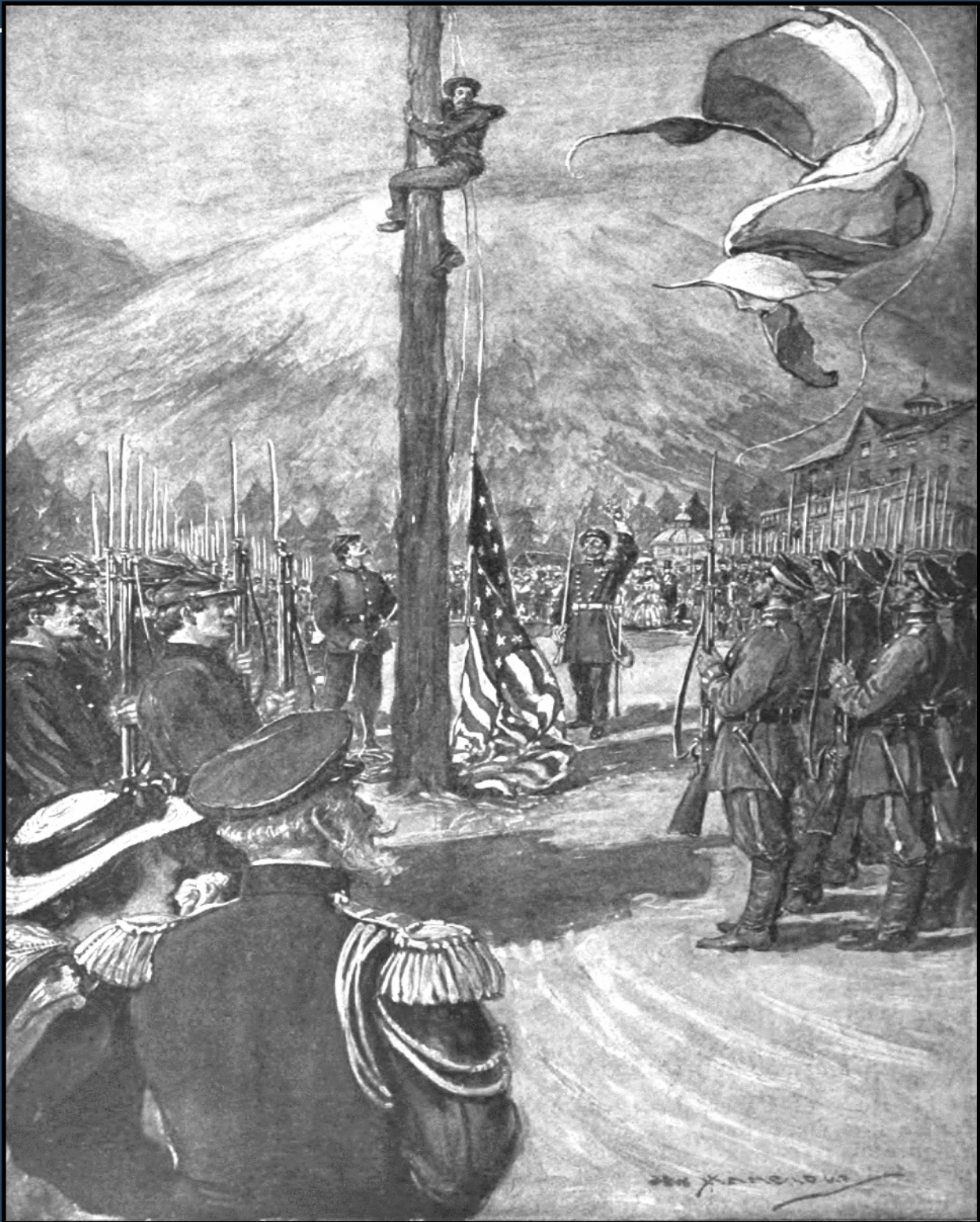


AS THE OLD FLAG CAME DOWN

Eyewitness Accounts of the October 18, 1867
Alaska Transfer Ceremony



Edited and Foreword by Chris Allan

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2018

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For additional copies contact:

Chris Allan
PO Box 81494
Fairbanks, Alaska 99708

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Front Cover: The illustrator Jay Hambidge's depiction of the moment during the October 18, 1867 transfer ceremony when a Russian marine dropped his nation's flag over the heads of his fellows standing at attention below. The image appeared in *Century Illustrated Monthly* (October 1913; the version appearing here) and then again in 1942 as the cover of *New York Journal-American*.

Title Page Inset: Sovereignty in North America at the time of the Alaska purchase. *Harper's Weekly*, May 4, 1867.

Back Cover: John A. Fuller's 1867 sketch of the residence atop Castle Hill where the governor of Russian America and his family lived until the transfer ceremony, at which time they made way for General Jefferson C. Davis and his wife Marietta. Note the discarded cannon at lower left and the American flag on the pole. Fuller wrote to newspapers about the transfer ceremony and later served as one of Sitka's early postmasters. Beinecke Library, Drawings of Alaska and Tatoosh Island (MSS S-2595).

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This depiction of George L. Rousseau, son of U.S. commissioner Lovell H. Rousseau, raising the American flag is signed by Harry C. Wood, though nothing is known of the artist or the date the picture was completed. Alaska State Library, Dmitrii P. Maksutov Papers.

Introduction

The ceremonial transfer of Russian America to the United States was a dramatic turning point in the history of our nation and in the lives of many Alaskans. Even so, the transfer and the early days of Sitka as an American town are topics that have been little examined by historians. The first milestone in the purchase of Alaska was the March 30, 1867 signing of the Treaty of Cession in Washington, DC, by the Russian ambassador Edouard de Stoeckl and the U.S. Secretary of State William H. Seward. In the treaty Czar Alexander II agreed to sell his North American colony for \$7.2 million.

The second milestone, the political and military transfer of ownership, took place six and a half months later when an American delegation arrived to raise the U.S. flag and take control of Sitka—and by extension, all of Alaska. This was a shift in sovereignty on a massive scale, surpassed in U.S. history only by the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. The transfer included 665,000 square miles of land stretching from the Arctic Ocean to the Pacific littoral and (without their permission) entire indigenous nations. The ceremony lasted less than an hour, and when it was over the Russian hold on the region was broken and a period of rapid change and uncertainty under American rule began.

This collection brings together fourteen accounts from eyewitnesses to the transfer ceremony and two more describing Sitka before and after the event. Some accounts are well known, like the official reports of U.S. commissioner General Lovell H. Rousseau and of General Jefferson C. Davis, who served as Alaska's first governor. The journal of Captain George F. Emmons of the U.S.S. *Ossipee* and letters written by General Davis's wife Marietta have also been published and examined by scholars. However, other witnesses on that day put their observations to paper—and still more may be discovered. Newspapers are one rich source of such accounts because two professional reporters were sent to write about the event, and a number of amateurs also penned accounts for press publication. Also included here is a Russian account translated from a St. Petersburg newspaper and two others by people who were children at the time and recorded their memories decades later.

These first-person accounts are important for many reasons. They illustrate the turmoil of the era after the Treaty of Cession was signed when American opportunists rushed in to claim land and set up shop. The accounts describe elements of daily life for Russian-American Company employees, including Russians, Germans, Finns and the Alaskans of mixed Russian and indigenous parentage known as Creoles. They also describe the anxiety among Sitkans at having their homes sold out from under them and suddenly facing a form of frontier capitalism quite unlike what they had known.

Language, politics, money, social mores, and even the calendar all changed in the blink of an eye. An American era had begun, many of the Russians were leaving, and Sitka's original inhabitants—the Tlingit Indians—were denied a prominent role in this new order. The purchase of Alaska would profoundly influence the lives of indigenous people, and these accounts offer glimpses of how the Tlingits responded to the transfer and the occupation of Sitka by a new group of foreigners. But because none of these eyewitness authors were indigenous, Tlingit viewpoints are, unfortunately, underrepresented.

Each account begins with an "Editor's note" identifying the author and the meaning of obscure references and vocabulary. I transcribed handwritten journals and letters and restored abbreviated words; I also did my best to decipher blurred newsprint. In some cases I have excerpted accounts, leaving out portions not related to the transfer ceremony or to life in Sitka. Notes in brackets are used to guide the reader where necessary. My hope is that this collection will interest researchers and Alaskans curious about the transfer by offering multiple eyewitness versions of key events, each with its own style and point of view.

A note about language: Writers in the 1860s often used racial slurs and offensive depictions of indigenous people. This kind of language is unacceptable today and can be upsetting to read. It is included here because it lends insight into the attitudes and prejudices of those telling these stories.



The photographer Eadweard Muybridge arrived in Sitka in 1868, ten months after the transfer ceremony, and took photographs on contract for the United States government. He took this image of Russian Orthodox priests outside what is today called the Russian Bishop's House. Bancroft Library, Eadweard Muybridge Photographs (1971.55: 472).

ACCOUNT 1

LETTER FROM NEW ARCHANGEL

British Colonist, September 20, 1867

Editor's note: After the Treaty of Cession was signed (and before the transfer ceremony), Americans rushed to Sitka to open retail shops, purchase furs, or to start gold mining. They also tried to become real estate magnates by snapping up property in the former Russian American capital. Some sailed from Victoria where Americans settled after a gold rush in British Columbia. One of these soldiers of fortune used the pseudonym "Carlow" and wrote the following article for Victoria's newspaper *British Colonist*. The writer mentions the skin money used by the Russian-American Company to make up for a lack of currency in the colony and also the Shandon bells at the Church of St. Anne in Cork, Ireland. When he describes fish as a "drug" he is using an obscure definition meaning a commodity for which there is no demand.

To Editor of *Colonist*: I mentioned in my letter to you that there are three Greek or Russian Churches here; but I forgot to tell you about their bells. Each Church has three or four bells, but the Cathedral has a peal of six bells—some of them large ones—of the sweetest tone. They are, I believe, equal to the renowned Shandon bells, and are rung three times during divine service. They give out a merry peal pleasant to hear at the beginning of the service, before reading the gospel and before showing the sacred elements (bread and wine) to the people. During the evening service, which begins on Friday at 6 o'clock, a large Bible is brought out of sanctuary by one of the priests and left on a stand, when the whole congregation go to it and kiss it with the greatest veneration. The men kiss the book before the women. Children are lifted up by their parents to kiss the holy book, and about that time the bells are again rung, and the peals can be heard for many miles on sea and land around New Archangel. The Russians have a great many holidays in their Church (one every week, I believe, since I have been here,) when all work is suspended and divine service held the same as on Sunday.

The leather money is so annoying that I sometimes make mistakes. The pieces of leather, when they get dirty, look so much alike, although of different value (from two cent pieces away up to \$5 pieces,) that they make my head ache and puzzle me often to make things right. I sold to a Russian a few minutes ago some goods for \$3 and he paid me 150 pieces of leather—two cent pieces; and now this moment I am after taking in among other leather money, a two cent piece for one rouble (20 cents).

There is a fresh water lake at the back of the town. There is also some level land around it—say 2,000 acres or more—that could be made into excellent gardens, and by being manured and attended to, all kinds of vegetable could be raised. Along with the vegetables mentioned in a former letter they grow also turnips, onions, radishes, carrots, parsnips.

The Russian clergy seem to me to be quite easy-going sort of men, not, I believe, very anxious about spreading the dogmas of their Church. They are all (four in number) married and have tribes of children. They are like the patriarch Jacob (he had twelve sons and I don't know how many daughters) in that respect. About the year 1801 the Russian Company commenced to build their fort and trading post here. I have conversed with some Russians who speak some English. They tell me they have lived here nearly 50 years, and they appear to be strong, healthy men yet. The people—

Russians, Finns and Germans, from all I can learn, are much rejoiced at becoming American citizens.

There is here the most frightfully hideous race of pigs that ever made a man ashamed to own himself a bacon eater. They are the very ghosts of swine, consisting of bones and bristles. Their backs are long, their ribs are long, and their heads and noses are hideously long. These brutes prowl about the streets and glare at strangers with their starved eyes, as though doubting themselves whether by some little operation they might not become beasts of prey.

A few days ago the *Lincoln* arrived [with George Davidson of the U.S. Coast Survey]. Business is much better. Some coin is in circulation. Town lots have gone up several hundred dollars, and no more lots are to be pre-empted. Parties who came here in schooners are talking of jumping lots. They believe might is right. Those who recorded lots and left will have them jumped. I am afraid there will be some blood spilled about those same lots.

From all I can learn from Russians and Indians the country is immensely rich in gold, copper and coal. They seem to think that as soon as the territory is prospected there will be great diggings discovered on Copper River; but the Indians are very bad there. They kill off the Russians whenever they go there, and in consequence not much mining has been done.

—Carlow

A one-rouble example of Russian-American Company money made from tanned walrus or seal skin (front and back). National Museum of American History.



ACCOUNT 2

JOURNAL OF ANDREW A. BLAIR

October 18, 1867

Editor's note: After Andrew Alexander Blair graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1867 he was assigned as a midshipman to the U.S.S. *Resaca*. The ship was promptly sent northward from the coast of Panama to Sitka to extinguish a yellow fever outbreak among its crew. As a result, Blair was on hand when the *John L. Stephens* arrived carrying over two hundred Ninth Infantry troops and the U.S.S. *Ossipee* delivered to Sitka a delegation of American and Russian commissioners for the October 18 transfer ceremony. Weeks earlier, Blair had purchased a canoe from local Tlingits and was filling his days with hunting excursions and trips to town to buy furs and what he called "Esquimaux curiosities." At the end of his description of the transfer ceremony he refers to Byron Adonis of the *New York Herald* and to an act of protest by an important Tlingit leader. In the last line Blair quotes from Alexander Pope's poem *An Essay on Man* (1734), which reads, "Lo! the poor Indian, whose untutor'd mind sees God in clouds or hears him in the wind."

Early this morning I saw a steamer coming in and soon after she made her number [by displaying signal flags], proving to be the *Ossipee*. When she got in the Captain went on board and I went to the *John L. Stephens* and took Gen. [Jefferson C.] Davis and two of his staff over to the *Ossipee*. When we got onboard I saw McCormick, Butts, Lotten, Roberts, Judd, Turnbull, Dayton, and Sprague having been ordered from her to the *Pensacola* at Mare Island [a naval shipyard in California]. The *Ossipee* brought up Gen. [Lovell H.] Rousseau, the two Russian Commissioners, the Collector of the Post and one or two others. They came up the inside passage all the way from Victoria to Cape Ommaney, making the passage from San Francisco in 22 days. Gen. Rousseau seemed to be in a pretty big hurry to get back so he gave orders to have the troops landed and everything ready for the ceremony at 3 o'clock.

We sent all the boats we could spare. The *Jamestown* and *Ossipee* sent theirs, and the troops were all landed at the boat house and marched up to the open place in front of the Governor's House where the flag staff is. All the Russian troops were there also. I went over at 3 o'clock in the gig [a row boat] with the Captain and Mr. Ames. We called at the *Stephens* for the ladies but found that they had all gone over some time before we got there. We went to the Governor's House and went into the parlor where we found the Governor, the two Russian Commissioners, Gen. Rousseau, Gen. Davis, Capt. [George F.] Emmons of the *Ossipee* and a great many others.

When they all got ready we went out to the flag staff where the troops were drawn out. The troops presented arms, we all took off our caps, and they started the Russian flag down, but it pulled some way or other and the inside edge tore off, leaving the main part of the flag hanging aloft and no way to get it down.

Several of the Russian soldiers started up the guys to get it down but they were all tired out before they got up. All this time the *Ossipee* and the battery ashore were banging away at a salute of 21 guns apiece and the colors were shown from the mastheads of our ship and the *Ossipee*, Russian at the fore, American at the main and mizzen. After fooling for about 15 minutes they suddenly

thought of hoisting a man up with a tackle of which there were two on the flag staff. They hoisted him up in a jiffy and he got the flag but instead of bringing it down with him, he dropped it on the heads of the soldiers below.

After some delay on account of the battery, the American flag was hoisted, saluted by the battery onshore and the shipping in the harbor. The people around gave three cheers, the [highs?] played, the troops were marched off and embarked and we all returned to the parlor and took a glass of champagne and returned onboard.

As the reporter for the *Herald* was present that paper will probably contain the pretty sentiment about the "stars and stripes" waving triumphantly, etc., etc. At the Indian village the head chief Michael Kaukan [Kukhkan] hauled down the Russian flag from the staff in front of his house and after a pow wow hoisted it up again and they all came to the conclusion that although they gave the country to the Russians they did not agree to give it to everyone that happened to come along, so Uncle Samuel must move off. "Lo! The poor Indian."

Navy midshipman Andrew A. Blair participated in the transfer ceremony. Beinecke Library, Blair Papers (WA MSS S-2583).



ACCOUNT 3

ALASKA

New York Herald, November 13, 1867

Editor's note: The October 18, 1867 transfer ceremony was a pivotal moment in the history of the United States, but at the time it was easy to miss given that the nation was still recovering from the Civil War. Only two newspapers sent "special correspondents" to cover the event—the *New York Herald* and San Francisco's *Daily Alta California*. The *Herald* chose Byron Adonis for the mission, an eccentric character and former war reporter who was crafty enough to file his story before his rival. Adonis wrote his report in Sitka, carried it by ship to Nanaimo Harbor on Vancouver Island, traveled by hired canoe and overland trail to Victoria, and then (when Victoria's telegraph line was down) boated to a telegraph station on the coast of Washington Territory. His was the first description of the ceremony to reach a national audience.

The formal transfer and delivery of Russian America to the United States government took place to-day, by Captain Pestrechoff [Aleksai A. Peshchurov], Acting Commissioner on behalf of the Russian government, and Major General [Lovell H.] Rousseau on behalf of the United States.

At three o'clock P.M. a battalion of United States troops, under command of Major Charles O. Wood, of the Ninth Infantry, was drawn up in line in front of the Governor's residence, where the transfer took place. By half-past three a large concourse of people had assembled, comprising Americans, Russians of all classes, Creoles and Indians, all eager witnesses of the ceremonies.

Precisely at the last named hour the Russian forts and fleet fired salutes in honor of the lowering of the Russian flag; but the flag would not come down. In lowering it tore its entire width close by the halliards, and floated from the cross-trees, some forty feet from the ground. Three Russian sailors then attempted to ascend the inch and a half guy ropes supporting the flag staff, but each failed to reach his national emblem. A fourth ascended in a boatswain's chair, seized the flag and threw it in a direction directly beneath him; but the motion of the wind carried it off, and caused a sensation in every heart.

Five minutes after the lowering of the Russian flag the Stars and Stripes went gracefully up, floating handsomely and free, Mr. George Lovell Rousseau [Commissioner Rousseau's 15-year-old son] having the honor of flinging the flag to the breeze, the United States steamers *Ossipee* and *Resaca* at the same time honoring the event by firing salutes.

As the Russian flag was lowered Captain Pestrechoff stepped forward and addressed General Rousseau as follows:

General—As Commissioner of his Imperial Majesty the Emperor of Russia I now transfer and deliver the territory of Russian America, ceded by his Majesty to the United States.

General Rousseau, in response, as the American flag ascended, said:

Captain—As Commissioner on behalf of the United States government, I receive and accept the same accordingly.

The Commissioners spoke in a tone of common conversation, and were only heard by Governor Makesatoff [Dmitrii P. Maksutov], General Jefferson C. Davis, Captain [Theodor von] Kuskol and a few others who formed the group. Several ladies witnessed the

ceremonies, among them Princess [Maria V.] Makesatoff, Mrs. General Davis and Mrs. Major Wood. The Princess wept audibly as the Russian flag went down.

The transfer was conducted in a purely diplomatic and business-like manner, neither bouquets nor speech-making following. The entire transaction was concluded in a few hours, the *Ossipee*, with the Commissioner on board, steaming into the harbor at eleven o'clock this forenoon, and at four o'clock in the afternoon a dozen American flags float over the newly born American city of Sitka.

—Byron Adonis

General Lovell H. Rousseau was sent to Sitka to represent the United States during the October 18, 1867 transfer ceremony. On orders from Secretary of State William H. Seward he raised the American flag and then returned that same flag to Seward in Washington, DC. Photograph from Library of Congress.



ACCOUNT 4

ACQUISITION OF ALASKA

Alta California, November 19, 1867

Editor's note: Writing under the alias "Del Norte," the reporter John H. Goodale described the October 18, 1867 transfer ceremony for San Francisco's *Daily Alta California*. In the race to file the story of the transfer, Goodale came in second, but he outdistanced his rival from the *New York Herald* by writing more often and more detailed articles about Alaska that were reprinted in newspapers across the United States. The "Del Norte" articles were even known to President Andrew Johnson and Secretary of State William Seward, even if his real name was not. Goodale took pains to write not only about events but also about the emotions Sitkans experienced during this period of change. His reference to "Her whiskered pandors and her fierce hussars" is from Thomas Campbell's poem *The Pleasures of Hope* (1799).

In view of the unavoidable discomforts on shipboard, General [Jefferson C.] Davis was desirous that arrangements should be made to put the soldiers in quarters on shore at the earliest practicable time. Soon after, he personally conferred with the Commissioners, and they decided that the ceremony of the transfer of the Russian colonies in North America to the United States should take place at half-past three this afternoon, at the Governor's house—this edifice being the Capitol under the existing government.

Prince Maksoutoff [Dmitrii P. Maksutov], the Governor, gave orders that the Russian military force, consisting of a company of one hundred men, should appear in uniform at three; and Gen. [Jefferson C.] Davis directed the military on the *John L. Stephens* to be landed in full dress at the same hour. A flag, forwarded by the State Department for this occasion, was entrusted to a "Guard of Honor," consisting of twenty men. The afternoon, though partially cloudy, was pleasant.

Preparations for the Transfer

At 3 o'clock, the Russian troops formed on the parapet in front of the Governor's house, on the right of the Government flag-staff, a fir mast, 100 feet high. At the same moment, our troops embarked in the launches belonging to the men-of-war—the boat of General Davis, with the flag and Guard of Honor, taking the lead. This movement covered the little harbor with boats, and the sheen of the muskets, the uniforms of the officers, with the dark and lofty mountains as a background, presented a novel and impressive picture. A short row, and the Stars and Stripes were landed for the first time on our new territory. As soon as the soldiers were all landed, General Davis with the Guard of Honor proceeded to the Governor's house, the latter taking their position on the left, in front of the flag-staff. Our soldiers now filed past, and took their position on the left of the Russians—the latter presenting arms, and ours returning the salute.

Appearance of the Soldiery

The Russian soldiery were dressed in a dark uniform, trimmed with red, with flat glazed caps. Here in Sitka they are employed as day laborers on working days; but on holidays, which, under the Russian regime, number eighty-six annually, in addition to Sundays, they are frequently called out on drill, and by this means become familiar with ordinary military evolutions. The United States troops appeared in the usual full dress. Comparing the two, the most casual observer would say that the latter were the more energetic, mercurial

and nervous, with a keener eye and sharper features than the Russian soldiery. The soldiers of Russia, taken from the lower class of peasantry, have been trained from youth to regard themselves as mere machines, with no will or purpose of their own. A passive, perhaps it might truthfully be said a stupid, or at least, an indifferent expression, marked the countenances of the most of them. As a rule, they are orderly, simple, well disposed. In my earlier reading of Russian history I had been led to regard "Her whiskered pandors and her fierce hussars" as little less than ferocious demons. But in her military representatives at Sitka, one looks in vain to find that fierce aspect which English prose, as well as verse, is apt to ascribe to the Muscovite soldiery.

Look of the Spectators

In the meantime there was collected in front of the military a larger assemblage of spectators than is wont to be seen in Alaska. First in point of numbers were the commissioned naval officers belonging to the ships of war now in port, numbering 98; next were the marines and sailors, about 80 in number; then came the civilians, perhaps reaching sixty. From feelings, which Americans can well appreciate, few of the Russian people were present. Aside from the military and officials whom duty compelled to be in attendance, I do not think that twenty were witnesses of the ceremony.

On such occasions it is often that a numerous, as well as important part of the spectators are the ladies. Such, however, could not be the case at this remote outpost of civilization. It is quite probable that what was wanting in quantity was more than compensated in quality. Of American ladies, six were present—the wives of General Davis, Colonel Weeks, Major Wood and Rev. Mr. Rainer, of the *John L. Stephens*; the wife of Mr. Dodge, Collector of the Port, and the wife of Captain McDougal, of the *Jamestown*. Six Russian ladies were also present—the Princess [Maria V.] Maksoutoff, the wife and daughter of Vice Governor Gardsishoff [Login O. Gavrishev], and three whose names I do not know.

Ceremonies of the Transfer

At half-past three Prince Maksoutoff and the Commissioners, General Rousseau and Captain [Aleksei A.] Pestchouroff, appeared, and taking their position near the flag-staff were saluted by the military. Captain Pestchouroff then gave the signal to lower the Russian flag. As soon as it began to move down the staff a gun thundered from the *Ossipee*, the ship of the senior officer of our squadron. A moment after it was answered by a gun from the Russian battery. These guns were fired alternately, first by us and then by them, until 21 guns were fired by each. When the flag had descended one-third of the distance, it caught fast upon the yardarm. One of the Governor's marines ascending, disengaged it, and it dropped down upon the heads of the Russian soldiers, as if seeking a home with those who were its appointed defenders.

Captain Pestchouroff, turning to the American Commissioner, Gen. Rousseau, said:

"By the authority of his Majesty the Emperor of all the Russias, I transfer to you, the agent of the United States, all the territory and dominion now possessed by his Majesty on the continent of America and in the adjacent islands, according to a treaty made between these two powers."

General Rousseau replied:

"I accept from you, as agent of his Majesty the Emperor of all the Russias, the territory and dominion which you have transferred to me, as Commissioner on the part of the United States, to receive the same."

Our flag was now bent to the halliards by two American sailors, and George Lovell Rousseau, a lad of fifteen and son of General Rousseau, assisted by a midshipman, raised the “Stars and Stripes,” slowly and surely to the head of the staff. A gun thundered from the Russian battery, answered by one of our ship. The firing was alternate, as before, until each had fired the national salute.

The Russian eagle had now given place to the American, and the National colors floated over a new, wide-spread territory. Our dominion now borders on a new ocean, and almost touches the old continent—Asia. Democratic institutions now extend over an area hitherto the possession of a despotic Government. The occasion inspired the soul of every American present, and as the officers retired, three mighty cheers were given, and we all rejoiced that we now stood on American soil.

The Aboriginal Element

There was another feature of the occasion which must not be omitted. The *John L. Stephens* lies opposite the Indian portion of the town. The transit of the military from the steamer to the landing attracted their attention. Savage curiosity was on the alert. It is a trait of the red man never to betray inquisitiveness; but they could not permit the opportunity to witness, as far as they were able, the imposing ceremonies in progress to pass unimproved. They put off in their canoes, rounded the anchorage, and took a position in the harbor from whence they had a remote but yet impressive view of the proceedings. Of the nature of the event they had a partial knowledge, and were disposed to regard it unfavorably. Their acquaintance with American whale-ships has not prepossessed them in our favor. They watched the descending and the ascending flag, listened unmoved to the booming cannon, and quietly retired.

Feelings of the Russians

The inquiry naturally arises in the mind of the reader, “How do the Russians of Alaska regard this sale of the territory to a foreign power?” Very much as you, reader, would in the same circumstances. I have already mentioned that very few of them witnessed the ceremonies of the transfer. The Russians, like the Americans, are proud of their vast domain. Hitherto in her history,

Russia, like the United States, has invariably been adding to, but never surrendering any of her territories. The sale of Alaska is an anomaly in her policy. However judicious the disposal of this domain may seem to the Emperor, and to the European Russians, those subjects living in the territory cannot see the expediency of the act in the same light.

Yet, even if acknowledging its expediency, there is to them something irksome and forbidding in the very act of surrendering the soil, even to a friendly power. Added to this, Alaska is the fatherland—the native soil of the more active and intelligent of her people. Some of the chief business men in the employ of the Company here, with their wives, were born in Sitka. The lofty, snow-clad mountains, the dark forests, and the rock-bound islands, are associated with their earliest and most tender recollections. They would be less than human were they to regard this cession of the country with any other than feelings of sadness.

No one could walk the streets to-day, after the announcement of the arrival of the Commissioners, without perceiving that an air of depression pervaded the Russian population. I overheard one say in broken English to a companion, “I cannot be present at the death of the country.” “There will be many tears shed tonight in Sitka,” said a Finlander to our interpreter; and it is told that the intelligent and accomplished wife of the Governor, after the ceremony of the transfer was over, retired to her chamber and wept bitterly. If the report be true, and I do not doubt that it is, the feeling does credit to her head and her heart.

Let me not be misunderstood. The Russian citizens of Sitka are loyal to their Sovereign, and submit to his mandate peaceably and without complaint. There has been no repining—no exhibition of moroseness or ill-will toward our people. Yet it was impossible for the more patriotic of the resident population not to have a feeling of sorrow while seeing the flag under which they were born lowered from its time-honored position, never again to float over their island home.

—Del Norte



Sitkans along Lincoln Street with the Russian Orthodox Church in the background, 1868. Bancroft Library, Eadweard Muybridge Photographs (1971.55: 469).

ACCOUNT 5

LETTERS FROM ALASKA

San Francisco Bulletin, Nov. 23, 1867

Editor's note: When U.S. Navy surgeon Delavan Bloodgood left for Alaska, his mission was to care for men with yellow fever aboard the U.S.S. *Jamestown*, which was already anchored in Sitka Sound. The sloop-of-war saw its first cases while in port at Panama and had been sent to Sitka, along with the U.S.S. *Resaca*, to “freeze out” the disease at more northerly latitudes. The strategy seems to have worked, and the outbreaks on both ships soon faded. Bloodgood reached Alaska aboard the U.S.S. *Ossipee*, which was carrying a delegation of Russian and American commissioners, but before he left San Francisco he struck a deal with that city's *Bulletin* to report on the October 18, 1867 transfer ceremony and send observations about life in the new American outpost. Bloodgood later wrote “Eight Months at Sitka” (1869) for the national magazine *Overland Monthly*. “Three cheers and a tiger” is an American modification of the traditional British rounds of Hip, Hip, Hooray but followed by a howl or bestial roar.

The Ceremony Transferring Alaska

Before getting up to moorings, we were boarded by several Russian officers offering every facility and assistance. The harbor is very narrow; all vessels have to moor head and stern; as there were over a dozen intricately tied up with cables and hawsers stretching in every direction. It seemed like no place could be found for the *Ossipee*, but after backing and going ahead, running out of lines, breasting off, letting go anchors, etc., she was at length secured. . . . The Governor immediately came on board, and after a short interview with the Commissioners it was determined to make an immediate transfer of the Territory. So the boats from the U.S. ships *Ossipee*, *Resaca* and *Jamestown* were sent to disembark the troops from the *John L. Stephens*, which arrived at least a week before us.

By 2 o'clock in the afternoon all were landed and drawn up near the flag-staff at the Governor's house, and alongside of two companies of serviceable-looking Russian troops, though half of them were armed with flint-lock muskets. The Commissioners, attended by the officers of the services of their respective countries, advanced to the flag-staff. The troops presented arms; the assembly uncovered; and the shore battery and the *Ossipee* fired a salute of 21 guns as the Russian ensign was hauled down. All vessels were dressed, those of the United States with the Russian flag at the fore. An awkward accident occurred, by which the Russian flag, soon after the halliards were started, was torn from its “tubing,” and the bunting caught on the cross-trees. Three soldiers attempted to reach it by shinning up the guys, but failing, one was hauled up in a bowline and recovered it. Then the flag of the United States was bent on and hoisted, receiving the same salutes which had been rendered to the Russian. As soon as it reached the truck [the cap at the top of a flagstaff] the “American citizens,” Alaskan pioneers, available subjects for any colonial emoluments or honors, could no longer suppress their swelling emotions, but gave three cheers and a tiger, and swung their plug hats [a felt hat with narrow brim] in the saddened faces of the Russians, who could not regard the lowering of their national emblem, even under these circumstances, as other than unpropitious.

The Governor courteously threw open his house, where a short but very cordial greeting occurred between the present and the late authorities; and this afforded the before-mentioned “patriots” a chance to gratify a curiosity which would have been otherwise unappeased [to see inside the elegant house]; and, in the meantime, some excellent champagne was misplaced, and so the grand ceremonies terminated—no impromptu speeches inflicted upon us, not even a stupid toast given. Our fellow citizens, the Indians—men and brethren—look upon this transfer with great repugnance. However, they waived one trifle of their principles and got very drunk, making the night hideous with their howlings.

Now the Trouble Begins

It seems that many of the Russian officials had not made sufficient preparations for this change of governments, and it has occasioned them much embarrassment. Habitations with “apartments to let” are not numerous in these parts; still, Gen. [Jefferson C.] Davis and his command can't be kept long out in the cold. Besides this, there are complicated questions about titles arising which seem quite perplexing; dissensions as to what is Government property, which personal, and how much goes to the Fur Company. More bitterness of feeling has been manifested than all told is worth.

The great influx of all sorts and conditions of men to this new field of adventure has perfectly revolutionized all previously existing rules of trade and barter. However, those who came “on the make” had only the money brought with them to operate upon. Real estate is held at as high figure, comparatively, as in the Atlantic cities. The price of a story-and-a-half log house desired by an army officer of moderate means and aspirations was stated to be \$10,000! The Clubhouse, which would not rate favorably with the structures in lanes leading out of the lowest part of York street, Brooklyn, was held at \$17,000. Furs can be purchased more advantageously in Montgomery street than here. Even the Indians have advanced the prices of their baubles and game about five hundred percent. The party prospecting for gold have found it in several places in the vicinity, but not in any considerable quantity—however, they have high speculative hopes, as have all others, but I think the chances are that the next steamer down will have a full passenger list. Since the day the Territory was transferred (18th October) it has rained, or rained, snowed and hailed almost continuously, and the prospect is favorable for a long spell of such weather.

ACCOUNT 6

LETTER FROM SITKA

Marysville Daily Appeal, Dec. 4, 1867
(via *Nevada Transcript*)

Editor's note: One of the Americans who made his way to Sitka in time for the October 18, 1867 transfer ceremony was a gold miner from California named John A. Fuller. A year before coming to Alaska, Fuller achieved minor celebrity for a patriotic pen-and-ink sketch he called "Freedom's Footsteps" tracing the political evolution of the nation from the original thirteen colonies to the Declaration of Independence and Constitution. He intended to reproduce it as a lithographic print, but instead left for Alaska. Using "Freedom's Footsteps" as his nom de plume, Fuller wrote to the *Nevada Transcript* in Nevada County, California, about the transfer ceremony, services at St. Michael's Cathedral, and the land grab by newly arrived Americans that included the Tlingit village. Fuller mentions "fifty vara lots" which would have been understood by other Californians because the *vara* was a unit of measure in former Spanish American colonial lands like Texas and California that equaled roughly a yard.

An Important Day

To-day, October 18th, General [Lovell H.] Rousseau arrived in the United States steamer *Ossipee* with the Russian Commissioners, who immediately upon landing proceeded to the Governor's residence and made the necessary preparations to receive the Territory. It was an unusually fine day. Our American vessels of war, consisting of the *Resaca* and *Jamestown*, were decked with colors. At three P.M. the *Ossipee* thundered forth with salutes to the Russian flag which was floating over the Governor's residence. These were quickly answered from the guns ashore, whose echo resounded over the mountain, glen, as if to speak the tidings of the last hour when the Imperial banner shall have waved its last. The star spangled flag of freedom was all ready to wave its glorious folds o'er the heads of impatient spectators, and at 3:30 P.M. the Russian flag was hauled down, and amidst the cheers of an admiring public, the banner we love so fondly and so well, was fluttering in proud defiance to the mountain breeze. Our Company F, of the Ninth Infantry, escorted the officials of both nations to the scene of excitement. The Russian soldiers giving place to ours, and the booming of the cannon spoke the tale of the last and the first, which reverberated "o'er hill and dell," to house and wigwam. The Indians, one thousand in number, were allowed directly to witness the scene, and in one short hour the Russian monarchy had become a link to our glorious Republic. Jeff. C. Davis, commanding the post, has been appointed Military Governor. One company of infantry and one of artillery, and about thirty employes constitute the American race in Sitka.

Climate

Is the key to this whole region. It is rough as thunder; the average amount of rain annually, for the last fifteen years, is ninety inches, and twenty-nine have fallen in the months of August and September alone. The old adage is well exemplified here: "It never rains but it pours," and the houses being built of wood suffer from constant wet. Last year there were only sixty clear days. As yet it is not cold, although the snow has already fallen; but it does not stay long on the ground along the shore, and it has never been

known to lie deeper than two feet and that only for a few days. According to the thermometer, which has been kept by the Russian Government for five years past, the mercury has never been lower than fifteen degrees. Ice is never found here in quantities large enough for saving, but it has to be imported from Kodiak, four hundred and fifty miles west of here.

The Probable Future

I went to the Greek Church last Sunday. I had to stand up like the rest of the congregation, as no seats were allowed. In this church a submissive number of people were apparently soliciting a position in heaven, while outside a band of men, representing border ruffians, were defining by argument their relative "posish" on earth. As soon as our flag floated to the breeze, city lots were staked off by hundreds. The whole of the Indian village that had been held sacred for years against land grabbers was located into fifty vara lots for homesteads. Such a mingled mass of confusion one scarcely ever saw. How it will terminate I shall inform you in my next letter, and give a more minute detail of the country, climate and manners of the once Russian America. I will conclude this letter by giving one verse of [John Greenleaf] Whittier's song, which I am now singing:

Behind the squaws' light birch canoe,
The steamer rocks and raves;
And city lots staked to sell,
Above old Indian graves.

—Freedom's Footsteps

Sitka's Russian Orthodox church, known as St. Michael's Cathedral, was completed in 1848. This photograph was taken by Eadweard Muybridge in July 1868. Bancroft Library, E. Muybridge Photographs (1971.55: 470).



ACCOUNT 7

ALASKA

New York Herald, December 26, 1867

Editor's note: When the editor of the *New York Herald* sent Byron Adonis to Sitka to cover the October 18, 1867 transfer ceremony, he could not have known what competition his newspaper might face. As it turned out, the man from the *Herald* needed to outpace the *Daily Alta California*'s John H. Goodale (alias "Del Norte") to file the story first. Adonis wrote the following article about his voyage to Alaska on the steamer *John L. Stephens* and about Sitka's dramatic scenery, the tensions between the Tlingits and American soldiers, and daily life in flux in the former Russian colonial capital. Adonis uses the Russian term "Koloshes" to refer to the Tlingit and Haida people of Southeast Alaska. This is the longest and most detailed of the accounts written by newspaper reporters during this period.

On the morning of the 13th [of October] Mount Edgecombe was in sight three thousand feet above the land, its top crested with snow, which, farther down the slope, is divided into lines radiating from above, marking the ravines. It is upon the northern extremity of the island, opposite the mouth of the harbor, and 'twas once an active volcano. People here speak of the mountain having had a sharp conical peak, and of that having fallen in when it gave its last expiring pyrotechnic effort. Soon the highland back of Sitka, on Baranoff Island, was discovered, and from among the islets of the bay the masts of shipping appear, and the roofs of houses are discernable among the treetops; and adorn a devious winding way among the rocks and roofs we enter, under charge of a Russian pilot, a narrow, deep and landlocked harbor, where ships are moored with anchors and ropes, and take our station too.

Back of the town is a range of hills where tops are covered with snow and circled with clouds. The sun was out, auspiciously for us, and lighted up at times the peaks of the mountains in darling whiteness, while now and then, as a slight shower of rain would fall—for rain is the normal condition of Sitka weather—a bright, vivid rainbow would form against the woods, brighter and more beautiful than any I ever saw elsewhere. Perhaps it is the contrast between the bright colors and the somber woods and forbidding scenery, but at all events the majestic arc never looked so cheering in any other spot as when here it breaks out magically against clouds and pines and shore, commencing in the water almost at one's feet, and growing brighter and more glorious in mid air, till the descending curve is lost among the vapors overhead. There are two peaks close together behind the town, the higher and more distant rarely being entirely free from clouds. Upon the other, in relief against the snow, is a tall black wooden cross. It is eighteen feet high and is upon the very crest of the mountain, though at that height it can hardly be discovered with the naked eye, until after the sight has been searched slowly and carefully along the rugged line up to where it stands. A Russian officer climbed this hill and planted the emblem of Christianity among the clouds years ago, and there it remains to brave the winds, and will remain no doubt, for all our time.

The national salutes were fired by Americans and Russians, gun for gun, as the old flag came down, and when the new went up the transfer was complete, and the Custom House flag also floated gayly from the government building. That night the Indians and some of the whites had a grand hoodoo, feeling sure, I presume,

that any change in their lot might be for the better; not that I mean to cast any reflections upon the Russians, but only to show that here, as in other parts of the world, are plenty of poor wretches who regard every movement of greater or less magnitude, with speculative eyes, and expect profit from everything.

Dogs are as much the natural tenants and associates of Indians as pigs are of Irishmen; and all through the night up to twelve o'clock, could be heard the barking and yelping of these villainous curs. For they are as much savages as their masters, never presenting the slick, intelligent features of the dogs we see at home, but having a mangy, hungry look, with sneaking face and prowling air, tending much to big wolfish ears, and being predisposed to protuberant ribs. And this course of yelpings did not add much to the harmony while the hoodoo was at its height, nor did it cease until each Indian maiden had tripped it home, and every big barbarian had reeled drunkenly off to his wigwam. Long afterwards, in the silence of the night, one cur would bay at the moon, if one of its rays pierced the clouds, and immediately the whole yelping pack would open in every key, and make the welkin ring with their infernal music. Had it been in a city, the number of bootjacks expended would have been enormous [ref. to the practice of throwing the heavy, metal boot-removers at any annoyance].

The canoes of these Indians are similar to those of the tribes farther south, and of a very pretty model, the paddles being pointed at the blade, and having a crosspiece at the end of the handle, which rests in the palm of the hand. Some of the canoes, however, are of skins, stretched over a frame, having holes in the top in which the men sit. Of different sizes they hold from one to three people each, and are very buoyant and excellent sea boats, the only aperture in the canoe being that fitted over the sitter's body. In these they go through the surf and out to sea with impunity. The men are larger and more thick-set, with features more strongly marked than the others we have seen, and the women show no difference in features. The former are much given to painting their cheeks in vermillion, while the latter frequently exhibit faces daubed all over with black paint, while the labret or piece of wood worn through the upper lip is very common. Nose and earrings are worn by those of all ages, though the women monopolize the former ornament. I saw one little baby, about five months old, strapped, motionless, to a board with bands which crossed and recrossed the little thing's body; and in its nose was a silver ring—an early commencement certainly. The little motionless papoose would be stood up against the side of the cabin, or laid down on a blanket, or soothed in its mother's arms, seeming as insensible to ordinary childish emotions as if there were no body about it, and the woman was handling a piece of wood instead.

All day long the [crowd?] hung round the shipping offering for sale venison and fish and wild ducks; and they also have the skins of marten and hair seal, making out of the latter mittens and caps and tobacco pouches. Those which were purposed, however, smelled so abominably there was little inducement to buy others.

The town itself is a little village of wooden houses, boasting two churches—one the Greek and the other Lutheran, I believe—and being particularly favored in regard to mud. In some places there are plank walks, but as a rule they are covered with a greenish slime produced by the incessant rains, and are almost as slippery as ice. The fur company have a trading store in the second story of a house.

Numbering but five hundred whites, all told, this monopoly could not have been very valuable, though being a monopoly insured a certain return. Here in this state everything can be bought,

from a pair of white leather Russian boots to a string of colored glass beads with which to decorate the neck of some swarthy squaw. Furs too, but only of the coarser kind, can be obtained; for the Company forbids any bartering of skins, reserving this as an inviolable right for themselves to profit by. Next door to the store is the place where the skins, brought in by the Company's agent, are sorted and packed, each one being handled and smoothed out, and receiving the leaden stamp of the association to the tag attached to it and piled away together. Fur seals and sables, otter, foxes, bears and wolves, all are represented here, and one cannot but linger admiringly over the soft dark fur of the most elegant of all, the otter and sable, and covet the goods of his neighbor.

Sables can be obtained from private parties, but not without great injunctions to secrecy on the part of the owners, at from two and a half to six dollars a skin. It is the same as the marten, and is not so dark as that of Siberia, where the very black ones come from—the crown sables—which are valued at twenty and thirty dollars apiece. The Governor, Prince Macsatoff [Dmitrii P. Maksutov], has some five or six hundred, which he has chosen from all the Company have accumulated here for the past three or four years, and which he will sell for seven dollars apiece; but there are few to buy them, as this is a little above the figure in the San Francisco market, even. These are said to be very handsome, however. The sable, or marten, is valued according as the shade approaches black, and the fur is thick and deep. As, however, the Indians would be discouraged if all were not taken, as they cannot bait their traps for dark-skinned sables alone, the graders give an equal amount for all of this kind of skins, and sell in the name of fashion. For example, a man offers a hundred for sale at four dollars throughout. You may say, after examining them, "I will give four dollars a piece for those twenty I have selected." He would laugh and think you wanted to make a game of him, and refuse to part with one unless all the rest went, too. For the light colored ones are comparatively worthless, and so are the summer skins, and if the good were selected the trader would have the rejected on his hands, unsalable.

At present, owing to the influx of Americans in the man-o-war and the *Stevens* [John L. Stephens], the prices of everything have gone up tremendously, and furs are somewhat higher than in San Francisco. I think, however, it will take but a few days for the commercial world of Sitka to recover from the previous unhealthy excitement, and for the old level to be reached again. The sable is a beautiful skin, about fourteen inches long, the animal being about as large as a kitten, or large grey squirrel, and its fur is very soft and thick. It takes about twenty to make a set, I believe, as the furriers use only the backs of the skins, which are the darkest in color, reserving the rest for cuffs and piecing other furs, or collars for gentlemen's coats. But the finest of all is the rich, dark, glossy fur, of the sea otter, which surpasses all the others in beauty and softness. The only objection to it as a fur for ladies, is the weight, which would not, I think, be very hard to bear while the wearer was conscious of the elegance of the material which covered it. They get the ermine here too from the extreme north, and from Siberia, and as this is a tiny animal not larger than a rat, a great many are required to make a set. They are, certainly, very beautiful.

Speaking of prices, when we arrived, a whole deer could be purchased from the Indians for a dollar, but only two days elapsed ere the price went up to seven. Everything else has risen in proportion, the Indians appearing just as anxious to gain by the change in government as everybody else.

The town is separated from the Indian village by a barricade of long logs driven into the ground, and some old iron guns, pointed out from a covered shed, command the whole town, so that, in case of attack, a good many savages would bite the dust. The inhabitants of this colony hold but little intercourse with the natives outside their walls, rarely going into their village, and the policy pursued towards them seems to have been uniformly a temporizing one, so that the Indians have kept on in their naturally savage and insolent manner, believing that white people are afraid of them and perfectly confident in their ability to keep the newly arrived purchasers of the soil in proper subjection.

This tribe, whose town is right by the side of the colony, their houses extending along the muddy beach, numbers about nine hundred, and is governed by an old chief, who is reputed to be the most unfavorably disposed to the transfer of territory. He says he gave the Russians their land, he and his ancestors, and it was merely a permit to live here and trade in the vicinity, and that they have no right to make any cession or sale. Being an intractable old curmudgeon, and very bellicose in his feelings, he has kept flying before his house the Russian flag, presented to him a long time ago by the Company, and refuses to acknowledge the authority of the Americans. I don't think it will be long, however, before he comes to terms, as the present Military Governor is not a man to stand such humbug. As it is, the Indians were much surprised at the freedom and carelessness with which we Americans sauntered through their town, among and into houses and all about their premises, and perhaps did not understand that had one been attacked more revolvers would have been ready in his defense than the whole tribe of Kolashes ever saw.

The huts, or houses, more properly speaking, are set in an irregular line about three hundred yards from the beach, and the canoes of those dwelling in them are hauled up opposite. The gable ends face the water, and there is but one aperture besides the door, and this is a hole in the middle of the roof, which answers for a chimney. Like the houses of the Indians farther south, they are built of large timbers, as if meant to withstand great winds, and are equally filthy and odorous. The fire is built at the center of the floor, and about it crouch all those dwelling there, wrapped up in their blankets, and almost as swart and grimy as the soot-covered rafters. They paint their faces black in order to protect them from the wind, and when performing journeys in canoes in winter use a paste of grease and ashes for this purpose, which gives them an unfriendly, repulsive look. The canoes are hollowed out carefully from the trunks of trees, and require to be kept wet, constantly, to preserve their shape. This is very good and shows quite a fair idea of symmetrical models. The wood is left only about an inch thick, and stanchions, of round sticks of wood, are put in to keep the sides apart, the ends being sewed with bits of deer sinew to the wood, to keep the canoe from opening, as well. They require very careful handling, being as brittle as watermelon rind, and cracking quite as easily if ran against a rock or receiving any severe collision. The sun, too, when it comes out—a very rare occurrence, indeed, for this place—splits a good many canoes, and they have to be covered by seaweed, well wetted in the water, to be preserved from its rays.

Back of the town is the ridge of a long hill, not at all high, upon whose hither slope the houses are built, which runs along for quite a distance to the westward. This is covered with a short furze and with scrub pines, and a great many huts behind the wigwams show the tombs of the defunct inhabitants. Here they do not place the body in a coffin, but burn it with ceremonious observances, with

much howling and drinking, keeping up the wake far into the night until many Indians are drunk and a great deal of noise made, and until there is nothing left of the deceased but a few cinders. These are enclosed in a box and deposited in a hut carefully closed, which hut is ornamented with much care with blankets and paint. Nor does it require much stretch of the imagination to fancy this emotion derived from that of the ancients of the age when the Romans built columbariums, in which were placed the ashes of the dead. It is a beautiful idea, as we think of it put in practice by the elegant Romans, and robs the grave of all that is revolting, no ideas of corruption and foul vermin mingling with our thoughts of that last cold resting place. Instead, a few light ashes lie in a beautiful vase, as eternal and indestructible as the porcelain itself. The funeral pile, however, surrounded by a hundred naked savages, howling and drunk with excitement and whiskey, is somewhat different.

It is customary when any Indians of this or a neighboring tribe dies for him to designate, just before his decease, those persons among his slaves who would like to accompany him to the happy hunting ground and it is regarded as a sacred and most binding duty, on the part of his friends, to carry out his last request. If it is a man of note or powerful chief who is upon his death-bed, there is no limit to the number who may thus be sacrificed; and it is related that a chief of some neighboring tribe indicated his desire for the death of one of this town—one, too, of the leading men of the tribe—as necessary for his comfort hereafter. So one of his slaves girded up his loins, and, taking his knife only paddled straight on from that town to Sitka, landed upon the beach, walked coolly up to the wigwam of the chief and stabbed him to the heart. Of course there was a terrible howl and cry; but they seemed to recognize the act as a performance of a bounden duty—a religious obligation—and, instead of killing the perpetrator of the murder, acknowledged his blind, unwilling instrumentality, and did not molest him, not resting, however, till they had levied war upon the other town and retaliated heavily for their loss. These human sacrifices permitted by the Russians will not be tolerated by our government, and the funerals will be robbed of some of their barbarism. The slaves are prisoners and their children, who have been taken captive in battle, and the servitude is marked and severe.

The arms of the natives consist of old Hudson Bay muskets, with flint locks—very dangerous, I should think, to those firing them—and bows and arrows. The bow is about five feet in length, and has a bunch of twisted sinews stretching from end to end along the back, to give it additional elasticity. The wood is strong and of the shape of the classical bow of mythology, the cord being of stout sinew, and the arrow a good cloth yard shaft, nicely feathered. The barb, which is of bone, is inserted into a bone head at the end of the stick, and is comparatively loose, having a piece of sinew attached to it, and the end of the sinew tied to the center of the arrow, so that if any animal in the water is struck the barb will remain in and the arrow acts as a buoy to retard its escape by swimming. Equipped with these bows and arrows, the Aleutians particularly kill great numbers of fur seals and otter, and they handle their skin canoes with great skill. These are covered all over, except a hole in the center, and the man sits in this, kneels rather, managing this light boat either with a long double bladed paddle, or with a short pointed one. To keep dry he wears a transparent waterproof coat, with a hood to it, which protects the whole of his body but the face. The part around the waist is pulled around the little projecting rim of the hole in the canoe, and tied there securely, so that the only chance of a drop of water getting into the boat is by the aperture in the coat

for the face. The coat is made from the intestines of the seal, sewed together very carefully with sinew in horizontal ridges, and is warm and light, answering every purpose for which it is intended.

The Indians here have a few of these skin canoes and some of the same waterproof coats, but they are seen in perfection among the Aleutian islands.

The house of the Governor of the colony is built upon a huge rock, and was intended as a citadel for all to retreat to in case of an attack by the Indians when the settlement was first moved here after the old place had been captured and destroyed. It has a barricade about its base and small guns are mounted there which could sweep the steep sides of the hill. The “Boys in Blue,” however, are lounging carelessly about the steps leading up to the top and here and there around the town is seen the stalwart form and light blue cloak of one of Uncle Sam’s soldiers as he leans upon his musket, the impersonation of a veteran; and I think the whole tribe could stand but small chance against the two companies of soldiers now here, for they have the bronzed faces and stern port and phlegmatic air of men who have seen service, and plenty of it too, and who take an order to march through the crowd of hostile savages with the same nonchalance as if it were to their breakfasts.

There is a wharf here, with stone steps and plank, the surface so slippery with moisture one has to be careful, when going to visit the ships, not to get over board, and the company’s ships lie at its end occasionally to discharge or load.

The town boasts a park, too, with a high fence around it, resembling an old barricade toppling with weakness; and there is a great deal of mud within the walls and a great deal of rank foliage; but the humid climate, with the great amount of rain, keeps back all successful results in horticulture. In the club house is a billiard table of primitive model, which would attract much attention at Phelan’s [ref. to Michael Phelan, father of American billiards], being of the crudest kind; and there are two bowling alleys, the alleys having sides to keep the balls from rolling off, and the game being almost the reverse of the American, counting, I think, according to the most misses.

There is one nice walk, when it does not rain, and this is out to the river. It is about two miles from the wharf, and goes through the principal streets of the town. Mud one expects in this place, and so we do not mind it; for the weather is mild and not at all cold, while everybody goes prepared with rubbers and rainproof garments for any shower. On our way to the river we pass a little shanty of certainly not more than twelve feet by six, which is covered by canvas in lieu of weatherboards. Upon the top of the door is a notice to the effect that “This property is for sale or lease; apply to,” &c, &c.; and the other day I saw it was tenanted already. Numerous little huts—resembling the shelters our troops used to erect, while in camp, during the war—are all about the town, and are offered at fabulous prices. One man offers a miserable house and lot at ten thousand dollars. It would seem that the property owners have an idea there will be as huge a run to this place as there was to California during the gold excitement. But there are yet no indications of gold, only a little iron and copper and coal; this latter being much more valuable than the gold, if it turns out to be good. The path to the river winds along the beach, through the fragrant hemlocks and down across a very pretty point of low land projecting out into the bay. Here are posts driven, and poles nailed horizontally across them, the marks of property which some enterprising citizens have staked out as their own. The stream itself comes rushing down

from its mountain source among the snow and ice, cold and clear as crystal, and the view from here is very attractive, with the high snow-clad hills and the placid bay, and little pine-clad islands protecting the harbor.

I think the pre-emptors will be somewhat disappointed in the decision of the government in regard to most of the property here, and feel sorry they have wasted precious time staking out land and building houses, as useful to them as those most people erect with such care in Spain [ref. to "building castles in Spain" meaning an unattainable dream]. I can fancy one of these disgusted individuals, thus disenchanted, rendered twofold more uncomfortable by the idea that the friends of some dying Indian chief, with whom he might, in a spirit of barter, have established a nodding acquaintance, were after him to accompany the departing savage to the dim hereafter. Nor is this chimerical, for one old fellow expressed a very strong desire that the Governor, Prince Macsutoff, should accompany him, and he does not feel yet perfectly safe, as some fanatic may carry out the wish of the dead chief and assassinate him.

I think, with all due modesty, that the mild, temporizing policy pursued by the Russians is a wrong one. These Indians have rough notions of right and wrong, and should be governed like children, with stern severity when doing wrong. The custom has been, however, to accede to all their demands, however absurd, after some delay in reducing the claim. I am told, and one case was cited by my informant, of this tribe accusing the colony of the murder of a squaw. No squaw had been murdered, but they made up the story, went to the Governor and urged their claim and demanded seventy blankets. And though they were convinced of the injustice of the suit, after some parley the blankets were paid by the company. Perhaps this conciliatory policy is the wisest, and it may be that yielding to the demands of the Indians upon the principle of a soft

word turning away wrath prevents a long and expensive war, which would interrupt and stop the fur trade; still it seems that a stern, just and unwavering system would be much more to the purpose than that pursued.

On the 26th of October the *Ossipee* went to sea, and during her absence a very heavy gale of wind occurred. The revenue cutter *Lincoln* went to sea the next day, in the afternoon. The night of the 27th it blew terrifically, unroofing houses, blowing one to pieces, driving ships about the harbors upon rocks and against each other, and quite eclipsing everything in the shape of gales any of the oldest sailors had seen before. In the morning one little steamer belonging to the company was found sunk, with her bow above water; the wharf was raised, ships had lost boats and topgallantmasts by collisions; some were ashore, and one had a rock through her bottom. During all the gale the *Jamestown* and *Resaca* did not budge from their anchorage, though nearly all the merchantmen in the harbor took turns in caroming against them, and the stout sides of the man-of-war bore all such chafing uninjured.

On the night of the 29th the United States steamer *Ossipee* came into port in a battered condition, having lost all but one boat and leaking as if she had seen heavy weather. The storm must have passed right over her, and blew harder there, if anything, than it did in this port. However, the conformation of the land admits of nearly the whole distance between this and Victoria being traversed by island channels, so that the people going in the *Stevens*, which is not as staunch a ship as the man-of-war, need fear no danger in case of bad weather—running along nicely, protected by the high hills and bluffs on each side of them.

—Byron Adonis



Members of the Kiksadi Tlingit community of Sitka, 1868. One man has a salmon on gaff pole and more on a stringer. Bancroft Library, Eadweard Muybridge Photographs (1971.55: 479).

ACCOUNT 8

JOURNAL OF GEORGE F. EMMONS

October 18, 1867

Editor's note: As captain of the U.S.S. *Ossipee*, George F. Emmons was charged with transporting the American and Russian commissioners from San Francisco to Sitka for the October 18, 1867 transfer ceremony. In his ship's journal, Emmons describes the officers as "in undress and side arms" meaning they were wearing their ordinary uniforms and swords rather than ceremonial garb. He calls the American civilians "unterrified," meaning undaunted or bold, and refers to a "spread eagle speech," meaning overly patriotic or jingoistic in tone. The two newspaper reporters hoping for such a speech would have been John H. Goodale of the *Daily Alta California* and Byron Adonis of the *New York Herald*. The captain's son, George T. Emmons, also joined the navy and was stationed in Alaska beginning in 1882; his deep interest in the indigenous cultures of the northwest coast produced *The Tlingit Indians*, edited by Frederica de Laguna.

Weather cool and unusually pleasant for this latitude. Steamed in and anchored in 7 feet of water . . . soft mud on rock and gravel in the narrow channel opposite Sitka, swung ship and moored with the port bower anchor and stream chain doubled to a buoy ahead and two hawsers astern or on each quarterdeck to buoys. Government officials came on board to assist in this operation. The Governor [Dmitrii P. Maksutov] afterward called while I was on shore to call upon him. The necessary arrangements were made and the transfer of the Russian possessions in North America to our Government took place on shore at the Governor's House. At 3:30 P.M. in the presence of the Commissioner [Lovell H. Rousseau], all the Officers in undress and side arms and some 200 of our soldiers and some 100 Russians under arms. The Russian and American colors being displayed at the mastheads of our 3 men of war laying here. And a national salute of 21 guns being fired alternately commencing with this ship when the Russian flag came down and the same as our flag went up, the Russian firing the first gun in the latter case followed by us alternately loosened sails—displayed the Russian and American colors.

No longer Russian America. The American (United States) emblem which has this day been hoisted here under a national salute and in the presence of nearly all the civil and military present, I hope will hereafter be the emblem that will embrace all of North America. The transition was attended with an incident that I will mention—in lowering the Russian flag from a tall flag pole, it wound itself around the top mast crosstrees and became disengaged from the signal halyards apparently determined to not come down. Several Russians climbed up the shrouds supporting the staff but their strength became exhausted and had to slide down, in the interim the salute was going on and the Governor and all hands were getting impatient, finally a running bowline was made in one end of the mast rope which was rove and a man was hoisted up who cleared the flag and, instead of bringing it down with him as was evidently the wish and expectation of the Russian authorities present, threw it down upon the bayonets of their own soldiers presenting arms underneath.

The American ensign (which was brought out by General Rousseau) was then bent on and slowly run up, followed by another salute of 21 guns fired alternately by the battery on shore and the

U.S.S. *Ossipee* and 3 cheers given by the unterrified Americans present. When the Russian Commissioner Captain [Aleksei A.] Pestchouroff advanced with his hat in his hand and a few appropriate words to General Rousseau said, "General Rousseau by authority vested in me by his Imperial Majesty the Emperor of Russia I transfer to you the Russian possessions of Alaska" (which embraces all of their possessions in North America). General Rousseau replied, "I accept it in behalf of the government of the United States."

This ended the ceremony—much to the disgust of two newspaper reporters, who were present and expected a spread eagle speech to report to their papers. All the officers who assembled in the Governor Prince Makesoutoff's quarters drunk a glass of champagne and dispersed. At sunset the American and Russian flags were lowered together from the men of war following the motions of this ship—my being the senior naval officer present.

The Russian Commissioner Pestchouroff and [Captain Theodor von] Kuskall removed on shore. General Rousseau was invited to accept quarters at the Government House also, which he contemplated doing. The Prince apologized for not including me—saying that he had no accommodations, General Jefferson C. Davis and he having been given the only remaining rooms.

Captain George F. Emmons commanded the U.S.S. Ossipee that delivered Russian and American commissioners to Sitka in 1867. Alaska State Library (P243-3-78).



ACCOUNT 9

INDIANAPOLIS LADY IN ALASKA

Editor's note: As the wife of General Jefferson C. Davis, the military commander at Sitka and governor of Alaska, Marietta Davis (née Athon) was an important figure when the October 18, 1867 transfer ceremony occurred. In letters to her sister, she wrote about daily life in Sitka and her own efforts to make this exotic locale a home. Her letters appeared in newspapers in her home state of Indiana and (over a century later) in *Alaska History*, the journal of the Alaska Historical Society. Her descriptions of local foods and the story about her husband's reactions to European manners add an intimate feel to this account.

October 21, 1867

My Dear H.—

We arrived here about two weeks since, after a long and rough passage from San Francisco [aboard the *John L. Stephens*], and I more than once thought we could not reach land at all. I was thrown out of my bed, with trunks, tables, baskets, slop-pail and contents on top of me. General Lovell H. Rousseau's steamer [U.S.S. *Ossipee*] was over a week behind us, and as the troops were not permitted to land, nor anything to be done until he should reach here, we have been living on board ship for two weeks.

General Rousseau and the commissioners arrived last Friday, and in the afternoon the ceremony of turning the country over to this Government was gone through with. The ladies, (there are five ladies here besides myself,) went over in the town to witness the proceedings, which were not very imposing. Our troops joined the Russian soldiers, who were assembled in the grounds surrounding the Governor's house, where were the flag staff and Russian flag. After the soldiers had gone through with their exercises, the Russian commissioner made a speech, to which General Rousseau responded, then, amid the firing of guns and beating of drums, the Russian flag was hauled down, at least the attempt was made to lower it, but as it caught and was torn in two, it required the aid of some three or four Russian soldiers before it came down. General Rousseau's son then ran up our flag, three loud cheers were given, the soldiers dispersed, officers and ladies went into the Governor's house and drank some wine; the Stars and Stripes floated over Sitka, and Russian America was ours!

November 7, 1867

I am at last "at home." We are living in the upper part of the house occupied by the Russian Governor. He will leave for Russia in the Spring, and then we will have the use of all of it. It is quite large and comfortable, but well exposed to the sea, and I imagine it shakes with every wind. It is built on a high hill, and in order to reach the village I have to go down several stairways having altogether two hundred steps. I have made the acquaintance of the Governor's wife. She is a young woman, quite pretty and very agreeable. She seems to be a good housekeeper, and does all her own sewing and as she has three children of her own, and is step-mother to three more, you can imagine what that means.

Let me show Sitka to you as I have found it. It is a little town on Baranoff Island, and was laid off in 1804. Its few hundreds of inhabitants are either Russians or Indians. Some of the Russians have taken the oath of allegiance to the Government, and will

remain here, but a great majority will leave for Russia next month. There are no roads and little room for any, as the mountains rise directly out of the town and surround it.

The town contains two churches—one Greek and one Lutheran. We have had services once in the Lutheran church; it is a small building, but is nicely furnished inside, and is carpeted and furnished with an organ. I have not visited the Greek church. Jeff [her husband] called on the Bishop a few days since. He is a Prussian, and after the manner of his countrymen, kissed Jeff on both cheeks, and he asserts that he positively felt himself blushing like a girl, which assertion of extreme bashfulness I hardly expect you to believe, as you know him so well.

There is one grocery and one dry goods store. The houses are chiefly built of logs, and are quite comfortable; but the yards and streets are perfectly filthy. We have been living on fish, duck, grouse, deer, and game of all kinds, ever since we came here, buying mostly off the Indians. No vegetables grow here except potatoes, and they are small. Cranberries, blackberries, and huckleberries are the only fruits. An ordinary cow costs here two hundred dollars, and there are very few of them. Chickens are a dollar each, and eggs ten cents apiece.

The Indians are quite friendly, and we do not apprehend any difficulty with them. We have a stockade around our part of the town and keep well guarded all the time. They are allowed to come in the town through a gate, during the day, to trade; but they are shut out at night. They are a better looking set of Indians than any I have yet seen, being much fairer; but they disfigure themselves horribly, painting their faces perfectly black with white streaks around their eyes, and bore a hole through the lower lip, through which they run a silver pin or piece of bone an inch or two in length.

The old chief [Mikhail Kukhkan] called on us a few days since. He is about ninety years old. In his manners and appearance he reminded me of Judge M—. He was dressed in a coat made of some gay material, and fashioned after the pattern of a gentleman's dressing gown. He had a hat, with a cockade, a sash, belt and sword, and was a very tidy looking gentleman. We had no very cold weather as yet, but it either snows or rains all the time—not a hard rain, but a slow, dreary, "continued dropping" that has but one recommendation—it is said that no one is ever injured by going out in it.

ACCOUNT 10

ACQUISITION OF ALASKA

Daily Alta California, Nov. 20, 1867

Editor's note: John H. Goodale, working under the alias "Del Norte," lost the race to announce the Alaska transfer ceremony to the world (this honor went to the *New York Herald's* Byron Adonis), but he managed to write a great deal about Sitka and the vast new American lands to the north. Here he describes the Americans settling in and many of the Russians preparing to depart for Siberia. Goodale comments on the weather and on daily life in a remote Russian fur trading post. He also hints at the dilemma facing Russian-Native families and the mixed-race residents known as Creoles—do they leave Alaska or stay and accept a new and uncertain social status? When Goodale refers to Pluvius, he is using an alternate name for the Roman god Jupiter, the "sender of rains."

A week has elapsed since the transfer of this Territory to the Government of the United States. The Commissioners have been engaged in making an inventory of the public buildings and other property to be transferred to our Government, and to be taken charge of, and immediately occupied by the military force now in the harbor. It is understood that the duties of the Commissioners are now completed, and that Gen. [Lovell H.] Rousseau will leave this evening on the *Ossipee* for Victoria. To-day, also, the soldiers, greatly to their satisfaction, are being transferred from the *John L. Stephens* to the barracks lately occupied by the Russians. For a few days past, both barracks and soldiers have been undergoing a much needed purification. The unmarried officers are also taking comfortable quarters at the "Club House," while next week Gen. [Jefferson C.] Davis and lady [Marietta Davis] will become occupants of the Governor's House. The lower rooms of the Custom House are being fitted up for the headquarters of the Government officers.

Meanwhile, the weather has been unremittingly dubious. It was well the ceremonies of the transfer were held immediately on the arrival of the Commissioners. Since then there has not been an hour of pleasant weather. In a word, reader, Sitka is the region of incessant storms, dripping forests, dank masses, dense mud and drifting mists. There Pluvius reigns with undisputed sway. It is the paradise of ducks and seagulls, of salmon and shell fish. Three Arizona miners, disgusted with the aridity of that sunny region, and yearning for the sight of a cloud, if no bigger than a man's hand, decided last June to come to—Sitka. They arrived just in time to enjoy the delightful humidity of August, the rainfall averaging about an inch daily. The desire of their souls has been satisfied. This opens the way for me to say a few things upon the subject of Meteorology.

We have been here seventeen days. Of those one was sunny, two cloudy without rain, seven partially, and seven constantly rainy. . . . According to the measurement of Mr. Treskovsky, of the Russian Observatory, over twenty-one inches of rain fell during last August. On the 26th of that month he reports a fall of three inches. When the sun does break through the clouds, it is laughable to see the cattle, mules, dogs, cats and hens, as well as humans, seek the brief sunshine, and bask in its transient warmth. These constant rains are especially annoying to the soldiers. Since the transfer of the territory, they have been detailed from the steamer, twenty-five at a time, to serve on guard about the town. Returning last night, after a four hours' endurance of the pitiless storm, one honest Celt, as he came dripping from the boat up the gangway, vented his

indignation by exclaiming, "Be Jasus, who bought this country? It wasn't me!"

The Russian American Company

The rainy weather of the past week has prevented any excursion to a distance, and compelled me to confine my "notes" to the town. One of the features which strikes the American visitor as peculiar is the absence of signs. You cannot find the "shingle" of a lawyer or a doctor, not a placard of a milliner or a dressmaker, no conspicuous sign of dry goods dealer or grocer, no projecting transparency of restaurant or hotel. Everything has been owned and administered by the Russian American Company. They owned all the buildings, public and private, in the town, which are numbered from unity upwards, reaching 123. They furnished all the goods and supplies, bought all the products of sea and land, were proprietors of all the wharves and shipping. Every specimen of live stock, except the poultry, and all the pianos the town can boast of, were and are still their exclusive property. The general regulations of these Russian Colonies were established by the Directors at St. Petersburg, sanctioned by the Czar, but all executive and judicial authority was vested in the Governor. Alaska has never had any judges or jurors, and no law-making body has ever been convened in her capital. Among her early Governors was General [Aleksandr A.] Baranoff, who held this position for thirty years, and gave name to the island on which Sitka is built. His successors exhibiting less integrity in the financial management of the Colonies, the gubernatorial term was limited to five years, without reappointment.

The Ex-Governor

Prince [Dmitrii P.] Maksoutoff, the late incumbent, entered upon his duties three years ago last August. He is a well-built, business-like, affable gentleman of forty. The Governor, nominated by the Directors, but subject to the approval of the Czar, must belong either to the Imperial army or navy. Prince Maksoutoff is an officer of the navy. The annual salary was \$7,000, with \$1,000 for family expenses, and perquisites in furs worth from \$4,000 to \$6,000. It is understood that at the close of his term, each Governor, unless prodigal of his income, was worth at least \$50,000.

The Princess [Maria V.] Maksoutoff, a lady of rare personal attractions, as well as intelligence, is, perhaps, ten years younger than her husband, and speaks English with ease and accuracy. Accompanied by her five children, she will leave in a few weeks for St. Petersburg, by way of San Francisco and Liverpool. The Prince will remain at Sitka till April, then visit on business Kodiak, Ounalaska and other western posts, and return to Russia in midsummer. He will leave Alaska with the good will of all her people.

The Russian Population

Aside from the Indians, the Russians number only two-fifths of the remaining population of Sitka. Of these, eight to ten officers with their families, and as many unmarried clerks, will return to Russia by the eastern route at an early day. Of the laboring class and soldiers, it is probable that a majority, accustomed to a life of routine and unwilling to adapt themselves to American ideas and habits, will leave Alaska. Such as prefer to do so, will be transported by the Company to the Asiatic settlement on the Amoor [Nikolayevsk-on-Amur near the mouth of that river]. Many of them have either Creole or Indian wives, with children. Their employment and that of their household has been varied—cleaning and packing of fur skins, fishing, unloading ships, hewing timber and other incidental labors. They have been a slow, simple-hearted, well-disposed people.

On account of the numerous holidays, they have worked for the Company not over two hundred days annually. Their pay has been about sixty dollars per year. To a citizen of the States, this would seem nothing short of “starvation” wages. True, their fare has been coarse, and they have, to use a homely phrase, lived “from hand to mouth”—yet in Sitka no family has really ever been destitute of food or clothing. The Company has a bakery, and furnishes coarse wheat bread at four and a half cents a pound, and dispenses either fish or venison soup gratis. The soup is prepared daily, and, after inspection as to its quality by an official, is distributed from the soup-house to each family, according to its wants. Added to this, the Company furnishes physician, priest, and school teacher free from tax. Food, drink and clothing is supplied at a stipulated price. In a word, it leaves nothing for the individual to do but work.

Hence, to the laboring class in Sitka, life has been monotonous and without excitement; yet, having no conception of any other, they have been, for the most part, a contented people. Their world was the little town in which they lived, with its surrounding waste of water and woodland. The busy outside world, its revolutions, its bustling trades and startling improvements, have been to them of as little moment as to the inhabitants of the moon. Of all the inventions of the past century only one has been practically known to this people—the friction match.

But a new era has dawned, and ere a twelve-month passes this remote village will be as wild with speculation, as agitated by excitement, as deeply earnest in the pursuit of gain, and as eager for the earliest news from abroad as any growing town in Kansas or Minnesota.

—Del Norte

Prince Dmitrii P. Maksutov (left) was the Russian-American Company governor from 1863-67. He believed the sale of Alaska was a mistake, but observers said he conducted himself with dignity throughout the transfer period. Alaska State Library (P297-251).

Princess Maria V. Maksutov was twenty-two when the transfer ceremony took place. Observers noted that she wept when the Russian flag came down; later claims that she fainted and had to be helped to her chambers are spurious. Alaska State Library (P297-113).



ACCOUNT 11

LETTER FROM JEFFERSON C. DAVIS

November 12, 1867

Editor's note: In this letter from General Jefferson C. Davis to Major John P. Sherbourne, the Adjutant General of the Department of California, Davis describes his arrival in Sitka aboard the *John L. Stephens*. In addition to soldiers, munitions and American civilians, the vessel was carrying oxen, mules, sheep, cows, pigs, and poultry to feed the military personnel. With the permission of the Russian governor, this menagerie disembarked prior to the transfer to forage on an island in Sitka Sound. Meanwhile, the American enlisted men were ordered to remain aboard the *Stephens* while waiting over a week for the U.S.S. *Ossipee* to arrive with the Russian and American commissioners. General Davis was the military commander at Sitka and the governor of Alaska until 1870.

The harbor of New Archangel was reached the 9th, but the ship [*John L. Stephens*] was only able to get to her proper anchorage on the morning of the 10th. The following day I went ashore, and called upon Prince [Dmitrii P.] Maksoutoff, the Russian governor, and was politely received by him; during the interview I made arrangement for the landing of our animals upon one of the little islands in the harbor. The animals were landed during the two succeeding days, in small boats or flats. The troops were retained on the vessel, in accordance with my instructions, patiently awaiting the coming of the commissioners of transfer, until the morning of the 18th, when the pleasing intelligence of their safe arrival was announced throughout the harbor and town. I lost no time in calling upon the commissioners and informing them of my readiness to take part in the ceremonies of transfer they might desire; also urged as much dispatch in making the transfer as was compatible with their duties.

It was soon decided to make the transfer the same evening, (the 18th). The troops were soon and easily landed in small boats, mostly furnished and manned from the ships of war lying in the harbor. These ships were the *Ossipee*, *Resaca*, and *Jamestown*, commanded by Captains Emmons, Bradford, and McDougal. The troops were formed near the flagstaff bearing the imperial flag of Russia, in front of the governor's house. The Russian troops were shortly afterwards formed on the same ground. At 4 o'clock p.m., the time agreed upon by the commissioners, the Russian flag was lowered, the troops of both nations coming to a present arms, and the artillery of both nations firing a salute, the Americans leading off. A few minutes after, our national flag was run up and saluted in like manner, the Russians taking the lead; thus ended the ceremonies. The territory and dominion of Russian America were formally declared ours.

.....

The commissioners [Lovell H. Rousseau and Aleksei A. Peshchurov] turned over to us some eleven or twelve buildings in all; several of them were only sheds which could be made useful only for temporary shelter for stores. I think many more houses should have been considered United States property, but it was the business of the commissioners to decide these questions, not mine. The business of getting possession of them devolved upon me to a great extent, and I have had considerable trouble in the performance of this unpleasant duty. The barracks for the troops were given up in good season, but a large and much needed storeroom is still nearly

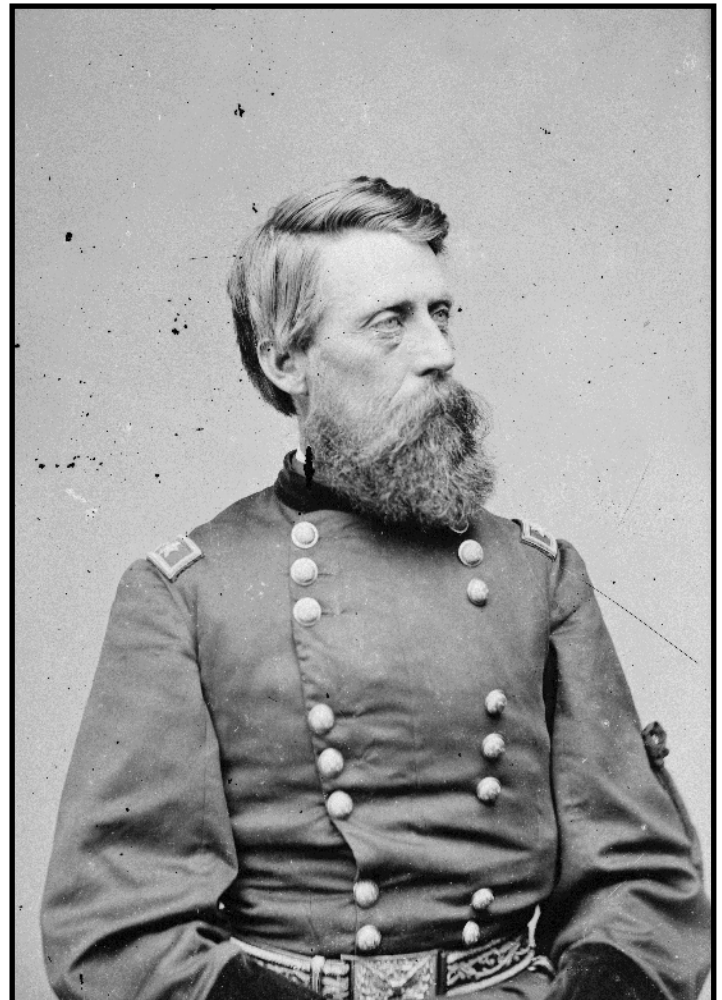
all occupied by the Russian American Company; it is much needed for our commissary stores. By dint of perseverance, in which both officers and men have shown a commendable degree of zeal and industry, we are now, I am happy to report, quite comfortably quartered.

The reputation of this place for raining, snowing, and sleeting, has been fully verified since our arrival. The amount of work that can be accomplished per day in this climate is much less, probably, than in any other on the continent. The summer months may prove more favorable to our operation, and on this account I would like, respectfully, to suggest the advantages of sending the troops designed for this district as early next spring as expediency will admit. The Indians inhabiting the little village just outside of the palisades protecting the town number, from what I can learn, about twelve hundred in all. They are at present at peace, but have the reputation of being very hostile and insolent. They fear the Americans, and look with considerable mistrust upon us. Notwithstanding they boast that they can and will whip us some day. I have been too much engaged to inquire about the Indian tribes beyond this vicinity. . . .

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

Jeff C. Davis

General Jefferson C. Davis commanded troops during the transfer and served as Alaska's military governor until 1870.
Library of Congress.



ACCOUNT 12

LOVELL H. ROUSSEAU'S REPORT

December 5, 1867

Editor's note: After serving as the United States commissioner for the October 18, 1867 transfer ceremony, General Lovell H. Rousseau sent his report to Secretary of State William H. Seward. Although he does not admit it, Rousseau suffered terribly from seasickness on his journey from San Francisco to Sitka aboard the U.S.S. *Ossipee*, and once he arrived in the Russian American capital he was eager to fulfill his duties and leave again. His description of the ceremony went by telegraph to Washington, DC, as soon as Rousseau reached Portland in Oregon Territory. At the end of his account, he expresses regret that the American civilians present at the ceremony let out a lusty cheer when the commissioners were done speaking—it is clear he did not want to further upset the Russian dignitaries. The Koloshian, or Tlingit, chief referred to here is Mikhail Kukhkan who was at first unwilling to fly the American flag at his house or to easily accept United States sovereignty in the region.

After a pleasant passage, taking it altogether, we cast anchor in the harbor of New Archangel on the 18th of October, at eleven o'clock a.m., where we found the troops and supplies had preceded us several days. The day was bright and beautiful. We landed immediately, and fixed the hour of three and a half o'clock that day for the transfer, of which General Jeff C. Davis, commanding the troops there; Captain Emmons, United States ship *Ossipee*; Captain McDougall, United States ship *Resaca*, and the officers of their respective commands, as also the governor of the territory, the Prince [Dmitrii P.] Maksoutoff, were notified and invited to be present.

The command of General Davis, about two hundred and fifty strong, in full uniform, armed and handsomely equipped, were landed about three o'clock, and marched up to the top of the eminence on which stands the governor's house, where the transfer was to be made. At the same time a company of Russian soldiers were marched to the ground, and took their place upon the left of the flag-staff, from which the Russian flag was then floating. The command of General Davis was formed under his direction on the right. The United States flag to be raised on the occasion was in care of a color guard—a lieutenant, a sergeant and ten men of General Davis' command. The officers above named, as well as the officers under their command, the Prince Maksoutoff, and his wife, the Princess Maksoutoff, together with many Russian and American citizens, and some Indians were present. The formation of the ground, however, was such as to preclude any considerable demonstration.

It was arranged by Captain [Aleksei A.] Pestchouroff and myself that, in firing the salutes on the exchange of flags, the United States should lead off, in accordance with your instructions, but that there should be alternate guns from the American and Russian batteries, thus giving the flag of each nation a double national salute; the national salute being thus answered in the moment it was given. The troops being promptly formed, were, at precisely half past three o'clock, brought to a present arms, the signal given to the *Ossipee* (Lieutenant Crossman, executive officer of the ship, and for the time in command), which was to fire the salute, and the ceremony was begun by lowering the Russian flag. As it began its descent down the flag staff the battery of the *Ossipee*, with large nine-inch

guns, led off the salute, peal after peal crashing and re-echoing in the gorges of the surrounding mountains, answered by the Russian water battery (a battery on the wharf) firing alternately.

But the ceremony was interrupted by the catching of the Russian flag in the ropes attached to the flag staff. The soldier who was lowering it, continuing to pull at it, tore off the border by which it was attached, leaving the flag entwined tightly around the ropes. The flag staff was a native pine, perhaps ninety feet in height. In an instant the Russian soldiers, taking different shrouds attached to the flag staff, attempted to ascend to the flag, which, having been whipped around the ropes by the wind, remained tight and fast. At first (being sailors as well as soldiers) they made rapid progress, but laboring hard they soon became tired, and when half way up scarcely moved at all and finally came to a standstill. There was a dilemma, but in a moment a "boatswain's chair," so called, was made by knotting a rope to make a loop for a man to sit in and be pulled upward, and another Russian soldier was quickly drawn up to the flag. On reaching it he detached it from the ropes, and not hearing the calls from Captain Pestchouroff below to "bring it down," dropped it below, and in its descent it fell on the bayonets of the Russian soldiers.

The United States flag (the one given to me for that purpose, by your direction, at Washington) was then properly attached and began its ascent, hoisted by my private secretary, George Lovell Rousseau, and again the salutes were fired as before, the Russian water battery leading off. The flag was so hoisted that in the instant it reached its place the report of the last big gun of the *Ossipee* reverberated from the mountains around. The salutes being completed, Captain Pestchouroff stepped up to me and said: "General Rousseau, by authority from his Majesty, the Emperor of Russia, I transfer to the United States the Territory of Alaska," and in a few words I acknowledged the acceptance of the transfer, and the ceremony was at an end. Three cheers were then spontaneously given for the United States flag by the American citizens present, although this was no part of the programme, and on some accounts I regretted that it occurred.

.....

The people of Sitka seemed to be quiet, orderly and law-abiding; of the Russians proper there were about 500 on the island. If kindly treated by our people, most of them will remain as citizens of the United States. Many of them have already made their election to remain under the stipulations of the treaty by which the territory was ceded to our government. Generally they were satisfied with the transfer of the territory, as were also most of the Indians. The latter received from the Americans since the transfer exorbitant prices for fish and game and whatever they had to sell, and were generally pleased with the change. A Kolloshian chief, however, angrily remarked, "True, we allowed the Russians to possess the island, but we did not intend to give it to any and every fellow that came along."

ACCOUNT 13

NEWS FROM SITKA, 1868

Editor's note: The following article appeared in the *Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti* (or *St. Petersburg News*) in 1868. The author is unknown, but he appears to be an interpreter who helped Russian speakers and the newly arrived Americans understand each other and assisted with naturalization ceremonies for Sitkans taking American citizenship. He refers to the Italian *bersaglieri*, who were Sardinian light infantrymen and part of the Royal Italian Army. The article was translated by Dr. Richard A. Pierce of the University of Alaska Fairbanks who spent his career translating important Russian American documents and publishing them under his own imprint, Limestone Press.

We got the first news of the sale of the colonies on Good Friday. We didn't believe the first rumors, in papers sent up from Victoria, but two months later all was clarified. By the end of September there were two American steamers in the harbor, a big passenger steamer with 300 officers and men on board [*John L. Stephens*], and three merchant vessels, with cargo for the army.

Several days later, on 18 October, the commissioners arrived on a military steamer [*Ossipee*]. On the same day they set about changing the flags and simultaneously the rule over the country. The ceremony was very simple. The American army did not come ashore until that moment, and then we saw them for the first time on Russian soil in full armament. They were in parade uniform and in caps like those worn by the Italian *bersaglieri*. Our garrison here also put on their threadbare uniforms, and then the Russians and the American troops formed in front of the flagstaff, on which the Russian flag still waved. Not many civilians were present. Many heard of the ceremony only after it was over.

At a signal from the Russian commissioner, two Russian sub-officers began to lower the Russian flag. The public and officers took off their hats, the soldiers stood at attention, the Russian drums beat the march, and at the same time the vessels and battery fired 42 shots. But the Russian flag did not want to come down; it tangled in the ropes at the very top of the flagstaff and when they pulled on the halliard from below, it broke. At an order from the Russian commissioner, several Russian sailors hastened to climb up in order to untangle the flag, which hung on the mast in tatters. Then they began to raise the American flag, with the same category and the same salute from the cannon. They saluted twice, and thus, with the ceremony of the flag, without taking a step, we left Russia and found ourselves in the United States.

When the American flag was raised the public, on-lookers, but only the Americans, cried three times "hurrah!" The Russians remained silent. Soon the troops and the public dispersed. The Russians spent the day quietly, as if nothing had happened; the Americans drained several baskets of champagne.

After several days the Russians began to feel that they were already no longer at home. In place of the Russian inhabitants American officers and soldiers arrived, and in one day Sitka changed its appearance entirely. I speak of the appearance of the streets, because few Russians were seen. It was mostly soldiers, officers and quite a few merchants, who did not delay coming. We and the American merchants did not expect that the soldiers would settle in the port itself, and up to the last minute hoped that they would settle somewhere nearby, but it worked out otherwise. The soldiers elected to settle in our port, and all our hopes of being only

a commercial town flew into thin air. We now have a military government, a military court. Our governor is Jefferson C. Davis. He was the rank of a major general. You will note that only by the letter C. does his name differ from that of the former president of the rebelling states. Everyone praises our governor, saying that he is strict but just.

In Sitka there is an orderly disorder. The Russian authority disappeared in a moment with the change of flags, and the American authority is not yet established. Most of the Russians do not know English, so there are misunderstandings and clashes, which don't quite suggest the friendship between the two nations of which the newspapers speak. The company has begun to sell its property, has closed the schools, released surplus personnel, and expects to wind up all its affairs in America in the fall of 1868. For the translator things are hopelessly consumed; the whole day passes in a scramble. But gradually all this disorder is disappearing, meeting places are established, there is a chief of police, a lawyer and a notary, and there is plenty of money in coin. Even the [Russian-American] Company has had to buy up its skin money tokens to pay salaries in American coin money.

By force of the treaty, all Russian subjects now living in this land may, if they choose, either remain Russian citizens, or take the oath of allegiance to the constitution of the United States and become American citizens outright. So that no one will feel any sort of compulsion, a three-year period is agreed on in the treaty, in the course of which any Russian who wishes can become a full-fledged citizen of the United States of North America.

If the Russian colonies had not been sold it would be necessary to live in one of the states for five years in order to receive citizenship. Yet here no more than ten minutes are needed for this. All you have to do is bring two witnesses to the proper office, who will there swear that so-and-so really was in this country at the changing of the flags, and that they consider him to be a reputable person. Then the person must under oath renounce allegiance to all other states in the world, particularly Russia, and promise with all his powers to support the constitution of the United States by oath. He concludes by raising his right hand and saying "I swear." Then they give their signatures, and the matter is finished. Thus have several of the Russians here become Americans.

The building known as the Double Decker, 1868. Bancroft Library, Eadweard Muybridge Photographs (1971.55: 475).



ACCOUNT 14

FROM PETER KOSTROMETINOFF

March 11, 1927

Editor's note: This letter was written almost sixty years after the transfer ceremony by the son of Russian-American Company employees. Peter Kostrometinoff offers a rare glimpse of the day the American soldiers arrived on October 18, 1867 as well as tidbits of daily life and a sincere expression of regret over the end of the Russian era. He is writing to Andrew P. Kashevaroff, the Russian Orthodox priest and scholar who helped to establish Alaska's territorial library and museum and who used some of the following letter when writing about the transfer ceremony. This account of a boy marching in the street with the Americans and watching the ceremony from his rooftop stands as a dramatic counterpoint to the official reports of General Rousseau and others.

Dear Father Andrew [Kashevaroff]—

As I feel better to-day, I will proceed with my story. The American troops landed about 3 o'clock P.M. on the 18th of October, 1867; for some reason they didn't land on the wharf, they landed in the warehouse, where Russians kept ship supplies, where Boots Cold Storage is now [he includes a drawing of the building with the letter]. And from there the American soldiers marched to the Castle Hill. I marched along side of them as far as Castle gate. Russians had high fence in panels, with heavy double gate, above eight or nine feet in height, from the Custom House to Russian barracks, just before you come to the Castle steps. I couldn't go no farther than Castle steps—so I went home, and got on the roof, the house was two story high, and it was about 150 or 200 feet from the Castle Hill, and saw the whole business.

A company of Russian soldiers were also marched to the Castle Hill. The ceremony began about half past 3 o'clock by lowering the Russian flag. But the ceremony was interrupted by catching of the Russian flag in the ropes attached to the flag pole. A sailor was then sent up to untie the flag, but he went up only about half way, and got tired out, so couldn't go any farther. The flag staff was about 100 feet in height; then a soldier was pulled up on boatswain's chair. The orders were to come down with the flag; the soldier must of misunderstood the order, when he untied the flag, he threw it down, and the flag fell on the Russian soldiers' bayonets and a good many of the Russian ladies cried. Then the United States flag was hoisted up. Then Russian Commander transferred to the United States the Territory of Alaska, and the ceremony was ended. Of course, there was a salute from United States ship, and from the Russian batteries.

During the Russian time the Castle Hill looked much different than at present. There was a large platform on the southeastern side with a flag staff in the middle, and there was a picket fence on the southern side; the pickets were square about 1½ inch, and about 5 feet in height, and went through the 2x4. The eastern side was fortified with heavy logs, and there were small cannons on the platform and on the southwestern side. There was a pigeon coop and flower garden. It looked quite nice.

By the way, the old brass or copper cup which I gave you [for] the museum has a small story to it. During the Russian time, they had a long pole on the parade ground, on the end of the pole they had a bell, and when it was time to go to work they ring it, and when

it was time to quit, they ring it again. The working men were allowed to drink before their meals, so at noon time they all marched to the drinking place. The liquor was kept in the storeroom on the northeastern side, near our house. They used to put a stand near the door, and a man would call out; first, second, third and so on, and the men stepped up to the stand, by four persons and had their drink out of that kind of a cup, straight without water.

When they had a drink, I was there to sell hot peroskey [Russian hand pies], fish or meat at 5 cents. . . . I was a regular Russian boy, dressed just like a Russian, had red shirt with a belt and the pants inside of the boots. When I think what a good time we had during Russian time, it makes me feel blue. The time will never come back. I am the only one left who have seen the transfer (I think the United States ought to give me a pension). There might be some Indians who have seen the transfer. If there are, surely they couldn't see very much from such a long distance, as they were not allowed in town without permission; although, there were some Indians on the Castle Hill during the transfer—some chiefs. I think you must be tired reading my letter, so I must stop.

Sincerely yours,

Peter J. Kostrometinoff

U.S. Army soldiers in the garden at the Russian governor's mansion on top of Castle Hill, 1868. The American troops took over the barracks that had housed Russian soldiers. Bancroft Library, Eadweard Muybridge Photographs (1971.55: 467).



ACCOUNT 15

ALASKA CORRESPONDENCE

British Colonist, January 8, 1868

Editor's note: Thomas G. Murphy arrived in Sitka in time to witness the October 18, 1867 transfer ceremony and quickly established himself as a lawyer, politician, and clothing purveyor. Under the nom de plume "Barney O'Ragan," he wrote about Sitka for the *British Colonist* of Victoria, British Columbia, and after a year founded Alaska's first regular newspaper—the *Sitka Times*. In this article he describes what might be seen as a second transfer ceremony, during which Alaska's military governor tried to win the allegiance of the local Tlingits with the gift of a flag at a birthday party. But with the gift came a thinly veiled threat. Murphy also describes the formation of Sitka's first municipal authority and laments a Thanksgiving without turkey. The Organic Act he hopes for, to provide Alaska with the bare essentials of civil government, would not arrive until 1884. Murphy twice mentions "Gen. N.J.T. Dana," a veteran of the Civil War named Napoleon Jackson Tecumseh Dana working for a company formed by Russian and American investors in 1853 to sell Alaskan ice to California.

As we are isolated and removed far away from all telegraph communication with the entire world, your readers will not expect to hear much in the way of news from this land of Alaska. For the last six days we have had fine weather, while the three preceding weeks we had nothing but rain, hail and snow all the time.

Flag Presentation

From the time the *John L. Stephens* left we had no amusement, or excitement, in fact nothing which was calculated to disturb the monotony of a dreary life, until the 19th of November [1867]. It being St. Michael's day and the birthday of the old Indian chief, General Jefferson C. Davis concluded to present an American flag to the old chief, so that he might hoist it in place of the Russian flag which he had floated for sixty-five years. As it was also the old fellow's hundredth birthday, General Davis thought it a suitable occasion to compliment the venerable chief by calling on him in person, and, as the day was delightful, all the principal citizens of Sitka had invitations to accompany General Davis and staff. So, forming at two o'clock, p.m., the procession took up its line of march for the Indian village.

Arriving at the chief's tent, we were surprised to find about 150 Indians drawn up in line, each holding a long rod tipped with green, emblematic of friendship. On entering the tent, we found the old chief seated on a chair; and a more sedate or consequential looking man I never saw. His table was loaded and tastefully arranged with several dishes such as are most fashionable with the Russian people. The old chief got up to receive General Davis and the flag was presented by the General, who made the following speech:

"Venerable Sir—In your presence are a large number of ladies, officers and American citizens who come here to pay you their respects on this your birthday. I have the pleasure of taking this occasion to present you with one of the most valued emblems known to the lovers of freedom everywhere and idolized by all true Americans. This is the star spangled banner, or the flag of America. The Great Father in

Washington respects all good Indians, while he, through the army and navy, punishes all bad ones. The Great Father in Washington will protect and defend the Indians in Alaska so long as they remain good and respect this flag, but if they show any disposition to act badly towards any white man or woman, then the Indians must and will be punished. As you are the great chief in this country of the Indians, and as you are now about one hundred years of age, I come to pay you this visit. Accept, then, this flag and my kind and favorable considerations."

The old chief replied as follows:

"The words of man are like the winds, which pass away like vapor; but the words of a chief, when given, should be equal to his actions."

All who could get into the chief's house were invited to partake of his hospitality. As he had been supplied with a choice quantity of food, cooked in a way to tempt the taste of the most fastidious epicure; and as nearly all respectfully declined the invitation, they left and found the American flag floating to the breeze over the village. The flag was greeted by three hearty cheers, after which the procession returned to the house of Gen. N.J.T. Dana, who had a sumptuous repast prepared for all.

First Election in Sitka

Feeling deeply the want and necessity for some kind of Civil Government in Sitka, the citizens got together, and after one or two meetings adopted a City Charter, held an election and chose a Mayor and Common Council. Honorable William S. Dodge was elected as Mayor, and General N.J.T. Dana, Samuel Storer, Charles B. Montague, Thomas Whaley and James Langebil were elected members of the Town Council. The citizens before going into the election of course consulted General Davis, who gave them his approval of a Civil Government, knowing that it is impossible for Americans to live under military rule. We will now have a chance to make laws that will be for the benefit of all, while before we had neither law nor justice, so to speak. We hope that Congress will lose no time in framing an organic act and giving us a Territorial Government. For this boon we will ever pray.

Improvements

There are many improvements already made here under the direction of General Davis, who is leaving nothing undone that is in the power of man to do. Streets are being made, sidewalks built up, a light erected, streets laid out, and, in a word, this town looks much better than it did on the 10th day of October, when we first landed. I regret to say, however, that it is not in my power to give any encouragement to anybody coming here, at least until some mines are struck, which I don't believe will ever happen, Alaska being, in my opinion, no mineral country.

Thanksgiving Day

The 28th of November being Thanksgiving Day, was observed by the military, but we had no spirit or encouragement to celebrate, for we could get no turkeys; and here let me also state, such a thing as fresh meat of any kind cannot be had. We sometimes get a few deer, but the principal food is bacon, pork and ducks; but if I dwell on this subject of fresh meat longer I will get hungry, so I will only state that a butcher who could open a meat market here would live if he could keep a fresh supply.

—Barney O'Ragan

ACCOUNT 16

PIONEER DAYS IN OLD SITKA

Douglas Island News, April 1, 1921
(via *Portland Journal*)

Editor's note: Elmer E. Montague was six years old when the Russian flag came down and the American flag took its place. Yet, in 1921 he recounted to the *Portland Journal* in Oregon some interesting details about the transfer period and its aftermath, including a glimpse into Sitka's first English-language classrooms. Elmer's father was Charles B. Montague, who was discharged from the Army in Sitka, became a grocer, and was elected to Sitka's first Town Council during an early attempt to provide Sitka with a municipal government; he went on to be mayor and a trustee of Sitka's public schools.

Our family went to Alaska aboard the United States steamer *John L. Stephens*, in the fall of 1867, my father serving under Colonel George H. Weeks, who was in charge of the quartermaster's department. The troops stayed on board the steamer for some time before being landed. On Friday, October 18, 1867, they went ashore to take formal possession of Alaska for the United States. A company of the Ninth United States infantry was drawn up with the Russian troops on the rocky point on which the flagstaff was planted. General Lovell H. Rousseau represented the United States and Captain Aleksei Pestchourof represented the Russian government. The Russian captain ordered his men to haul the flag of Russia down. Then our men raised the Stars and Stripes. The soldiers of both nations presented arms and the guns of the Russian garrison as well as the guns aboard our ship saluted—and that was all there was to it. Our soldiers moved into the Russian barracks and we took over the buildings of the Russian American Fur Company. Most of the Russians sailed back to Russia.

Our soldiers were a pretty tough bunch, and Sitka soon was wide open. The Russians had named the place Novo Archangelsk, but had shortened it to Sitka, so it has kept that name ever since. It was against the law to import or sell liquor, but it was shipped in as 'coal oil.' With 500 soldiers stationed there and with nothing for them to do, things were pretty strenuous at times. Finally the folly of keeping troops there was recognized, so they were sent back to the United States.

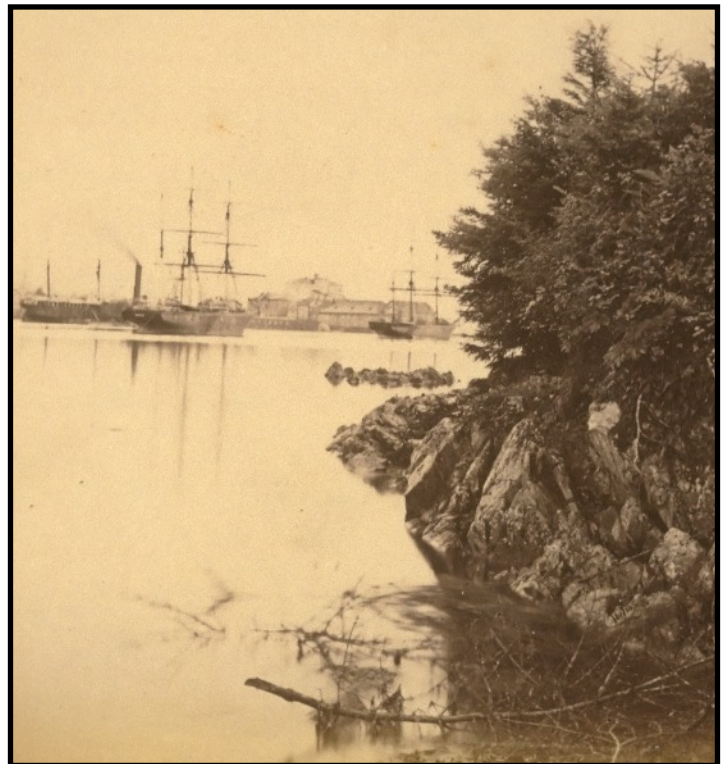
There were only four white boys at Sitka. Besides myself there were Eddie, son of Colonel Weeks; Louis Levy, son of a Jewish merchant, and George Murphy, son of Sergeant Murphy [Thomas G. Murphy]. We four boys with Sergius Kostrometinoff, a Russian boy, used to be inseparable chums. We went to school to Madam Konoplisky. Later a public school was established. My mother served as teacher till they could get a teacher from the states. General [Jefferson C.] Davis sent to Boston and his niece came out to teach the school. One of the first things she did was to lick me because I wouldn't pronounce a word the way she said was right. She asked me the name of the capitals of the Pacific coast states. I said Salem on the Willamette was the capital of Oregon. She said, "Pronounce that river with the accent on the 'met.'" I said I had lived in Oregon, and we pronounced it with the accent on the 'lam.' So she said, "I'll 'lam' you—and she did." We three white boys decided to run away and go to sea. We stowed away, but Louis

Levy got cold feet and beat it back and gave us away, and my father tanned me so I lost all desire to run away to sea for some time thereafter.

The Russians had skin money. It was made of tanned entrails of seals. When the two upper corners were cut off it circulated for 8 cents, but when all four corners were cut off it represented 4 cents. Our soldiers could trim the bottom of the 4-cent skins even and pass them for 8 cents, so they soon demoralized the currency system till the natives were afraid to take any skin money.

Mrs. Charles A. Kincaid of Portland was my Sunday school teacher. Her husband was one of the members of the first city council. We stayed there till 1871.

View from Japonski Island of ships at Sitka with Castle Hill in background, 1868. Bancroft Library, Eadweard Muybridge Photographs (1971.55: 459).



SOURCES

All of the newspaper articles used in this collection came from these online databases:

The British Colonist: Online Edition, 1858-1951

Library of Congress's Chronicling America

California Digital Newspaper Collection

Genealogybank.com

Newspapers.com

The journal of Andrew Blair, midshipman aboard the U.S.S. *Resaca*, can be found in the Andrew Alexander Blair Papers at the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University.

The journal of Captain George F. Emmons can be found in the collections of the Sitka Historical Society; it also appears in the online image database Alaska's Digital Archives.

The letters by Marietta Davis can be found in the Newberry Library's Jefferson C. Davis Papers or in "The Frontier Letters of a Post Commander's Wife: Marietta Davis at Sitka, 1867," *Alaska History* (Fall/Winter 1985/86), 73-78, edited by Stephen Haycox.

The report of Lovell H. Rousseau and letter from Jefferson C. Davis can be found in a bound volume of congressional records about the purchase of Alaska entitled *Russian America* (1868); Rousseau's report is also published as "Transfer of Alaska to the United States," *Washington Historical Quarterly* 3 (October 1908), 83-91.

The article from *St. Petersburg News* was translated by Richard Pierce and appeared in the *Daily Sitka Sentinel* on October 17, 1991 under the headline "Transfer of Alaska: 2 On-Scene Accounts." The second account in this article was the Peter Kostrometinoff letter.

The letter by Peter Kostrometinoff can be found in the Andrew P. Kashevaroff Papers at the Alaska State Library, Juneau, Alaska.

For more information about reporters at the transfer ceremony see:

Chris Allan, "Ho! For Sitka: 'Special Correspondents' and the Race to Report on the 1867 Transfer of Russian America to the United States," *Alaska History* 32 (Fall 2017), 1-26.

