

Weyman

ADDRESS BY COMMISSIONER OF INDIAN AFFAIRS GLENN L. EMMONS AT THE
TRIENNIAL CONFERENCE OF THE NATIONAL FELLOWSHIP OF INDIAN WORKERS,
ESTES PARK, COLORADO, JULY 11, 1955.

(Delivered by Thomas M. Reid, Assistant Commissioner)

THE AMERICAN INDIAN---YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND TOMORROW

By the time this speech is presented to you on my behalf by my associate, Thomas M. Reid, I expect to be some 2,000 miles away in the Territory of Alaska. It was, I assure you, a matter of real regret for me to forego the opportunity of attending the Triennial Conference of the National Fellowship of Indian Workers. But there were three closely associated reasons that made it just about imperative for me to do so. First, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has a rather unique program among the natives of Alaska--- different in many ways from our work with Indian people in the States. Secondly, Alaska is the only large and major area of Bureau responsibility which I have not previously visited. Thirdly, the opportunities for really extensive travel in Alaska are rather narrowly limited, as you probably know, to the midsummer period.

I have stressed these points because I want you all to realize the importance of the considerations that impelled me, finally, to pass up the privilege of meeting with you in person and taking part in your discussions. It would have been, I feel sure, one of my most pleasant experiences as Commissioner to attend your conference and to make the acquaintance of you many fine people who are working day in and day out with the Indians at the real grass roots.

The theme that I have chosen for this talk is "The American Indian: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow." In selecting that particular subject, I assure you I had no thought of presenting in the short time available here a comprehensive history of Indian affairs from the time of Columbus down to some future date. But I do believe that if we can focus briefly on some of the salient aspects of the immediate past and then sketch out both the changes that have already taken place and those that seem to be shaping up for the future, it may give us not only a sense of trend but possibly a better perspective on the entire subject.

To me, of course, the term "yesterday" in Indian affairs includes just about everything that happened prior to August 10, 1953, which is the date when I took the oath of office as Commissioner. But I want to center attention chiefly on the period of five or six years prior to that time because I believe it is most pertinent to this discussion.

By the late 1940's, as you all know, the general pattern of Indian life in the United States was fairly well established along the lines that still prevail today. The frontier period of American history with its bloody wars between Indian tribes and pioneers of European stock was well behind us. Vast areas of the country where Indian people had once roamed freely in search of a livelihood were now taken up by farms and factories, by thriving communities and broad paved highways and all the other physical landmarks of