

Introduction

Throughout the 1930's and 40's, most Americans knew a Santa Clara County resident by his face, his work, his voice, and his nickname: The *Glacier Priest*. The *Glacier Priest* toured the country as a speaker and starred in his own film shorts which were shown on silver screens across America. Who was The *Glacier Priest*? How did he become a household name in America? What was the nature and impact of his work? How was his life story interwoven with the larger, national stories of his era: anti-Catholic sentiment; entertainment-hunger during the Great Depression; America's enduring fascination with explorers and remote places; and the development of national lecture tours, newsreels, and motion pictures as new venues? What legacy does the *Glacier Priest* leave for us today? The answers to these questions begin with a boy, a dog, a gun, and a camera.

Bernard Rosecrans Hubbard was born in San Francisco in 1888, the third child of George Mellon Hubbard and Catherine Cornelius Wilder. At birth, he weighed just over three pounds and was a fragile, sickly child who stayed indoors until he began school. When Bernie was nine, his mother bought him a sailor suit, which included a free camera as a promotion. This began his lifelong practice of acute observation and crafting images on film. Soon after, his father bought 200 acres in the Big Basin Redwoods, about 50 miles south of San Francisco. Bernie's older brother, John, harvested a single redwood tree from the property and built a second home for the family. On weekends and vacations, Bernie took his dog, gun, and camera, and explored the area. These first outdoor adventures gave him a lifelong love for wild places and open country.

The Hubbard family was deeply religious. Bernie's father had been an Episcopal priest, but he had left the priesthood shortly before Bernie's birth, and both he and his wife had become Catholics, a daring change in an era when the Protestant majority in America deeply mistrusted Catholics. The Hubbards lost considerable social prestige because of their conversion. Regardless, both parents encouraged their son to become a Jesuit priest.

After two years at Santa Clara University, Hubbard entered the Jesuits, a Catholic order known officially as the Society of Jesus (S.J.). The order was founded in 1540 by Ignatius of Loyola, a Spanish nobleman and soldier who experienced a religious conversion and became a priest.

The Jesuit motto: *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam* For the Greater Glory of God

The Jesuit way: the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius

The Jesuit vows: Obedience, Poverty, Chastity

Jesuit formation: 10 years of graduated study and service

Hubbard completed his noviate and juniorate at Los Gatos, in the hills above Santa Clara University. He studied philosophy at Mount St. Michael's in Spokane, Washington, where a well-known geologist, Father Paul Galtes, took him on field expeditions, a combination of science and exploration which appealed to Hubbard.

While studying theology in Innsbruck, Austria, Hubbard mounted geological expeditions into the Tyrolean Alps, and his Austrian guides began to call him *Der Gletcherpfarrer*, "the Glacier Priest." He was ordained a priest in Austria in 1923, and two years later, he returned to Santa Clara University and began teaching Greek, German, and geology.

At the age of thirty-nine, Hubbard was sent to Juneau, Alaska, in order to lead a retreat for the Sisters of St. Theresa. At that time, Alaska was a United States territory, a remote frontier larger than Texas and California combined but inhabited by less than 50,000 people. Most

Americans of that era regarded Alaska as an arctic wasteland unsuitable for travel or settlement, but to a scientist-explorer like Hubbard, Alaska's active volcanoes, glaciers, unmapped mountains, and rugged islands became his calling. While in Juneau, Hubbard mounted a three day expedition across the Taku Glacier which nearly took the life of his traveling companion and caused Hubbard to lose 28 pounds. Alaskan newspapers and the *San Francisco Examiner* ran the headline: "Glacier Priest First to Cross Taku Glacier." Hubbard gained inspiration from the earlier Jesuit explorer-priests such as Father Marquette in America's Midwest and Father Kino in America's Southwest. Once, when invited to join the prestigious New York Explorer's Club, Hubbard refused, saying, "I'm a member of a much older explorer's club - the Jesuit order."

Hubbard's early expeditions to Alaska took him to such remote places as the interior of Kodiak Island, the volcanoes of the Alaskan Peninsula, the Aleutian Islands, and the Jesuit missions of Nulato, Holy Cross, and Pilgrim Springs. The Glacier Priest followed each expedition with a lecture tour, and through these tours, Hubbard raised money for his next expedition as well as the Jesuit missions of Alaska. Hubbard became an explorer in another way too - as an openly Catholic celebrity who braved much anti-Catholic sentiment. Once, just before Hubbard was to deliver a slide lecture to an audience of five thousand in Washington D.C., the local promoters approached him and said,

"Because of the sentiments of so many in your audience, we have removed the slide which features you saying Mass in the volcano."

Hubbard replied, "Return the slide or there will be no lecture tonight!"

By 1930, Hubbard had been relieved from teaching and began to list his occupation as "Alaskan Explorer and National Lecturer." The *Saturday Evening Post* ran a series of his articles, and Americans, eager for distraction from the economic troubles of the decade, began to follow Hubbard's Alaskan explorations with as much relish as they followed Byrd's Antarctic explorations or the Johnsons' African explorations, or, with equal relish to how a later generation followed the space explorations of America's first astronauts. Though popular with the general public, Hubbard received criticism from many scientists and Alaskans who did not view him as one of their own.

The Press followed Hubbard too:

"Intrepid Jesuit Missionary Celebrates Mass in Crater of Volcano," *Boston Herald* .

"Glacier Priest Rescued from Alaskan Ice Flows," *Newsweek* .

In the summer of 1936, Father Hubbard undertook his most ambitious Alaskan expedition: a year-long residency on a tiny rock island in the Bering Sea, known as King Island, or, Ooq-uuk - a place for winter. Hubbard intended to study, photograph, and film the Island's "unspoiled Eskimos" who lived in ingenious cliff-dwellings and practiced the ancient way of subsistence - even though most of them had become Catholics due to the pioneering missionary work of another Jesuit priest, Bellarmine LaFortune. Hubbard's party included his two favorite sled

dogs, Wolf and Mageik, Ed Levin, a professional prize fighter - and later San Jose council member, Ken Chisolm, a Santa Clara star football player, and Bernard Stanley, Hubbard's nephew - the first outsiders to winter on King Island.

Hubbard's party, financed by Agfa Film, arrived at King Island by Coast Guard cutter with one hundred-ten tons of equipment and lumber and built sawn-lumber houses, a community center, and installed electric generators and a radio antennae. LaFortune wrote of Hubbard, "One can hear the click of his camera at any hour." Thirty years later, the famous Russian anthropologist, Sergei Bogojavlensky, wrote this about Hubbard's King island photographs and film, "...superb prints, perceptive pictures of the highest artistic and scientific interest... no comparable record of an aboriginal people exists."

During that year, Hubbard organized two other projects: a 2,000 mile journey in a walrus skin boat from King Island to Point Barrow, in order to observe whether King Islanders could understand the various dialects of their language along the Bering Sea coast. Also, Hubbard commissioned, installed, and dedicated a life-sized, bronze statue of Christ the King. The statue still stands, looking over the now abandoned village, reaching one hand to America and one hand to Asia, and Hubbard's films and photographs of the Island are still used by researchers from around the world as well as King Islanders eager to remember their Island ways and loved ones.

By 1940, Hubbard was a national celebrity, and most Americans knew his face, his voice, and his work. The Glacier Priest was the star of the *Father Hubbard Lectures*, and *Fox Movietone* produced a series of his short films which played with feature films on silver screens across America. Hubbard once remarked, "I'm a good showman - God has given me the ability, and I'm using it for his work." Also in 1940, Hubbard organized a 6,000 square foot exhibition of his King Island objects, photographs, and films for the Golden Gate Exposition in San Francisco. His exhibit received six million visitors and a best-of-show award.

When the United States entered World War II in 1941, Hubbard took up the role of military advisor. He consulted with the armed forces on arctic gear, clothing, and Aleutian geography. He became auxiliary chaplain to the Sea Bees on Attu Island and toured Alaskan military bases, often entertaining the troops with his films and befriending high-ranking officers such as George Paton Jr., General Hoyt Vandenburg, and General Omar Bradley.

After World War II, Hubbard traveled around the world, photographing Jesuit missions - especially the war-damaged missions. In the late 1940's, Hubbard returned to Alaska on several occasions, but because of failing health, he could no longer mount strenuous expeditions. He continued his national lecturing and began to produce his films for television. Most of his films did not appear on national television, but on April 30th, 1958, the Glacier Priest himself appeared

Page 7

on television as the star of Ralph Edward's popular program, "This Is Your Life!" On May 28, 1962, as Hubbard was putting on his vestments for Mass, he suffered a fatal stroke. He is buried in Santa Clara Mission Cemetery.

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Stand alone Quotes:

"He is a man, a sturdy, robustious sort of he-man, yet he has the soul of a child seeking the cover of Mary's mantle."
Francis Talbot, S.J.

"Of all those picturesque Alaskans I have met, not excluding the legenday fellows of the glamorous gold-rush days, none was as arresting, as vital and as colorful as this modern Marquette."
Rex Beach

"The Glacier Priest adventures in the name of science incorporated melodrama, wonder, thrills and dangers, camaraderie, a remote unknown, geological conquests, and service to the cross."
Katherine Price