1959

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Christmas
In Our Newest States

By Beth Beecher, H. Ec. 2

Christmas in Honolulu, the principle city of Oahu, the capital island, is like June in Des Moines with the temperature ranging from 60 to 80 degrees. The days at Christmastime in Hawaii are slightly longer than the winter days in Iowa.

Hawaii is a group of islands, reefs and shoals stretching 1,600 miles northwest to southeast. As American as “the Mainland,” their term for the United States, is its melting-pot population of Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Hawaiians, Puerto Ricans, Koreans, Portuguese and Caucasians.

Churches and stores in Hawaii have elaborate displays during the Christmas season. Two of the biggest department stores in Honolulu which have displays are McInery’s and the Liberty House.

The immediate families spend Christmas eating American food in their own homes or in restaurants. However, the traditional food of a family’s particular ancestry is served on New Year’s Day.

Santa Claus visits Hawaii in a boat. One year Santa made his trip in Henry Kaiser’s “Catamaran,” a motor driven sailboat. There is a big parade and Santa goes up and down the streets throwing candy.

Only the elaborate older houses of Hawaii have chimneys. Probably these houses have chimneys because their owners copied the designs from homes in the cooler climates from which they came. It is the custom to leave a window open so Santa Claus can get in and leave the Christmas presents.

The Eskimos and Indians in Alaska, who make up about 12 percent of the population, were not acquainted with Christmas until the white man invaded Alaska.

A custom which the Tlingits Indians already observed was pot-latching. The man in the village who gave away the most possessions was considered the biggest man in the village. Since men often became destitute in their efforts, the government outlawed pot-latching.

The Eskimos believed that anyone was free to use everything a man owned except his wife. Therefore, it wasn’t necessary to exchange gifts. This belief has been modified depending on the amount of contact with white people. For instance, the Eskimo who works for a white man and earns wages may think his rifle is stolen if someone borrows it. The Eskimos are becoming possessive of their more expensive belongings.

There is a hotel in every town in Alaska. Old prospectors (sourdoughs) want to be with someone over the Christmas holidays. Therefore, groups of them gather at these hotels and spin stories during the Christmas season.

The days at Christmas in Alaska are shorter. Around December 21, there can be total darkness at Point Barrow, the northernmost tip of Alaska and four or five hours of daylight at Juneau, the capital.

People in Alaska may go out and cut a tree for Christmas anytime they wish. Even though Alaska has many trees, supplies are shipped in from the forests of Washington and Oregon, “The Outside.”

Christmas in Alaska is very similar to Christmas here. As one Alaskan said, “You drive your car home from modern department stores to a home with more insulation and that’s the primary difference.” People of Alaska stay up to welcome the New Year and watch television programs piped in from New York.