipulating the federal transfer of schools in Alaska from the BIA to

the administrative control of the Territory of Alaska. Both acts had long-term effects on Native American and Alaska Native policies and federal funding for medical and educational services, as children were still forced to go to boarding schools, often out of state. It wasn’t until 1972, in a class-action lawsuit (Hooch v. Alaska State-Operated School System) that a court ruled the state’s failure to provide local high schools in native villages constituted a pattern and practice of racial discrimination in violation of the U.S. Constitution’s federal non-discrimination laws, and the Alaska Constitution. In 1976, through Tobeluk v. Lind, an out-of-court settlement negotiated a minimum size of high school facilities the state had to provide in each village to include an elementary school (McDowell Group, 2001).

In 1937, at the forefront of World War II, experiencing a major threat from Japan in the Pacific Region, the Navy's Hepburn Board recommended the construction of Naval Air Stations at Sitka, Kodiak, and Dutch Harbor, Alaska. As Japonski Island was previously set aside as a naval reservation, it conveniently became the headquarters of a great defensive build-up in the Sitka Sound region. It was designated as a naval air station September 12, 1939 and in July of 1942, the U.S. Army Coastal Defenses joined the naval forces. At that time, the base was reconstructed by civilian contractor Siems Drake Puget Sound. This effort included building a causeway to connect Japonski and smaller outlying Islands to create Fort Rousseau. Charcoal and Alice Islands were connected to establish Fort Ray. On Japonski, Alice, and Charcoal Islands, two airplane hangars, several warehouses, a mess hall, a 150-bed hospital, officers' quarters, and a post office, bowling alley, and a movie theatre were also among the features.



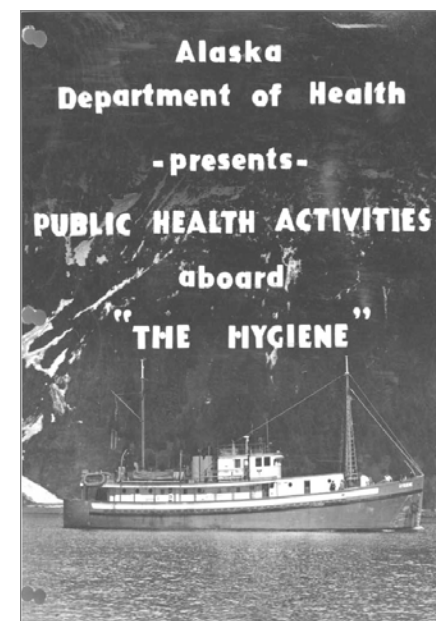
Sitka NOB.s Hangar 1 (ca. 1942), Mt. Edgecumbe Vocational Shop (1949) and currently the MEHS gymnasium (Sitka Historical Society # 3299)



Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Army Coastal Defenses build-up (Bush, Jr., U.S.A.C.O.E., 1984)

During WWII, the full extent of the tuberculosis epidemic became apparent when nearly one-half of Alaska Native enlisted men were deemed physically unfit due to the virus. In general, the virus is attributed to one-third of Alaska Native deaths (Fortune 1986). In 1945, with WWII declared over, military facilities in Alaska were decommissioned. As the medical needs of Alaska Natives to combat tuberculosis continued as dire, noting facilities to be abandoned, leaders such as Don C. Foster, ANS General Superintendent, Territorial Governor Ernest Gruening, and Dr. C. Earl Albrecht, lobbied alongside prominent Alaska Native leaders Mark Jacobs, Sr., Andrew P. Hope, Herman Kitka, and Mr. and Mrs. Woodrow Widmark, Sr. (representing the Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood) for these facilities in Sitka to be transferred to the ANS. On July 1, 1946, President Truman signed Public Law No. 478, an Act to transfer the Japonski Island Naval Operating Base and Fort Ray Army Base, consisting of 450 acres to the U.S. Department of the Interior. On August 16, the Navy ceremoniously transferred the property to ANS Superintendent Fred Geeslin with a letter and a full inventory of the property (Druxman, 1949; Metcalfe, 2005). Guests of the transfer event included Sitka Mayor, Charles Peterson; Les Yaw, Superintendent of the Sheldon Jackson High School; Dr. George Dale, ANS Director of Education; and Ralph W. Mize, ANS Construction Superintendent.

In 1943, PHS pulled its administrative headquarters for Alaska from District #5 based in San Francisco to establish District #11 with headquarters in Juneau. Over the next several years, PHS coordinated with the Alaska Territorial Health Department (THD) and the BIA to provide funding, medical expertise, and staffing support for the care of Alaska Natives. In 1944, funds procured the acquisition of an army surplus vessel and converted it to the "S/S Hygiene", the first of several health ships used by the THD in the postwar era (Fortune, 2006). By 1955, PHS officers and direct employees in service to Alaska increased from a few hundred to close to 2,000. This expansion took place on a nationwide scale as the PHS took over all health functions and facilities of the BIA following passage of Public Law 83-568 in August 1954 thereby establishing a new administration. The new unit, initially known as the Division of Indian Health was renamed the Indian Health Service in 1969.



Alaska's Department of Health aboard the M/S Hygiene (Alaska State Library P143-0279a)

Part II

The Creation of the Mt. Edgecumbe Community

With facilities secured, great efforts were made by ANS and residents to overhaul facilities to begin providing for more extensive Alaska Native healthcare and educational services. In 1949, Bob Druxman, a realtor and newspaperman for the Daily Alaskan Empire and correspondent for the United Press, was commissioned by ANS General Superintendent Don C. Foster to write of the development of the school and medical center, and in effect, the establishment of the community of Mt. Edgecumbe. Druxman writes,

The name, Mount Edgecumbe School and Medical Center, was suggested in July of 1946 by the late Oliver Davis, former ANS property clerk in the Juneau ANS headquarters. He took his idea from a 3,467 foot high extinct volcano located on Kruzof Island 15 miles west of Japonski. The mountain received its name from the famed English explorer, Captain Cook [1778]. (Druxman, 1949)

Immediately upon transfer and well into the first six months, ANS and the Edgecumbe community worked long, hard, hours, often without overtime pay, to ready the facilities for use. Everyone was conscious of the importance of the job to be done and what it meant to Alaska's' Native children. That was their compensation....the personal satisfaction of doing a good job (Druxman, 1949). They had much to clean and repair in order to house even the construction workers and their families. It would take several weeks of planning before the transition from a military facility to a hospital and school was to be accomplished with the consideration that supplies had to be shipped from Seattle. When the BIA Chief of Buildings and Grounds Maintenance arrived late in December 1946, due to needed repairs of the facilities, he limited housing to 15 duplexes (former military housing in an area called Millerville) and two houses Master Officers' Quarters (MOQ).



Millerville on Japonski Island, just after World War II, 1949 (G. Nelson photograph)



BIA - Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbook TAHETA, 1949

Simultaneously, the extreme winter weather conditions of 1946-1947 left the Skagway sanatorium without adequate heat and prompted the facility to be closed. Further intensifying matters, the Eklutna Vocational School near Anchorage having closed in 1945 causing the school to move to the Fort Raymond facilities in Seward, also deteriorated during the harsh winter and the school was slated to be closed. Repairs at both facilities were deemed too costly. While work at Edgecumbe concentrated on renovating utilities and homes and readying the school for completion in the summer of 1948, acting quickly, ANS officials decided to immediately receive the Skagway patients and reopen the former Army Hospital on Alice Island for service. Similarly, ANS staff hastily ramped-up renovations and prepared the two dormitories for students from the Eklutna Vocational School.

It took fifteen days, braving the cold, winter conditions, for ANS to prepare the hospital on Alice Island for the Skagway patients. On February 7, 1947, Mt. Edgecumbe hospital on Alice Island received 91 patients, via the S/S North Sea, from the Skagway sanatorium. Equipment, patients, and their beds had been taken and loaded onto the ship, including staff. By 1954, Edgecumbe maintained 230 tuberculosis beds, 60 orthopedic beds and 20 general beds in a newly built facility (Parran, 1954; Easton, 2019)).

On the school side of preparations, faculty members, including the new Principal, Max W. Penrod, worked tirelessly to ready the school. For months, faculty, students, nurses, doctors, and everyone in the newly forming Mt. Edgecumbe community toiled long hours to get things into satisfactory condition for their use. On September 1, 1947, the community of Mt. Edgecumbe was made a fourth class U.S. Post Office. A month later it was elevated to a third class Post Office due to the heavy volume of mail (Druxman, 1949). This allowed for additional funding to hire postal service personnel and imparted an even greater sense of community amongst the residents.

Detailed to Mt. Edgecumbe on July 20, 1947, Fred R. Geeslin, ANS Assistant Superintendent, became the first administrator and head of all activities at Mt. Edgecumbe. Geeslin and four other “high caliber” ANS officials formed an Advisory Committee to plan and manage activities. The committee consisted of the heads of the School, the Medical Center, the Utilities Division, and the Maintenance Division. Personnel Employment kept records of the initial 261 employees, which continued to increase through the 1950s. Natives consisted of approximately twenty-five percent of employees (Druxman, 1949).



Alaska State Library - Historical Collections

Eye and Ear Testing Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital (ASL-P143-1190)

All levels of staffing from the school and hospital continued to use the original military reference for housing sites as was used by the Navy. Maintaining a level of hierarchy and separation of genders, the MOQ, or Master’s Officers’ Quarter, was still referred to as such, as were the series of twelve duplexes called the JOQ or Junior Officers’ Quarters, housing staff doctors and department heads. The BOQ, or Bachelor Officers’ Quarters housed unmarried nurses and teachers. The 1,200 residents of Edgecumbe that were not patients or students were housed all over the Island, making use of remodeled naval barracks and other structures.

Mt. Edgecumbe had three neighborhoods; *Millerville*, *Charcoal Island*, and a short-lived neighborhood called *Hollywood*. Two dormitory buildings, one for boys and one for girls; were each capable of accommodating 300 students. However, due to the rapid expansion and constant influx, there was nearly always a shortage of housing in the first decade of Mt. Edgecumbe (Shuler, 2005). According to former Mt. Edgecumbe medical staff and school faculty, the social clubs on the island were a spirited and entertaining place to gather with friends and colleagues.



Mr. Don Bolau, Pat Smith, and Mt. Edgecumbe Postmaster Ruth Nelson, 1949
(G. Bartolaba photograph)

Mt Edgecumbe School

Mt. Edgecumbe Boarding School was in keeping with national and territorial educational trends of vocational programming, especially for Native citizens. In addition to academic studies, Mt. Edgecumbe offered a range of educational opportunities unlike other vocational programs since the school was a branch of a much larger complex of services, including the hospital. Hildegard Thompson, Chief Branch of Education, BIA monthly publication, *Indian Education* wrote in 1955 that:

The objective of the Bureau's vocational program to equip Indian youth of high school age to warrant a living through salable skill.....The Commissioner has described these needs of today as (1) the need for proper health protection, (2) the need to provide sound, modern education, and (3) the need to provide the Indians with economic opportunities that they can improve their living standards. (Thompson, 1955).



Mt. Edgecumbe Highschool Building and Education Office, 1951
(BIA - Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbook TAHETA, 1951)



Principal Max W. Penrod
(BIA - Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbook TAHETA, 1950)

Under the direction of Principal Max Penrod and nine staff members, Mt. Edgecumbe Boarding School opened on February 22, 1947 with the arrival of 245 Eklutna students traveling by way of Alaska Coastal Airlines. They were soon joined by 84 sophomore and junior students from the Wrangell Institute, ending the school's first semester on May 17, 1947 with 450 students. Many improvements were made to the school during its first summer months. The school reopened September 15, 1947 with 600 students along with 40 educational staff, and graduated 50 seniors in 1948 (Druxman, 1949). Of the 50 graduates, the majority of them started at the Wrangell Institute. The rest at the Eklutna and White Mountain Vocational Schools, as well as Sheldon Jackson High School and various public community high schools throughout the territory (Druxman, 1949). On December 10, 1948, Mt. Edgecumbe School received full accreditation from the Northwest Association of Secondary and Higher Schools, a standing made retroactive to September 13, 1948. The inclusion of an academic program allowed for graduated students of Mt. Edgecumbe to qualify for universities and colleges. By 1954, enrollment was up to 619 (Parran, 1954). From 1947 to 1965 Mt. Edgecumbe was the only public secondary school within Alaska and available to Alaska Native children living in rural communities with no secondary school. The state eventually opened several regional boarding schools, but none were as large or long-lived as Mt. Edgecumbe (Hirshberg & DelMoral, 2009, p. 2).

Mt. Edgecumbe was initially divided into three components: The Elementary School; the High School; and Adult Education. The combination of these three programs created the largest school in Alaska and provided some of the most exceptional educational opportunities on the West Coast (Druxman, 1949). The elementary school, which taught grades five through eight, accommodated students from around the territory. Circumstances included children whose community was too far from a school system, orphaned children, children with ill parents, and children from the Government School in Sitka (Coughlin, 1947). However, the Elementary School was soon eliminated to accommodate more high school and vocational students. Boasting high standards for admittance, high school students were offered



Student arriving for school at Mt. Edgecumbe ca. 1950s (G. Nelson photograph)

the opportunity to partake in both traditional academic and vocational schooling. Students were given the prospect for academic coursework in preparation for college or university, but were encouraged by staff to learn a trade or special skill such as shorthand or typing (Coughlin, 1947).

Mt. Edgecumbe School briefly offered an adult educational program with the philosophy that, “being born too soon may not deprive them of the opportunities their children were having...”. The program at Edgecumbe sought to offer adults from villages throughout Alaska new trades and professions (Coughlin, 1947).

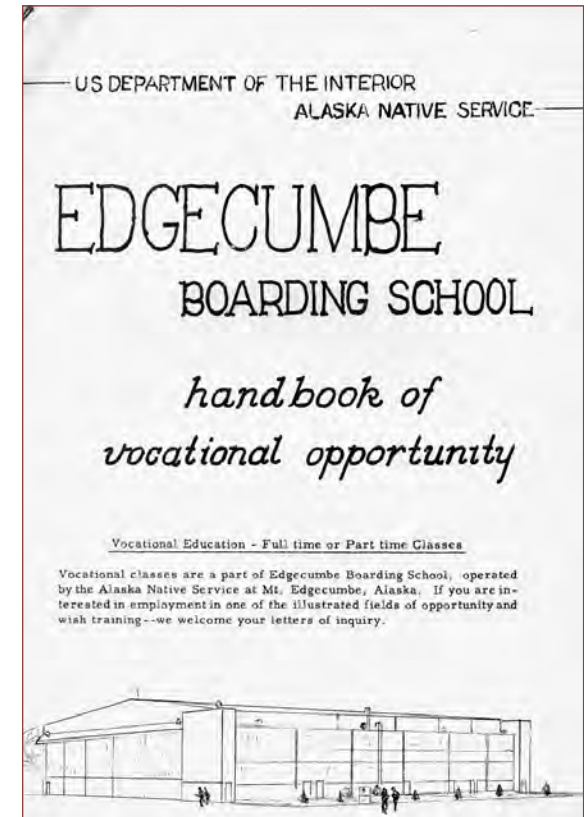
Alaska’s Territorial Department of Education and the Veterans Administration recognized the school as qualified to instruct students under the provisions of the G.I. Bill of Rights, or the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. This bill made education accessible to any World War II veteran capable of fulfilling the admissions requirements. Public Laws 16 (1943) and 346 (1944) also granted educational and vocational training benefits to veterans.

Academic subjects were the same as those offered at the Alaska Territorial Schools of the time. Courses included English, Algebra, Geometry, General Mathematics, World History, U.S. History, Alaskan History, Civics, General Science, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Music, Physical Education, Typing, Stenography, Commercial Law, and Economics.

The Vocational School was viewed by the BIA as the most important branch as it offered a level of programming adaptable to the Alaskan economy (Druxman, 1949). The program was intended to develop skills, knowledge, and training in a students’ chosen line of work post-graduation and support gainful employment immediately upon completion of the same. The Vocational School began in 1947 with the Commercial, Home Economics, and Vocational Shop Departments. Students registered for only vocational programming spent six hours per day, five days a week, for at least 72 weeks conducting “the same kind of work as will be required on the job for pay” (Druxman, 1949). Upon completion, a certificate in the form of a traveling card was issued in recognition of the students’ accomplishment in the specified training.

Commercial Department: The Commercial Department was focused upon developing skills for a career in business (Druxman, 1949). Classes included Typing, Shorthand, Bookkeeping, Business Law, and Economic Geography.

Home Economics: In the Home Economics Department, girls could take courses such as Nurses-Aide Training (later a certified nursing program), Matron Training, Clothing, Food Preparation, Childcare and Home Nursing, Meal Planning and Serving, and Home Management and Furnishing. The Home Economics Center included a banquet room, a textile classroom, and six units located in the Central Mess building. The kitchen units contained different equipment so students could learn using equipment similar to what they would find at home. This practice



Mt. Edgecumbe Boarding School Brochure, ca. 1953 (G. Bartolaba Collection)



VS building serving as "Home Management Cottage"
(BIA - Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbook TAHETA, 1950)

continued in a program called "Practice Cottage" (Strand, 2019). Former Home Economics teacher Marcia Strand shared, "One side of the house used electricity and the other side of the house used oil, so the girls could learn to cook and clean and to keep different houses with different backgrounds" (Strand, 2019).

Nursing: Although a Nurses-Aide Training program was available to all students when the school opened, in 1952, the program expanded and became the *School of Practical Nursing* and recognized as the only formal nurses training program in the Territory of Alaska. In 1953, the school was accredited by the National Association for Practical Nurse Education, and graduates took the national examinations prepared by the National League for Nursing. Although

boys and girls aged 17 to 35 years old were eligible, provided they were physically able and had completed eight grades, the school was only available to Native women at the time (Parran, 1954). **Dental:** The Dental Training Program coupled with the nursing program. The enrollment for dental technicians increased continuously for dental technicians and by the third year, reached ten students. All students completing the course found employment with the ANS (Parran, 1954). Through this program and cooperation with PHS, a full time doctor and nurse were available to students. New students were given complete physical examinations which included x-rays, blood tests, and immunizations. With the threat of tuberculosis close-by, X-rays were repeated twice a year. Each dormitory was equipped with an infirmary, with less serious cases treated at the school clinic. Seriously ill students were transported to the Mt. Edgecumbe hospital.

The Vocational Shop Department: The Vocational Shop Department was divided into Industrial Shops and Vocational Shops. The Industrial Shop courses ran in conjunction with the regular academic program of the high school curriculum and included courses in Wood-Working, Metal Work, Drawing, Cabinet Making, Machine Shop, and Engines. The Vocational Shop was further divided into three groups; Boat-Building, Carpentry, and Gas and Diesel Engine Maintenance and Operation (Repair in later years), (BIA - Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbook TAHETA, 1950). Other Vocational School courses and programs offered were Boat Handling and Navigation, Heavy Duty Equipment Operation, Power Plant Operation, Refrigeration, and Native Arts and Crafts.

Boat Handling & Navigation: In support of the Seamanship and Navigation Vocational course programming, and to facilitate transportation needs for students and supplies, the school acquired the *USMS Army FS 46*, a 114-foot surplus Army cargo and passenger vessel. The vessel was brought to Mt. Edgecumbe from Seward by the *M/S North Star*, another ANS vessel, and renamed the *M/S Mt. Edgecumbe* (BIA - Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbook TAHETA, 1950; Druxman, 1949). The ship acted as a modern-day school bus making eight trips each year between Mt. Edgecumbe and other southeastern ANS stations and Seattle. It carried approximately 1,000 tons of supplies in conjunction with the training program. Civilians often hitched rides as far as Seattle during supply runs (Easton, 2019). In 1950, it



Nursing Program
(BIA - Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbook TAHETA, 1953)



M/S Mt. Edgecumbe ca. 1950s (G. Nelson photograph)

was reported that 16 trainees were assigned to the vessel, while 25 students who had completed courses were employed with regular positions on commercial and government boats (Olsen, 1954-1950).

Arts: The Indian Arts and Crafts Board was established in the DOI under provisions of the Act of August 27, 1935 (U.S. DOI, BIA, 1959). Its principal functions were to promote the production of indigenous arts and crafts by Natives and help with the marketing of such products. The Native Arts and Crafts Program at Mt. Edgecumbe followed in this philosophy and began as a club under the direction of “Art and Crafts Specialist” George Federoff. Federoff pled the economic importance of such an arts program, the necessity to fund it, and for a position amongst the faculty. In 1948, going above the head of Principal Penrod, Federoff convinced the General Superintendent Don Foster of



Students in the Arts & Crafts Program restoring totem poles from the Sitka National Historical Park. (Geeslin/Foster correspondence, January 8, 1948, National Archives, Seattle)

the commercial importance of such a skilled trade and secured a budget of \$1000 and a position of instruction. By the end of 1949, Federoff was the head of the department and the program flourished in the next decade (ANS correspondence, 1948-1950, National Archives, Seattle).

Recreation: Edgecumbe students had many opportunities to recreate. The Recreation Building contained a modern gymnasium, six-lane bowling alley, three pool tables, a ping-pong table, and the *Ships Service* (retaining its Navy name), a soda fountain and store operated by the student council. One of the three dormitories, Dormitory Number Two, was converted into the Social Hall Building containing a social hall, the school library, and a chapel. The gymnasium was the scene of school sports such as boxing and basketball, for which the Sitka Schools were a frequent competitor. Students were also offered other supervised physical activities and intramural athletics. Students could join various clubs including music, drama, science, camera, a ski club, and Boy and Girl Scouts. Religious services were offered to students and a full-time nondenominational Chaplain was made available. Sitka ministers also provided religious guidance to Edgecumbe students (Druxman, 1949).

Student Council, Civics, & Economics: The Edgecumbe Student Council comprised a representative from each dormitory and recognized organizations, and members elected by the student body. The Council managed all student activities, directed functions and business enterprises, and handled minor student offenses. Serious offenses were handled by the Principal. The Councils’ control extended to the policy that the Student Council Treasurer must sign all checks for each organization. Students were taught to manage their own affairs, both social and financial. It was not legal for BIA to collect admissions charges or other fees. In order for the school/student body to engage in all of these activities which BIA Federal appropriations could not be used for, it became necessary for the school to have a separate and viable student entity, which could take in and spend student money. Of the Mt. Edgecumbe Student Bank, the teacher and scholar Thomas R. Hopkins wrote,

“The Mt. Edgecumbe Student Bank was an anomaly compared to those of other BIA boarding schools, which banks normally deposited small amounts for individual students. Contrarily, several Mt. Edgecumbe students were full-fledged commercial fishermen, working on fishing boats throughout the summer months. These students arrived at the school in September with several hundred (sometimes several thousand) dollars to deposit. In addition, all student activities, i.e., the Student Store, the Bowling Alley, Basketball games, etc., managed by students under the supervision of a faculty advisor, deposited funds in the Students Bank maintained accounts with commercial banks in Sitka. The commercial banks coveted this business with the Mt. Edgecumbe Student Bank. I soon learned that the Mt. Edgecumbe Student Activities Association kept at least \$10,000 in each of the two Sitka banks. These were savings accounts and earned interest income for the Association. The Association was managed by the Student Council, an elected student body” (Hopkins, 2008).



Merle Easton aboard the M/S Edgecumbe circa 1950s (G. Nelson photograph)

Part III


Mt Edgecumbe's Vocational Shop Program

With the Vocational Shop Department divided into the Industrial and Vocational Shops, the Vocational Shop was further divided into three groups; Boat-Building, Gas and Diesel Engine Maintenance and Operation, and Carpentry (BIA - Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbook TAHETA, 1950).

The Vocational Shop Association formed at Mt. Edgecumbe like other clubs and associations. The 1949 yearbook noted the purpose of the association as, "to make the best use of what we have – be it material or opportunity" (Mt. Edgecumbe School, 1949, p. 33). Improvements during the summer break in 1948 included repurposing *Hangar 2*, of the naval aircraft hangar at the Sitka Naval Operating Base, to become the location of the shops for the Department (BIA - Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbook TAHETA, 1948, p. 103). Similar to how nursing students got practical experience at the adjacent Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital, students of the Vocational Shop Program played a vital role in enabling the community and hospital to maintain their functions while students achieved certification for future work.


Boat-building: Bob Modrell, of Seattle, Washington, headed the boat-building class from 1948 to 1955. The 1951 TAHETA Yearbook notes students rebuilt a shoreboat that year. In subsequent years, Modrell and his students built a commercial troll fishing boat and maintained the fleet of shore boats. They also used Hangar 2 for their shop as well as an old Navy boathouse that included a marine ways. Modrell noted, "While some of the vets were interested in boatbuilding as a career, none of the high school students were; they were mainly interested in being able to repair their own boats" (Poulson, 2016). In 1955, after administrators cut the program, Modrell went to work for PHS and continued to maintain the shore boats until a bridge across the Sitka Channel was constructed in 1972.

Gas and Diesel Engine Maintenance and Operation: The Gas and Diesel Engines course also served in the community as a practical training course for future endeavors. Students in this course rebuilt and kept-up engines in the community's buses, rebuilt the engine of the Shoreboat *Arrowhead*, and in 1951 concentrated their work on the overhaul of a D-8 Caterpillar tractor (BIA - Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbook TAHETA, 1951).



VOCATIONAL SHOPS

The Vocational Shop Association has as its purpose to make the best use of what we have - be it material or opportunity. To develop this organization a representative was selected from each of the phases of the Vocational Shop, and from this representative group officers were elected. George Walters, the advanced motors group, was elected president; Emil Notti, sophomore metal shop, vice-president; Ted Borbridge, advanced machine shop, treasurer; Allen Chernoff, sophomore wood shop, secretary; Raymond Roberts, boat building, student council representative. Robert Clark, freshmen wood shop; George Ridley, freshmen metal shop; Robert Armstrong, advanced machine shop; and August Anderson, carpentry class, are also members of this association.



Left to Right; E. Notti, R. Clark, R. Roberts, G. Ridley, T. Borbridge, R. Armstrong, A. Anderson, G. Walters, A. Chernoff.

HOME CONSTRUCTION THROUGH MT. EDGECUMBE'S VOCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

During the 1947-48 school years, vocational programming at Mt. Edgcumbe included courses for drafting, gas and diesel engines, machine shop, wood working, and miniature house construction. In the advanced classes, students applied their skills to boatbuilding. However, even at its onset, the carpentry program was deemed necessary to assist the BIA with home construction due to the dire shortage of housing on the island.

In 1947, J. Loyd Ripley and his wife A. Teresa Ripley came to Edgcumbe from the Wrangell Institute to assist in the opening of the school. The 1949 yearbook was dedicated to Mrs. Ripley, a much-loved history teacher. J. Loyd Ripley began his career at Mt. Edgcumbe in 1947 as the head of Vocational Training and evolved the program into the Vocational Shop Department by the 1949-50 schoolyear. As the Vocational Shop Department head, Ripley promoted campus maintenance man, Mr. George Nelson to Mt. Edgcumbe faculty as a carpentry instructor. George worked in maintenance and first appears as a faculty member in the 1950 yearbook (BIA - Mt. Edgcumbe Yearbook TAHETA, 1950). Following accreditation, in 1950, the program was expanded from building miniature houses and the construction of bus shelters to assisting with the housing needs of ANS and the Edgcumbe community.

With the immediate need for housing and the school's objective to teach students a professional skill to be carried into adulthood, prefabricated or house packages/kits were perfect solutions for the carpentry program at Mt. Edgcumbe. The ability to order and assemble a house quickly was made possible by precut or mail order houses, which became popular in the early 20th century. Companies such as Aladdin (1906-1982), Sears Roebuck (1906-1940), and Pacific Ready-cut Homes (1908-1940) offered kits that contained precut, notched, and numbered lumber and other parts, and were designed to be assembled on site. Both Sears and Pacific Ready-cut ceased offering their package homes as the U.S. prepared for war, and only Aladdin continued to offer package homes after the war. Pacific Ready-cut sold approximately 40,000 units, Sears & Roebuck sold 70,000 and Aladdin sold approximately 75,000 units.

After World War II, the demand for housing was unprecedented across the U.S. because no houses were built due to a focus on the war effort coupled with the Great Depression. This led to a significant shortfall in housing available for those veterans coming home from the war. The housing shortfall prompted Congress to fund research into prefabricated housing and any other means by which to alleviate the housing shortage. Initially, the U.S. government thought that unemployment would be the biggest issue to be dealt with postwar, but it was not and was quickly determined to be the housing market. Mt. Edgcumbe School had a role in the U.S. Government's attempts to deal with the overwhelming housing shortfall throughout the country.

The primary dampers on the "prefabricated home" market during this period was the Great



Mt. Edgcumbe Bus Stop 1966, (G. Nelson photograph)

VOCATIONAL CARPENTRY

These pictures show the carpentry class in action.

This house was built and furnished by the students of vocational carpentry.

Two years full time training in this class will assure you of work as an advanced apprentice. The wages are good - jobs are plentiful - and the work is steady.

If you would like to learn carpentry as a trade read this little book carefully and apply at once.

The Class enrollment will be limited to sixteen full time students. Avoid dissatisfaction. Act now!

Learn to build with wood, one of Alaska's most plentiful and most valuable natural resources. It is a material with a "Feel", a pleasant wholesome feel. If you acquire skill wood can be more easily shaped to your needs than any other permanent material.

If you decide to learn this trade then plan to work at it steadily after you finish training. Remember, in order for your training to be an advantage you must work at the trade when trained.

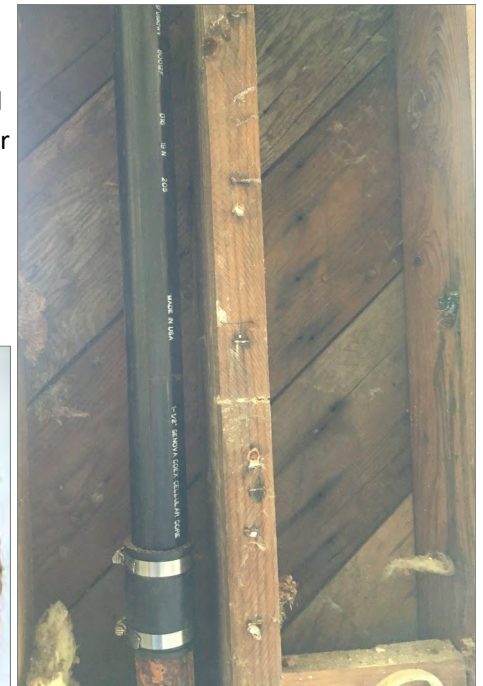
There is an old saying that "Every family wears out three houses," and "Every wedding creates a need for another house." Good carpenters will never be idle long.

Mt. Edgcumbe Boarding School Brochure, ca. 1953 (G. Bartolaba Collection)

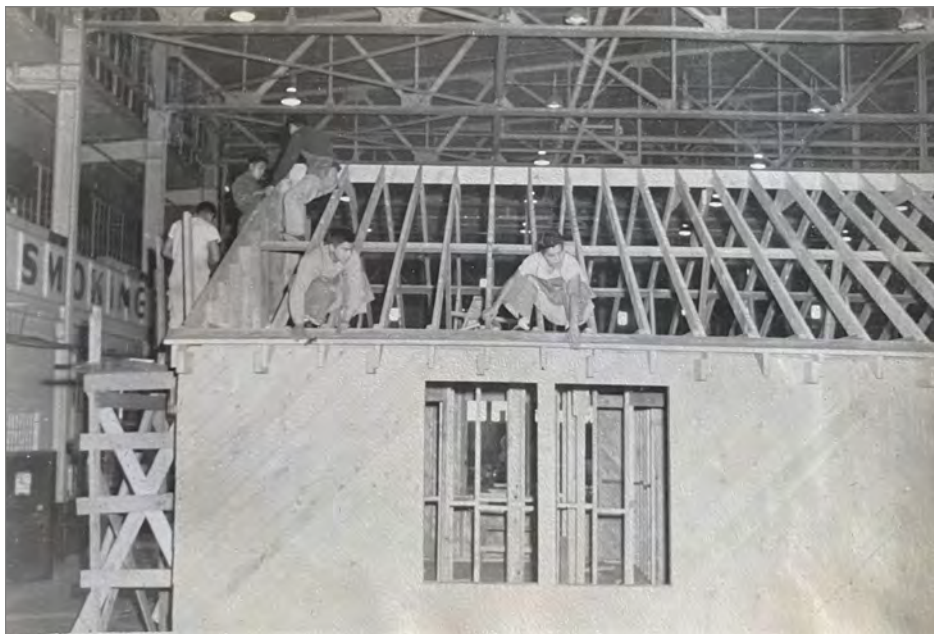
Depression and then World War II when the shift was to war-time production and a cease of home building to keep war time industries focused on supplies. Where traditional houses were ordered and the materials cut-to-length at the site, the packages did away with much of that by offering pre-cut and organized materials with a set of drawings to aid in assembly and construction. Where a master carpenter/craftsman was needed to assemble homes, the new trend of standardizing homes for quick construction required an individual to read maps and follow specifications for construction. It's not to say that a carpenter was not needed, but an understanding of the plans provided by the kit home manufacturers was a necessity. By standardizing floor layouts, wall lengths (both internal and external) and ceiling heights, manufacturers and suppliers could offer building packages in known quantities. A good example of this is having a wall length in multiples of 2 feet or 4 feet and wall heights at 8 feet. Since the mainstream production of plywood began in the U.S. in approximately 1928, the post war production of buildings utilizing multiples of full or half sheets of 4 feet by 8 feet plywood became the norm. Even so, the use of diagonal bracing, known as ship-lap, found in many houses was commonly used well into the 1960s and 1970s. This was more a consequence of accessibility to the product and in some cases ease of shipping. Diagonal bracing could be shipped in longer lengths that fit a "package" shipment more easily, as are the Mt. Edgecumbe built homes. It should also be noted that diagonal bracing is also in many cases a superior bracing mechanism than plywood. Plywood can only span up to 4-foot by 8-foot



House insulation from VS-1, 2019



Ship-lap diagonal sheathing from VS-1, 2019



Mt. Edgecumbe students & diagonal sheathing on shop building ca. 1950s (G. Nelson photograph)

section whereas diagonal bracing can span lengths up to 16 feet, and the longer the diagonal bracing, the more effective the structural component. More traditional house builders still to this day use diagonal bracing (Martin, 2019).

The Government's interest in prefabricated homes was largely due to the idea of streamlining the construction of affordable housing as rapidly as possible. Standardization of floor plans, heating, ventilation, plumbing and electrical plans meant that suppliers could ship known quantities of materials separate from that of the lumber supplier, roofing contractor etcetera and know that the quantity of material needed would not change from location to location with a standardized design. The BIA was no different. BIA architects likely drafted house plans with general construction notes and sent them to suppliers, including lumber mills, who could then perform a quantity take-off and assemble a "prefab-package" of materials to be sent to the home builder.

The drawings sent to the Mt. Edgecumbe campus were traced by students but were a product of BIA mass-produced drawing sets for buildings constructed elsewhere around the country. They utilized the same floor plan, and as such

could be easily supplied and quickly put into production. The distinction is in the lower right corner of the drawings where it shows the “Prepared By”, “Traced By” and “Checked By”. Original drawing sets do not have initials in the “Traced By” box (Martin, 2019).

The Vocational Carpentry Houses are a combination of both conventional and prefabricated construction techniques. When the program began in 1947, students studied the design and construction of miniature houses. Prior to this time, students were taught basic carpentry skills. In 1948, those skills were first applied as a large-scale building to the design and completion of two, three-car garages, and then the construction of a conventionally built stick-framed home (VS-1).

By the 1950s, their skills were applied to the construction of the Vocational Carpentry houses. There were two housing styles available at the time; these were “minimal traditional” and “ranch”. These homes were distinguished not by the mode of design but by that of construction. The homes were constructed in their entirety and then moved into the location where they were then occupied.

Nelson led the carpentry program in constructing contract homes on behalf of the BIA (ANS) Construction Division for both hospital and school employees. The contract homes were built from drawings sent by the BIA Construction Division and stamped by Edward A. Poynton, architect and chief of the BIA’s Buildings and Utilities Office. Using building materials sent up by vendors in the Seattle area and often transported via the M/S Mt. Edgecumbe, students learned nearly every aspect of how to construct a home.

Built in 1950, a two-bedroom home was the first in a series of small houses referred to as VS buildings, labeled as “VS” for “Vocational Shop”. These houses were numbered 1 thru 8 according to their order of completion. Similarly, houses constructed under contract to the Public Health Service were labeled “PHS” 1 thru 5. In total, at least 13 houses and two garages. Labeled as “VS-1”, the concrete foundation for the first house was laid in November of 1950, and the wood frame and roof were completed by December. By February of 1951, the majority of the framing had been completed. This structure was assembled on site at Charcoal Island and was one of two houses built in place during the years of 1951 and 1952. The first occupants of VS-1 were George Nelson, his wife Ruth, and his daughter Merle.



Mt. Edgecumbe student surveying ca. 1950s (G. Nelson photograph)

Beginning in 1952, house assembly moved to cover in former WWII Hangar 2 where the vocational classes were conveniently held under a roof. To support the academic calendar to avoid the typically harsh Southeast Alaska winters, homes were assembled in the hangar during the fall and then moved to their foundations in the spring. While the houses were constructed in the hangar, the location where each house would be moved was surveyed, prepped, and a concrete foundation was built. Houses were then installed and the finish work was performed on site. As described in the 1953 TAHETA yearbook:

“The carpentry class is building a complete two-bedroom house inside the hangar, where, because of favorable working conditions, the project has progressed with very satisfactory speed. Two sixty-foot beams have been fabricated for moving the house and the foundation is already completed on the permanent site of the house. The Gas and Diesel group will engineer construction of the trucks for moving the building, without damage, to its new foundation. In addition to fabricating moving equipment for placement of the Vocational Carpentry House on its foundation, the two Vocational Gas and Diesel classes will provide the actual transportation of the house to its site” (BIA - Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbook TAHETA 1953, p. 57).

George Arthur Nelson (1903-1996)

Born in 1903 on the family farm six miles north of Star, Idaho, Arthur George Nelson worked on the farm until taking a smoke chaser job with the U.S. Forest Service in 1922. George worked various jobs in Idaho during the 1930s, including as an airmail pilot from Spokane, WA to Great Falls, MT. He then gained valuable construction experience working on the Arrowrock Dam, the Grand Coulee Dam, the Lake Washington Floating Bridge and the Russ Building in San Francisco as a member of the Local Carpentry Union.

In the spring of 1940, George began working for The Seims Drake Puget Sound assisting in the construction of the Sitka Naval Air Base on Japonski Island. As a carpenter, George worked on the hangers, now gymnasium and the school building, and quartered with the crew on the ship "City of Victoria". Seims Drake then sent George to Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian Islands to build a sea ramp for the Navy. His wife Ruth and baby daughter Merle Lynn joined him there but were evacuated after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. George was conscripted to work and could not leave with them.

In 1943, he was back in Alaska working as an engineer on the White Pass and Yukon Railroad in Skagway. When the Army abandoned buildings outside Skagway and the ANS setup a tuberculosis hospital, George was hired to do maintenance and prepare the temporary buildings for patients. As the temporary Army buildings had no skirting around the crawl space or insulation, the pipes froze as did the nurses! In 1947, George travelled with the staff by ship to assist with transferring patients when the hospital, staff and patients were moved to buildings on Alice Island, Sitka. His family was assigned one of the duplexes in Millerville. The windows were painted with chocolate blackout paint inside and outside and food was still in the refrigerator left by the previous naval occupant.

George continued working in maintenance until 1948 when he joined the Mt. Edgecumbe High School faculty as the carpentry teacher. In 1949, President Truman appointed his, wife Ruth Nelson, the first Mt. Edgecumbe Postmaster. George in his off time provided the labor to build the Post Office in a former garage conveniently located next to the waiting area to the shore boat docks. George also shared his carpentry talents with the rest of Sitka including assisting with building St. Peters By-The-Sea Episcopal Church rectory, which was designed by George during his weekends off of work.

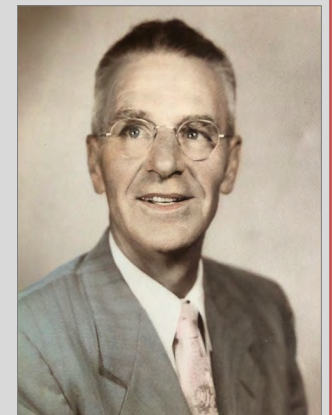
In 1958, George and Ruth moved to Las Cruces N. M. where George worked as an inspector for the Corp. of Engineers at White Sands Missile Base until his retirement. He continued to take inspection jobs with Contractors until he was 75 year old. He died in 1996 surviving Ruth by eleven years.

George was especially proud that his students received the same training as did a Union Carpenter's apprentice; skills that could get them good paying jobs.

~Merle Easton (daughter), 2020



BIA three bedroom house plans (Mt. Edgecumbe High School Maintenance Shop files)



George A. Nelson, Faculty Photograph, TAHETA, 1952

STUDENT-BUILT PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE BUILDINGS ON TONGASS DRIVE

Built by vocational carpentry students between 1953 and 1958, and located on the west side of Tongass Drive, across the drive from Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital, remain four Public Health Service buildings, PHS-2, 3, 4, and 5. While three of the former residences are on and are parallel to Tongass Drive, PHS-5 is located on and faces Seward Avenue. Retaining staggered setbacks and front lawns with minimal landscaping, the properties maintain front entryways accessed by short concrete sidewalks and a wooden staircase. The setback of the houses, the alternating of house styles in their location and their orientation in relationship to the hospital and the school suggest an overall well-thought-out landscape plan.



PHS Building on Tongass Drive, 2019

In view of the homes to the north and across Seward Avenue is Hangar 2, the former WWII Sitka Naval Operating Base and home of Mt. Edgecumbe Vocational Program. The Mt. Edgecumbe Medical Center Campus, once the WWII Naval Operating Base, is now an expansive medical complex utilizing many of the remaining WWII buildings and is owned by IHS and operated by SEARHC.

Originally designed as single-family dwellings, PHS-5 PHS-2 and PHS-4 are package homes of a contemporary “Ranch Style” and PHS-3 and are of the “Traditional Minimalist” style. All four homes were built by vocational carpentry students in the years between 1953 and 1958, although very similar, none of the homes were exactly the same as each home had either trim packages or accoutrements that were different and distinctive. All four of these structures had shared aspects of “prefabricated home packages” (Lambin, et al., 2017).



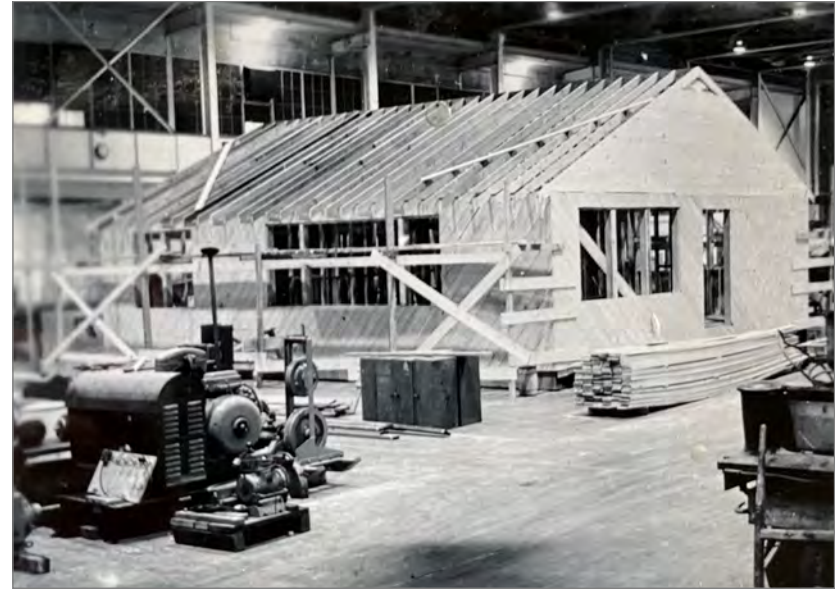
PHS Building on Tongass Drive, ca. 1950s



Mt. Edgecumbe Vocation Students ca. 1950s (G. Nelson photograph)



Edgecumbe Students ca. 1950s (G. Nelson)



Mt. Edgecumbe Vocational Shop ca. 1950s (G. Nelson photograph)

The first of the PHS buildings was likely PHS-1 as per the naming protocols and located on Alice Island between VS-4 and VS-7, but is no longer. PHS-2 and PHS-4, the “Ranch Style” homes, were 24’ x 42’ in size with a gable on hip roof style. A large gable on the north end of the facade projects at right angles from the main roof axis towards the street. These houses also utilized diagonal structural sheathing but were overlaid with sawn wooden shingles. The roofs of both houses were also covered with skip-sheathing and sawn shingles. The gable ends featured a cross-hipped-Dutch gabled roof and the eaves extended closer to 2 feet beyond the edge of the structure and had more of an overhang than that of the PHS-3 and PHS-5 (Lambin, et al., 2017).

PHS-3 and PHS-5 were both 26’ x 45’ in size. Both buildings had an arctic entry on the short axis of the building and utilized diagonal structural sheathing which was then covered with asbestos siding shingles. The roofs were sawn shingles with the gable ends tight to the edges of the structure with no overhang. The eave ends of the roof extended approximately 16 inches past the walls of the structure. This design feature minimized “ice-damming” at the outside wall which is more common on larger overhangs which in many cases leads to a leaky roof when water “ponds” behind the ice dam beyond the warm envelope of the building (Martin, 2019).



Mt. Edgecumbe Students finishing a home on Charcoal Island circa 1950s (G. Nelson photograph)

PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE BUILDING 2 (PHS-2)

PHS-2, located at 219 Tongass Drive, was originally designed as a three-bedroom, single-family dwelling. It was constructed and completed in the Mt. Edgecumbe Hangar in 1957 and moved to Tongass Drive.



PHS-2, ca. 1979 (CH2M Hill photograph)

For the first three decades of the house, families occupied PHS-2. The first family to live in the home was the Larson Family. Mr. Larson worked at the Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital, likely in materials management. Following the Larson family, from 1960 to 1968, Frank and Fran Clayton, and their children Sandi, Steele, and Bill occupied PHS-2. The Sutton, Davidson, and James families followed, all of whom worked at the hospital and had children. It sat vacant until it was remodeled in 1992 for use as offices.



PHS-2, 2020

“On moving houses built in hangar to foundation, we used hydraulic jacks, lifting 2 inches at a time, moving hydraulic jacks around. The long timbers were underneath the houses and picked up the house with those timbers. We put rollers, sections of pipe in between the timbers. We moved the house over onto the foundation, taking out timbers and pipes, sliding them out. “

~Aaron Isaacs, Klawock, AK
(Class of 1957)



Vocational Carpentry students posing for photograph ca. 1950s, (G. Nelson photograph)



PHS-2 or PHS-4 being transported from Hangar to Tongass Ave.
(BIA - Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbook, TAHETA 1958)

Reproduced at the National Archives at Seattle

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

REQUISITION 18 FEB. 1957

PROJECT NO. 858-2-49

FUNCTION: MT. EDGECUMBE EDUCATION TEACHING A & E COURSE

APPROPRIATION: 1750-591-000-5120

ACCOUNT: 1750-20

PROJECT NO.: 1751-2

CLASS	ITEM NO.	DESCRIPTION	QUANTITY	UNIT	UNIT PRICE	VALUE
OBTAINABLE FROM: AIR ASSOCIATES, INC., GLENDALE, CALIFORNIA						
GAS-312	(1)	DZUS GROMMET	200	per 100	1.25	2.50
AN737-22	(2)	HOSE CLAMP	6	EACH	.15	.90
AN737-26	(3)	HOSE CLAMP	6	"	.20	1.20
AN737-30	(4)	HOSE CLAMP	6	"	.25	1.50
AN737-34	(5)	HOSE CLAMP	6	"	.30	1.80
MIL-H-4000	(6)	SZ. 4 FUEL & OIL HOSE 1/4" I.D.	2	FT.	.30	.60
MIL-H-4000	(7)	SZ. 6 FUEL & OIL HOSE 3/8" I.D.	2	"	.35	.70
MIL-H-4000	(8)	SZ. 8 FUEL & OIL HOSE 1/2" I.D.	2	"	.40	.80
MIL-H-4000	(9)	SZ. 10 FUEL & OIL HOSE 5/8" I.D.	2	"	.45	.90
OBTAINABLE FROM: SEARS, ROEBUCK & CO., SEATTLE, WASHINGTON						
SG4469	(10)	COMBINATION WRENCHES 5/16" END OPEN/1 END BOX	1	EACH	.55	.55
SAME NO.	(11)	3/7 5/8"	1	"	.59	.59
"	(12)	7/16" ATTENTION: Mr. Lachowsky	1	"	.65	.65
"	(13)	3/2" ATTENTION: Mr. Reed	1	"	.69	.69
"	(14)	9/16" ATTENTION: Control Clerk	1	"	.75	.75
"	(15)	5/8"	1	"	.79	.79

ESTIMATED TO TOTAL \$130.54

Delivery required by _____

CHEAPEST SURFACE TRANSPORTATION, BIA, MT. EDGECUMBE SCHOOL

ATTN: NIELSEN-MINTZ

Purchase Order "Attn: Nielsen-Mintz" Ave., 1957 (Nat'l Archives at Seattle)

PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE BUILDING 3 (PHS-3)

Uniquely constructed as a “stick-built” home. Often referred to as a “site-built”, PHS-3 was erected onsite and is located at 221 Tongass Drive. Originally constructed as a two-bedroom, single-family residence, it was remodeled in 1994 as an office building. Mt. Edgecumbe vocational students Aaron Isaacs, James Williams Jr., and their friends wrote their names on the beam above the main entrance of PHS-3 before the walls were finished. James Williams Jr. was in Sitka and able to, once again, see his and his classmate’s names above the doorway during the 1994 renovation (Isaacs, 2019; Williams, 2019; CH2MHill, 1979; Bartolaba, 2019-2020).

After Loyd Ripley’s untimely death, Mrs. Teresa Ripley and her son Greg were the first to live in PHS-3 from 1957 to 1958. Then from 1958 to 1962, Mr. Moody who was associated with the Alaska National Guard, his wife, and their daughters Laurel and Holly lived in PHS-3. The girls are Sitka High School graduates circa 1960s. From 1962 to 1966, Home Economics teachers Verna Jensen and Ida Scott occupied the home. From 1966 to 1968, a bachelor by the name of Richard Francis who was in charge of dormitory operations lived there with his son, Richard Francis Jr. While Mrs. Adele Trice served as a Home Economics Department supervisor, from 1968 to 1976 she lived with her husband and daughter in PHS-3 (Bartolaba, 2019-2020).



PHS-3, ca. 1979 (CH2M Hill photograph)

Aaron Isaacs in front of PHS-3, 2019
(KCAW radio photograph)



Students working on Charcoal Island home, circa 1957 (G. Nelson photograph)

“Today they want to use plastic in construction, but that causes condensation and then mold occurs. In our day it was tar-paper, put it all around and hardly any rot was found in the 1990s renovations. We used shiplap instead of plywood, 45-degree angles. Today is all plywood and isn’t good for preventing rot.

All of the houses had electricity and the electricity department taught the students that, they came in and worked together, same thing with the plumbers. These departments were students that came in and worked together with the carpentry students.

~James Williams Jr., Klawock, AK
Class of 1958)



Vocational Carpentry students posing for photograph circa 1950s (G. Nelson photograph)

PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE BUILDING 4 (PHS-4)

PHS-4 was constructed as a three-bedroom, single-family dwelling in the Mt. Edgecumbe Hangar and moved onsite to 223 Tongass Drive. Completed in 1958, PHS-4 was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Karl and their son Fred from 1958 to 1964. Mr. Karl had a lifetime career as a high-level administrator at Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital. In 1964, the house was occupied by a doctor and his wife who adopted an Alaska Native child being raised by an Orthodox Priest and who only spoke Russian. The following year, 1965, the Holland family lived in PHS-4 until the early 1970s. Mrs. Holland was a supervising nurse at the hospital. From 1979 to 1990 The Kanosh family called PHS-4 home. Mr. William Kanosh was a housekeeper with IHS. After the PHS employees moved out, the building sat empty until the 1991-1992 office renovations (Bartolaba, 2019-2020).



PHS-4 moved to its location on Tongass Drive across from the Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital.
(BIA - Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbook, TAHETA 1958)



House framing in shop class
(BIA-Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbook, TAHETA 1956)



PHS-4, 2020

“They had someone come in with a digger and then the students built the forms. They did the iron work and the form building. The students poured the concrete themselves using wheelbarrows. They would mix it in the big concrete mixers (whoever brought over the concrete, it was not students who mixed the concrete for the foundations) and bring it over to pour directly into the student’s wheelbarrows. It took about two months for the foundations to be completed in the fall.

Sam Jr. was a big, big fella. He was coming towards us with a wheelbarrow, I don’t know, maybe one of us was talking to him or something. But halfway over there he lost balance and you can’t... I’ll bet ya there’s 400 pounds of concrete, just guessing again, but that’s a lot of weight and he started falling over and we ran over there to try to help him, and we couldn’t help either. He dumped it all over and we just laughed.”

~Aaron Isaacs, Klawock, AK
(Class of 1957)

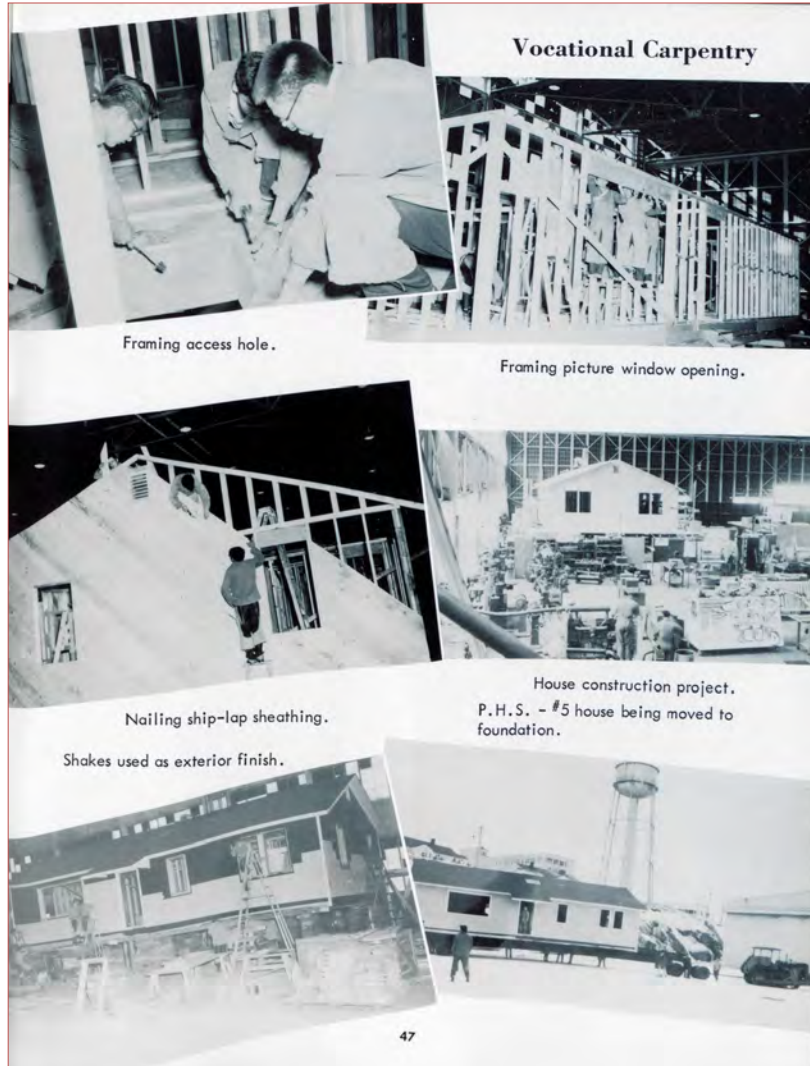


Pouring foundation for PHS building (BIA - Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbook, TAHETA 1958)

PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE BUILDING 5 (PHS-5)

Completed and moved onsite in 1959, this single-story, one and half bath dwelling is slightly smaller and faces Seward Street unlike the other PHS buildings that face Tongass Drive (CH2MHill, 1975).

From 1959 to 1963, the first occupants were the Director of Nurses, Hazel Kaye, and her teenage son, Bruce Kaye. In 1963, Mr. Spencer and Mrs. Evelyn Phillips lived in the house with their two children Jack and Pam. Mr. Phillips was an Executive Officer with the PHS. Similar to the other PHS buildings it was remodeled in the early 1990s to serve as offices for SEARHC (Bartolaba, 2019-2020).



The building progression of PHS-5. (BIA - Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbook, TAHETA 1959)



PHS-5, ca. 1979 (CH2M Hill photograph)



PHS-5, 2020



PHS-5, ca. 1979 (CH2M Hill photograph)

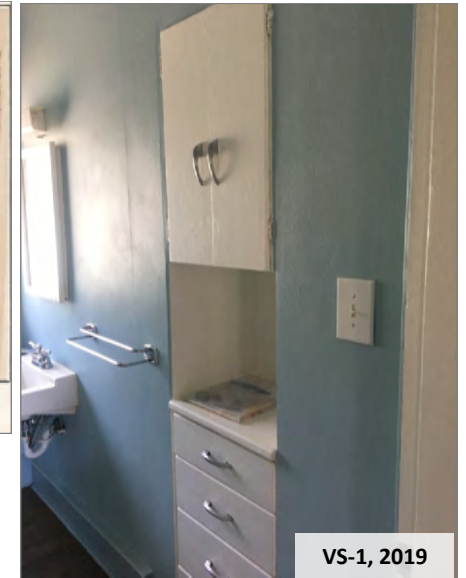
VOCATIONAL SHOP BUILDING 1 (VS-1)

VS-1, the first building constructed in the program is no longer on the Mt. Edgecumbe Medical Center Campus. However, it was identified during research to be located and in use as a home on Cascade Creek Road in Sitka. In the midst of carrying out upgrades and maintenance, former University of Alaska, Southeast and Mt. Edgecumbe High School shop teacher, Pat Hughes (pictured below), currently self-employed as a carpenter, realized it was likely a vocational shop structure. Indeed, it is the same house George Nelson and his students constructed in 1952 and became the Nelson family home (Easton, 2019, Hughes, 2019).

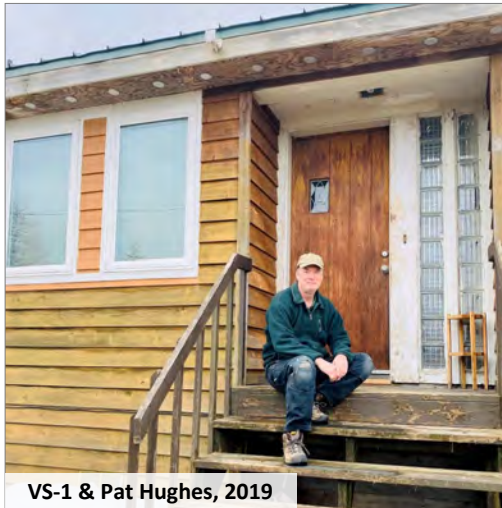


MVS-1 Kitchen

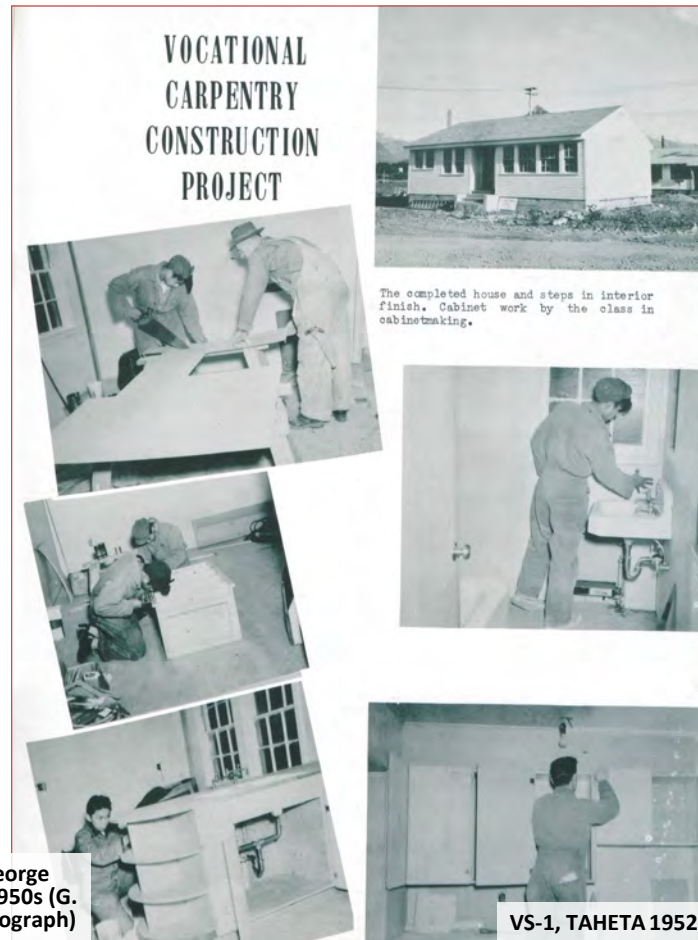
VS-1, ca. 1979
(CH2M Hill photograph)



VS-1, 2019



VS-1 & Pat Hughes, 2019



VS-1, TAHETA 1952



VS-1, 2019



VS-1 & George Nelson ca. 1950s (G. Nelson photograph)



VS-1, 1952 (G. Nelson photograph)

Part IV

The Mt. Edgecumbe Legacy

In 1955, the responsibility for the health of Alaska Natives went from BIA to PHS following the transfer of Indian Health Services to PHS. In 1975, under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, Native health programs began to transfer to tribal governments, which led to the formation of SEARHC in that same year. Under the Act, medical programs and facilities in Southeast Alaska that were designated for tribal management, are, as a non-profit, the responsibility of SEARHC.

While the BIA maintained educational obligations subsequent to the transfer of health services for nearly 10 years, in 1983 the BIA closed Mt. Edgecumbe after educating more than 9,000 Alaska Native children over a time span of thirty-six years (Hirshberg & DelMoral, 2009). However, two years later, the State of Alaska reopened and took over operating the campus. At that time, other than the PHS buildings, student-built homes were destroyed or auctioned off, some moved to Sitka.

Historically, Alaskan Natives confronted many challenges in educational performance, attainment, and opportunities. While vocational programming today is not as extensive, the current high school maintains excellence in education as it continues to serve Alaska Native children (Lambin, et al., 2017).

Gene Bartolaba, Mt. Edgecumbe Resident, 1949 to 1968

Beginning in 1949, Gene Bartolaba's father was employed by the BIA as a cook at the school and at PHS in the hospital and BOQ. Like most children of BIA employees, Gene took a Shoreboat across the channel to attend school in Sitka. He graduated in 1968.

Following high school graduation, Gene left Alaska to attend college in Idaho, transferring to Portland State University in 1969. In 1970, Gene joined and served in the Navy for four years.

Returning to Sitka, Gene became an I.B.E.W. electrician and recalls working with former Mt. Edgecumbe High School Carpentry Student James Williams on housing complex projects in Southeast Alaska.

Gene recalls fond memories of growing up in the Mt. Edgecumbe Community and has grown an appreciation that he was able to, "grow up on the Island".

Gene conducts his own research documenting the history of the Mt. Edgecumbe Community.



Researcher Gene Bartolaba & Candace Rutledge, 2019

1948 MESSAGE FROM DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION (GEORGE A. DALE, DIRECTOR)

Education should provide training in skills, habits, and attitudes which will make the student more able to earn a living and be a better and happier citizen. Such an education is devoted to the principles of giving the student an opportunity to learn how to better the desirable things he will do anyhow. A school with such an education to offer does not welcome the student who comes "because he thinks it is a good place to spend the winter" or who has been told that "it is a good place to come." It is open to the student who has in mind the goal of doing better the good things which he will do the rest of his life. This kind of education is worth the student's time and the tax payer's money.

Our Government has been generous in providing at Mt. Edgecumbe a school where opportunity exists which cannot be matched anywhere else in the Territory. It is the responsibility of the young native men and women of Alaska to use this opportunity to the fullest extent so that the Territory may have more and better teachers, nurses, lawyers, carpenters, seamen, doctors, fishermen, preachers, machinists, and above all, better parents and home makers as the future citizens of Alaska.

Channel Light, Vol. XII, No. 12, Mt. Edgecumbe School,
February 19, 1960

MT. EDGECUMBE: ENSUING WELL-BEING AND SUCCESS

Students in the BIA era of Mt. Edgecumbe expressed gratitude for their experiences at Mt. Edgecumbe that far surpassed a traditional education. This was especially true of the carpentry students of George Nelson. As an instructor, Mr. Nelson often filled the role of parent or guardian besides as instructor. Mr. Aaron Isaacs, Class of 1957, remembers Mr. Nelson as an “outstanding teacher...training I got was outstanding for me”. Mr. Isaacs returned to his Village of Klawock to start his own carpentry business with his sons and take leading positions within his community such as city administrator. To comprehend the legacy of Mt. Edgecumbe, we look to the professional accomplishments of former students. Across the state of Alaska and beyond, Alaska Native Elders from this era adamantly voice their appreciation for the skills cultivated at Mt. Edgecumbe. As measured by the BIA, the vast majority of students that left Mt. Edgecumbe furthered their educational opportunities and returned to Alaska to become prominent members of our communities and the state (Isaacs, 2019-2020).

While many students came to Edgecumbe for high school, the early years at Edgecumbe also offered elementary education. Paul White of Juneau shares that he not only went to kindergarten at Edgecumbe when it first opened, but he attended all four years of high school graduating in 1959. White went on to play basketball at

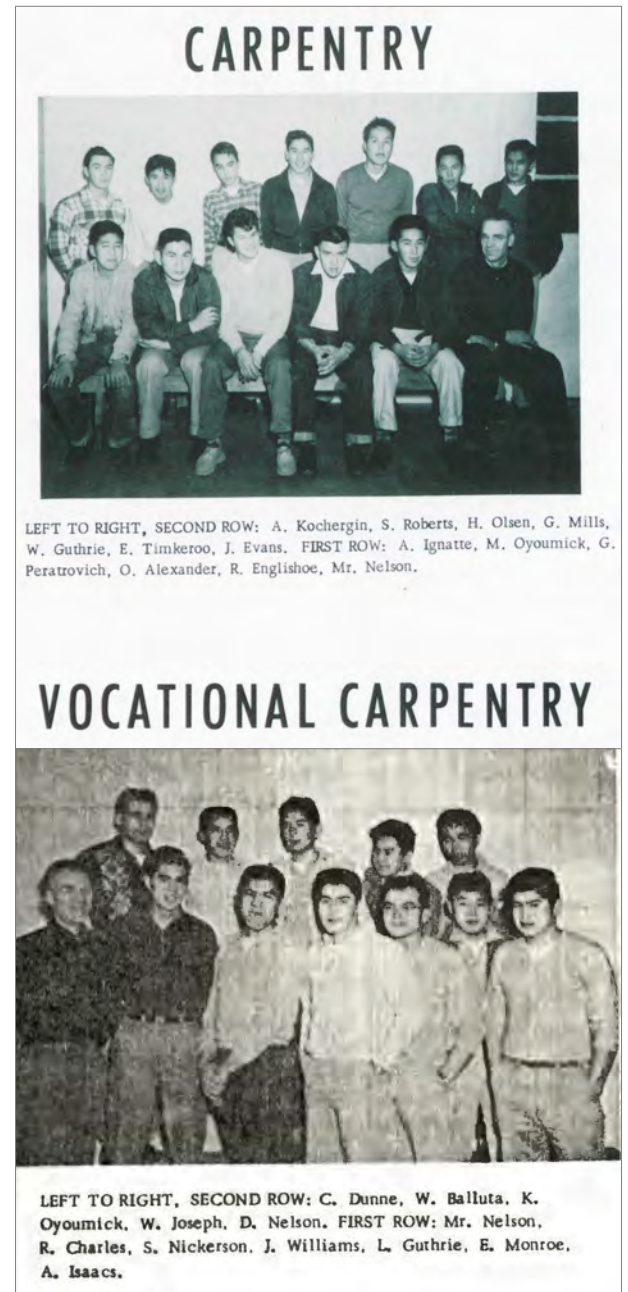
Aaron Isaacs, Class of 1957

When his school burned in Klawock, Mr. Isaacs transferred to Mt. Edgecumbe and participated in the vocational program and the construction of two PHS houses before his graduation and looks back on his time learning carpentry at MEBS as “one of the biggest thrills of my life”. Isaacs retained that thrill for carpentry as noted in speaking to him.

Following Mt. Edgecumbe, like many graduates, Isaacs pursued secondary training at Haskell Indian Nations University graduating in 1961. He moved to California to build high rises, one of which was a fifty-two-story in San Francisco. He was drafted into the army for two years and returned home to Klawock to establish a carpentry firm where he worked alongside his sons and trained his daughter and grandchildren to build as well. He went on to own two hardware and lumber businesses, one in Craig and the other in Klawock and constructed many buildings and structures for his community, including the Craig firehouse. He married his wife Betty in 1966 and their children and grandchildren are community leaders.



Aaron Isaacs in front of the Craig firehouse he led in constructing and adjoins his home community of Klawock, 2019



Mt. Edgecumbe shop classes, 1959 (top) and 1957 (bottom), Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbooks TAHETA

Colorado State University and notes the carpentry program as an influence for his choice of a civil engineering major. While at Colorado, White recalls taking a drafting class and noting much of the curriculum he had already learned at Mt. Edgecumbe. In fact, White completed in a month a portion of the engineering program that was to take a year and half due to the “excellent teachers” at Mt. Edgecumbe (White, 2019).

As many students traveled to Mt. Edgecumbe from impoverished conditions, they were often in awe of the furnishings and amenities the BIA provided. James Williams sums the experience of coming to Edgecumbe from the village that many experienced sharing, “Him [Aaron Isaacs] and I we grew up in poor conditions because we didn’t really have lots to eat and all that. I’ll give you an example. Went to the ANB Hall there and they were having church service and I went up there and kneeled down and start to pray, and the old timer came by and put his arm around me, and “Who do you want to pray for?” And I said, “Food.” “Food?” he said, “Yeah.” We prayed. Two days later, I never saw so much food in my life. I was sent to Mt. Edgecumbe. I saw all this food. Big tray, military tray. I mean, it was like heaven”. Years later Williams recalls running into his former instructor Gil Truitt at a Convention and Mr. Truitt



PAUL WHITE
Hoonah
It's all right to have a train of thoughts, if you have a terminal.

Paul White senior photograph, 1959 (BIA - Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbook TAHETA, 1959)



Dormitory life was always a feature in the Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbooks (BIA - Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbook TAHETA, 1955)

James Williams, Jr., Class of 1958

Inspired to be a carpenter after helping to build the cannery in his home community of Klawock, Williams also transferred to Mt. Edgecumbe when his school burned and was in the vocational carpentry program at Mt. Edgecumbe for three years. “They gave the students two weeks to make up their mind about what their specialty would be. I decided almost immediately that I wanted to be a carpenter. The school provided all of the tools, we did yard work around the dorms and campus to pay for the tools, hammer, hacksaw, chisel, braces. Of his instructor Mr. Nelson, Williams noted, “he was a simple and direct teacher”. After Edgecumbe, Williams hitched a ride on a fishing tender down to Bellingham and took a train to Kansas to attend school at Haskell with his toolbox in hand. He and his tools went on to San Francisco for work where Williams was a member of the union for 26 years. He returned to Klawock to build the school, 20 homes, a bridge, senior center, among other structures on Prince of Wales Island.

Construction Carpentry

LEFT TO RIGHT, BACK ROW: J. Williams, W. Pratt, G. Nelson, E. Johnson, Mr. Hathaway. FRONT ROW: E. Paul, N. Kozoloff, R. Wongittlin, M. Konooka.



Mt. Edgecumbe shop class (BIA - Mt. Edgecumbe Yearbook TAHETA, 1958)

asked him if he remembered his school interview with him and what he thought of it, he replied, “My first thought was I thought we were in heaven. No more going out on a rowboat to look for my food to eat. No more going down to the beach to get Cottonwood before I go to school so we could heat the house. No more going out in the woods and look for a deer or something so we could eat. And I never saw so many toilets in my life. You tucked us in, and we had our own bed...wow a shower. No more packing water. You tucked us in, you woke us up. We had our own light, we didn't have to pay for nothing. No, it was heaven. That was how I thought that man was, wow, he feels like brother.” (Williams, 2019)

Besides the mentorship experience, students became acquainted with each other's culture. The diversity of the Alaska Native culture may be incomprehensible to folks outside the state of Alaska, but as Williams notes, “The other thing I was really interested in, at first, they had a Caucasian running the dorm, and they couldn't understand each other because here was an Eskimo and here was a Caucasian, and they didn't understand the Tlingits, the Haida, the Tsimshians.” To remedy the inability to communicate with each other, older Tribal citizens were hired to translate. According to Williams, that “broke that ice and made it a lot easier... even school. They came in, they were just like a brother or mom... we're so far away a lot of us, and we didn't go home holidays or on weekends, they made it more comfortable” (Williams, 2019)

Growing up speaking almost only Tlingit at Mt. Edgecumbe, Mary Miller took English classes to work on speaking more clearly. She shares, “Mt. Edgecumbe, it gave me confidence, you know meeting other people from all over Alaska. Just made it easier for me to talk to people and I think that if it wasn't for Mt. Edgecumbe school I don't think I would have come out of my shell because I was really very shy.” (Miller, 2019).

The means by which Mt. Edgecumbe may be considered a legend is entirely attributed to the success of students in their adult lives. It can also be said that Mt. Edgecumbe Boarding School was a continuation of the boarding school philosophy, separating children from their parents, cutting them off from learning their traditional way of life, and devaluing their rich subsistence heritage.

The paradigm shift in the education of Alaska Native children to boarding school celebrated students' heritage, while simultaneously preparing them to thrive in an American economy very different from that of their parents and grandparents.



Mt. Edgecumbe students waiting for plane ride home ca. 1950s
(G. Nelson photograph)

CHANNEL LIGHT

Volume 4 Mt. Edgecumbe, Alaska, February, 1951 Number 2

TWO-BEDROOM HOUSE CONSTRUCTED BY STUDENTS MT. EDGECUMBE SCHOOL

Students Being Trained Built, Erect, Design Own Homes

Vocational carpentry students, supervised by their instructor, Mr. George Nelson, are constructing a two-bedroom house on Charcoal Island.

In September the foundation was laid and, little by little, it has grown until we can pretty well see what it will be like when finished in May.

The house is based on balloon construction (which means that the studding starts from the foundation rather than from the sub floor) and has a living room, two bedrooms, bath, kitchen, dinette, and utility room, which will have laundry trays, an electric hot water heater, and a hot water furnace.

The frame work is of 2 inch by 6 inch construction, will be covered on the outside with rustic siding, have a cedar shingled roof, and be completely insulated.

Though working six hours a day, as do other students, the carpentry class spends part of its time on the project and part on related subjects. They have learned to follow blue prints and to know what they are building. Mathematics has also been necessary as the whole house is designed in fractions of inches.

"Pirates," said Mr. Nelson, "aren't what one might think, and neither are styles. So the boys have had to learn a carpenter's vocabulary."

(Continued on Page 2)

GUARD HAS OPEN HOUSE
Company B at Sitka had open house for the public on Sunday, January 21, from 3 till 5 p.m.

They showed several moving pictures—one of the first forty days in Korea.

Displayed on tables about the Community Hall was their equipment, and certain members of the company explained to the guests the particular use of each type from the mummy bag to the automatic rifles.

As many of our boys belong to the company, their friends from Edgecumbe were especially glad to learn more about it.

About 400 people attended.

BOYS DORM HAS LEAGUE

The Dorm League, sponsored by Coach Harrigan, started early this year. Competing are three minor leagues—the first floor, being called the Igloo League; the second, the Salmon; and the third, the Northern Lights.

Games between sections were played until the three best sections from each floor had won their places for the play off.

Then hard fighting section 7 came to the top, winning all games played, and holds the title for the Igloo League.

(Continued from Page 5)

Channel Light, Vol. 4, No. 2, Mt. Edgecumbe School, February, 1951

Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital Medical Staff

The first PHS-1 house, originally located on Alice Island but no longer existent, was occupied by Dr. and Mrs. David L. Sparling, the physician for the school. On-call 24/7, he was the only physician for the school and the only pediatrician in Alaska. According to Marge Ward, who served as head nurse and acting orthopedic supervisor and also lived on Japonski Island for six years, “The students picked out who they wanted to have the house, and they picked them.” Regarding life on the island, “...We were always a little short-staffed, which was good because it kept everyone busy and they didn’t have time to complain, so busy working, no time to get into mischief” (Ward, 2019). “

In 1955, Shirley Anderson responded to an advertisement for nurses needed at Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital, and at the young age of 24, she was up for the adventure and joined the Edgecumbe community. She recalls, “They had a ward of 65 children, some with tuberculosis of the bone, some with cerebral palsy and some post-polio. And those wards were so joyful even though the children were so sick, that was quite a handful, but I just loved being with those children” (Anderson, 2019).

The tuberculous ward at Mt. Edgecumbe was moved to Oregon in 1964. Nurse Jean Frank was employed by BIA in the Public Health Service system and also served as the Mt. Edgecumbe school nurse. She recalled that the school clinic was moved to the hospital so children could be closer to the dental and x-ray services. She notes there were a lot of single people living on Japonski Island, but once married they would often move over to Sitka (Frank, 2019).

Mt. Edgecumbe: A Joyous Island Community

Operating a statewide boarding school and regional hospital takes a lot of human-power. All those people needed a place to live, and together they created the impressive and unforgettable community of Mt. Edgecumbe. While Sitka faced a housing shortage, a curriculum supporting students learning to build homes was the perfect solution for the community of Mt. Edgecumbe. From taking the shoreboats across the channel to Sitka to watching movies in the community theater, former residents of the Mt. Edgecumbe recall the sense of freedom and comradery often attributed to island living, but an extra-special variety. “It was the best place to grow up” Gene Bartolaba fondly notes, “everybody looked after each other” (Bartolaba, 2019).



Nurse with patient. With U.S. Navy blanket (UAF-2003-29-8, Elvra R. Scott photograph, Alaska and Polar Regions Collections, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks)



Mt. Edgecumbe Theatre (Teresa Redeagle photograph via Mt. Edgecumbe island family Facebook page)



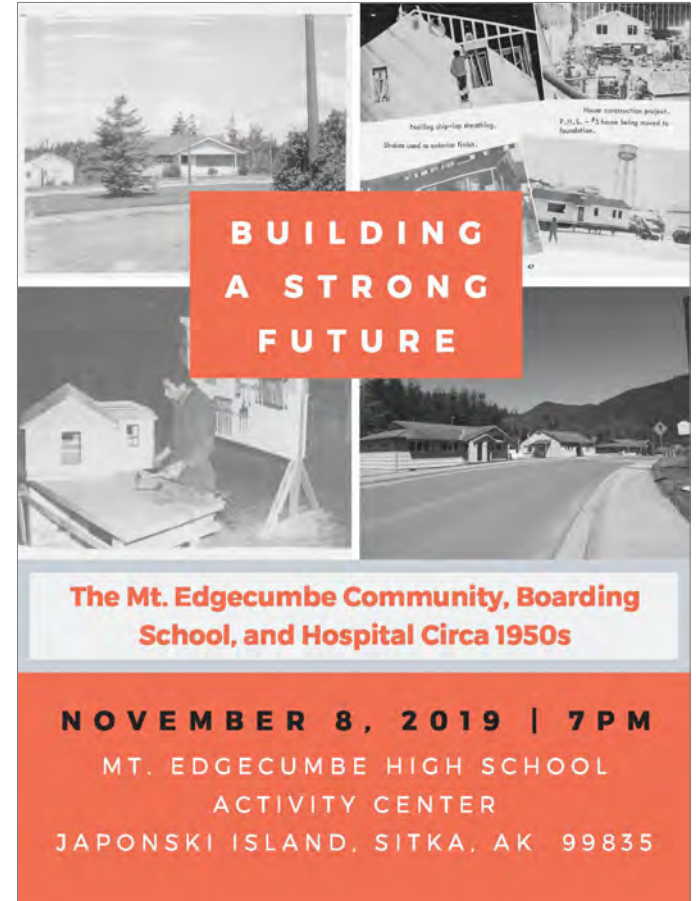
Shoreboat Dorothy ca. 1950s (G. Nelson photograph)

REMEMBERING MT. EDGECUMBE

In 2019, with the assistance of current Mt. Edgecumbe students and staff, Sea Level Consulting hosted a panel event to share stories from those that had attended or taught at the school, worked at the hospital, and those that grew-up in the Mt. Edgecumbe community circa 1950s and 1960s. Moderated by radio announcer Richard M^cClear, panelist included, via video, Merle Easton (George Nelson’s daughter) and in-person, Aaron Isaacs (Class of 1957), Pat Hughes (recent Mt. Edgecumbe High School Shop Instructor), Kent Hanson (Science Teacher 1963-1983), Marsha Strand (Home Economics Teacher 1964-1968), Norma Jean Frank (Hospital and School Nurse 1961-1962 and 1964-1968), and Shirley Anderson (Hospital and



Aaron Isaacs, Marsha Strand, Pat Hughes, Jean Frank, and Kent Hansen, 2019



Mt. Edgecumbe Remembers Event flyer, 2019



Merle Easton, daughter of Vocational Shop Teacher George Nelson and Mt. Edgecumbe Community Resident, 2019

“The legacy is definitely the students that were able to take their skills and work in the field, and this is what my father was really proud of and really wanted to hear stories. I’m sorry he’s not able to hear Aaron today”. ~ Merle Easton



Merle Easton as a young girl on the island ca. 1950s (G. Nelson photograph)



Rich M^cClear & Aaron Isaacs, 2019

School Nurse 1955-1966). Approximately 60 audience members gathered and participated in sharing fond memories and life in the Edgcumbe community. Moderator M^cClear asked for the panelists' thoughts on the legacy of Mt. Edgcumbe. Panelists replied conclusively, that Mt. Edgcumbe's lasting legacy is the people it brought together and the lessons and skills that have been taught to now multiple generations of Alaska Native people. Mt. Edgcumbe has touched many lives, both students and faculty alike, and will continue to be a positive influence for many years to come. The panelists are exceptional examples of the impact Mt. Edgcumbe school and community has had in their lives. A vast number of Edgcumbe students went on to become prolific and productive community members, positively shaping political and social affairs across the State of Alaska. Fond memories, long-standing friendships, and successful endeavors were the impressions Mt. Edgcumbe left upon the audience that evening.



Marsha Strand, former Mt. Edgcumbe Home Economics teacher, 2019

**“Well, look at Mr. Isaacs, what more can you say with two generations of contractors and expert carpentry.”
~ Marsha Strand**



“When I was here we had students from all over the state and when I graduated, I had friends everywhere, no matter where I went, and when we went to Haskell, we had friends all over the lower 48. The advantage is learning other people’s culture, other people’s business, and learning about other people. It gives you a great opportunity to be a craftsman or in business.” ~Aaron Isaacs



Aaron Isaacs former Mt. Edgcumbe student and carpenter and Pat Hughes, former Mt. Edgcumbe Highschool shop instructor, 2019

**“Students can go on to become carpenters, an occupation where you can step back and see what you did and be proud.”
-~Pat Hughes**



Jean Frank, Former Mt. Edgcumbe Hospital and School Nurse and Shirley Anderson, Former Mt. Edgcumbe Hospital Nurse, 2019

RESOURCES AND FUTURE STUDY

Research was compiled through the National Archives in Seattle, the Alaska State Library, the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. The Mt. Edgecumbe Boarding School yearbooks were especially useful to confirm timelines and provide an insight into the notions and achievements of students during the era Mt. Edgecumbe School and Hospital was operated by the BIA. When we asked former student interviewees if they had photographs to share, the common reply was, “No, a camera was too expensive in those days.” However, as the proud instructor he was, George Nelson took numerous photographs and slides, providing many to the yearbook staff. His daughter Merle Easton has gently cared for this collection and graciously shared them with us for this project. Gene Bartolaba was also an esteemed resource, his enthusiasm for the project was catching and his knowledge for the history of the island invaluable. Thank you to all the former students, instructors, and residents of Mt. Edgecumbe for sharing a glimpse of this special and unique time in our shared history.

This publication provides a bright glance into the legacy of Mt. Edgecumbe with a focus on the Public Health Service buildings. Mt. Edgecumbe’s far-reaching influence deserves a more in-depth inquiry of the school’s programs, the hospital’s successful battle against tuberculosis, and the celebrated island community. How far that influence spread and its impact can only be determined through additional contextual investigations.



Merle Easton with her projector going through her father’s slides, 2019



Author Anne Pollnow & Merle Easton in Japantown, San Francisco, 2019

Merle Lynn Easton, AIA

“When my Mother and I arrived on Japonski Island early in 1947, we were quartered at the BOQ and ate at the school mess hall until my father arrived with the TB patients from Skagway. When he arrived, we moved to a Millerville duplex. Living on the Island for the employee’s kids revolved around the shoreboat schedule. We went to school in Sitka five days a week and I started first grade taking a bus, shoreboat and walking to the school on Lincoln Street. At first my mother kept me at the Post Office where she worked, but as I got older, after school I was allowed to go home alone after checking in with her. On Saturdays, we’d drop-in on Neil Andersons for a soda. Summers were great, kids could go to the school gym for badminton and other activities, ride bicycles, which I learned to ride in the dirt (mud) and play in the roads and the woods. The woods were right behind our house and still had foxholes from WWII fortifications. A game we played was to go single file, with a flashlight, into one that was known as “dead cat cave”. Upon seeing the cat’s skeleton, we would scream and run out. The school had a snack bar and movies on Friday night, showing black and white WWII films. In the mid 1950’s, our family moved into the first Shop House (VS-1) built by the students. It was fantastic compared to the Millerville duplex, we had central heating and a built-in laundry utility room!

My choice to study architecture was influenced by my father being a carpenter, but I was quite unprepared and avoided thinking about the bias against women. After graduation, I entered the U. of Oregon, got married and transferred to U. of Washington. Living in the “States” was a cultural shock for me, but I graduated with a five-year Bachelor of Architecture degree. My first job was in a small office in Seattle. Then we moved to Philadelphia where I passed the state architect’s licensing exam, joined the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and became the first Director of Technical Services for the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency. In San Francisco, I worked for a large hospital firm, then Kaiser Foundation and Alameda County as a Project Manager. I still reside in San Francisco and am active in numerous architectural and historic societies.”

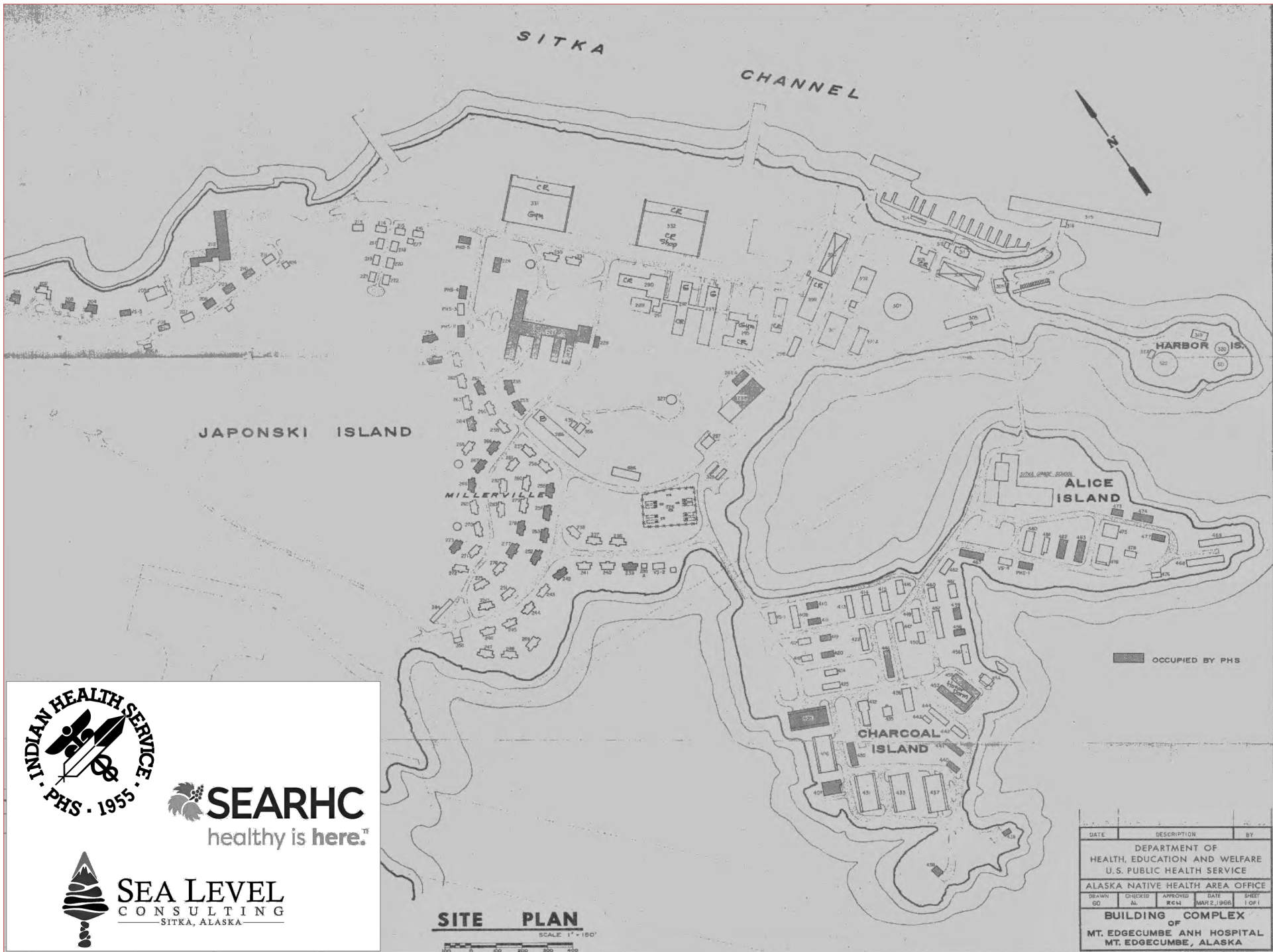
~ Merle Easton, 2020



Merle Easton on the steps of VS-1 ca. 1950s (G. Nelson photograph)

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ALASKA NATIVE HEALTH AREA OFFICE		
DRAWN GD	CHECKED AL	APPROVED RGL
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BUILDING COMPLEX OF MT. EDGECUMBE ANH HOSPITAL MT. EDGECUMBE, ALASKA		

