During the first part of the 19th century, Americans were consumed with a continental expansion that exploded in the 1849 California gold rush. They were dimly aware of the fur-rich Russian colony in the far north, but what was to become Alaska was still too far away for everyone but the Yankee whaling ships. From time to time these American ships would stop at New Archangel to bring badly needed supplies, then sail north to pick up their payment in seal skins. They brought back stories about the multitudes of fur seals living on the beaches of the Pribilofs and the fortunes that could be made from them. However, in 1824, the Russian-American Company put an end to American ships exploring their colony and prohibited them from traveling within thirty leagues of the colonial coast.\footnote{The ostensible reason was that these Yankee traders were selling rum to the Indians, but a more important reason was to prevent the Americans from discovering too much about their valuable colony.}

Despite this prohibition, or perhaps because of it, American curiosity about the Russian colony grew. To a perceptive Russian who had been watching the Americans' westward continental expansion there could be little doubt what the long-term future held. In 1853 Nikolai Muraviev, the Governor-General of Irkutsk district in Siberia, mused that "the United States are bound to spread over the whole of North America . . . sooner or later we shall have to surrender our North American possession."\footnote{His prediction was aided considerably that year by Russia's invasion of the Crimean part of the Ottoman Empire south of European Russia. This invasion precipitated a war with England and France in}
defense of the Turkish territory and for three years Russia's military thrusts were thwarted by an alliance among the three nations. Although the war was largely confined to the Crimean region near the Black Sea, in one incident it extended to East Asia, thousands of miles away. At the battle of Petropavlovsk in 1854, a fleet of British and French ships tried to overrun this Siberian outpost built by Bering. However, a brilliant Russian move to resupply the outpost by the Amur River, which was considered unnavigable, was successful and the enemy fleet was defeated.³

The Crimean War affected Russian profoundly and had a major impact on her attitude towards her colony in America. The war had been costly, both in terms of lives and in terms of the Russian national treasury, which was left almost bankrupt after the war. In addition, Nicholas I had died during the war and his son Alexander II had to deal with the military and financial chaos left him by his father. Suddenly Russia felt much more vulnerable, especially in East Asia and America, which were so far away that they could not be easily defended. Besides, with the Amur River suddenly opened up, whole areas of Siberia were accessible for the first time and invited colonization. Russian-America was becoming an expendable luxury for a country besieged by other problems closer to home.

During this same period the diplomatic relations between Russia and the United States were unusually cordial. One U.S. senator even suggested to the Russian minister in Washington D.C. that the U.S. could buy Russian-America in order to help Russia pay off the Crimean War debts.⁴ This offer was not entirely facetious and stirred rumors of such a sale. However, before it could be taken too seriously, the United States became embroiled in its own Civil War, and it was Russia's turn to be sympathetic to its overseas friend. Young Alexander II, who was himself preparing to free the Russian serfs, was President Lincoln's strongest foreign supporter during the darkest years of the American Civil War.

In 1861 the third charter of the Russian-American Company ran out at a most awkward time. Alexander II was having second thoughts about Russia's whole colonial adventure in America, especially after Russia's recent failure in the Crimean. In addition there was also the Aleut Navigator, Kashevarov, in the St. Petersburg court who argued eloquently against the renewal of the Company's contract because the
Company had systematically abused his people over the last 60 years. The administration and finances of the Russian colony hung in limbo while Alexander II tried to come to some decision about the future of the distant colony.

In 1864 several San Francisco businessmen who were interested in the fur seal trade had founded a company they called, with some humor, The Ice Company of San Francisco. They decided to make a bid directly to the Russian Government for the twenty year charter of the colony and offered the Tsar $5,000,000 for the lease. This generous offer, however, raised the suspicions of William Seward, then American Secretary of State, who thought that if it was worth that much money to the businessmen, perhaps the United States should purchase the whole territory outright. He was also impressed by the fact that in addition to the San Francisco businessmen, the territory of Washington also was interested in Alaska because of its enormous fishing grounds.

William Seward was an extremely competent and shrewd civil servant. He had once been governor of New York and hoped, without success, of one day being President of the United States. He had been Lincoln's closest political friend during the Civil War and had remained the Secretary of State after his assassination. Seward's motives for wanting to purchase Alaska were more complex than the businessmen's who were interested solely in profit. He not only wanted to expand the U.S.'s geographic boundaries, but he also wanted to buy Alaska as a warning to Canada who was about to become independent from England and had her eyes on this northwest extension of her own country.

The Treaty of Cession

It was during the debate on the purchase of the Russian colony in the Congress of the United States that the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Charles Sumner, proposed that the territory be called Alaska. Alaxaxaq was the name the Aleuts used to describe the land east of the Aleutian Islands and gradually it was this Aleut name that Americans used to describe Russian-America.

The debate in Congress about the buying of Alaska was often acrimonious with detractors calling it "Seward's Icebox." Senator Sumner argued that we should do our friend, Russia, a favor and take the colony off her hands. Others argued that it was an expensive favor to an
undemocratic country. The strength of Sumner's arguments and Seward's convictions convinced one voter more than the two-thirds required for the passage of the treaty to buy this enormous "icebox" of the north and the treaty was ratified on June 20, 1867.

V The Treaty of Cession provided for the transfer of a vast land and its people, 7,600 Indians, 4,000 Aleuts, 1,700 Creoles, and 800 Russians. In the treaty that was finally negotiated, the Russian Government insisted that American law protect the rights of the Russian citizens who might choose to remain in Alaska and the rights of the civilized tribes by which they meant the Aleuts. "The inhabitants of the ceded territory . . . shall with the exception of the uncivilized native tribes be maintained and protected in the free enjoyment of property..." The Aleuts were specifically classified as "civilized" and shall "be admitted to the enjoyment of all rights, advantages and immunities of citizens of the United States and shall be maintained and protected in the free enjoyment of their rights, property and religion." Despite the language in the treaty, the Americans did not consider the Aleuts any different than the rest of the native Americans in Alaska. Therefore they treated the Aleuts just as they had treated the American Indians who were natives and wards, but not citizens of the United States. The Aleuts had held a unique position with respect to the Russian colonists. The Russians had had to rely on them increasingly for the functioning of their colony and in turn the Aleuts adopted many of the Russians' customs, most importantly, their religion. However, this special relationship between the Aleuts and the Russians could not be preserved in the wholesale transfer of Alaskan people from the Russian Government to the American. And it was only many years later that the Aleuts realized that in the transfer of the Alaskan land they had lost the citizenship that the Treaty of Cession had entitled them to. Although the Russian government was glad to be rid of the headaches of the vast expanse of Russian-America, some of the Russian citizens were outraged by the sale. The more religious citizens felt that the government had no right to sell the Aleuts who had been converted to the Russian Orthodox Church and had been baptized with Russian names. The Russian Orthodox Church would not abandon their converts despite the actions of their government and the Church continued to send funds for nearly fifty years to the Russian churches in Alaska for their missionary work. Twenty years after the U.S. purchase, the Rus-
sian church was contributing $40,000 for Alaskan education, which was more than the U.S. itself was spending for education at that time.\textsuperscript{13}

However, the religious community was not the only Russian group who was angered by the sale of Russian-America; the stockholders of the Russian-American Company were also furious. Naturally, after hints in the early 1860's that the government was trying to sell Alaska, everyone lost confidence in the stock and eventually the Russian government had to subsidize all of the Company's operations. After the sale of Alaska, the Company paid off its disgruntled stockholders at the rate of 200 rubles per share, one seventeenth what the shares had once been worth.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{The American Occupation}

With a single purchase, the United States had increased its territory almost 50%. So much new land called out for some plans to develop it, but no one, including Seward, had any such plans. Congress sent soldiers to occupy this Alaska, but the 500 men who were given the task must have been overwhelmed with the magnitude of their orders. The troops were led by General Rousseau, who was accompanied by a most ambitious young secretary named Haywardg Hutchinson from Baltimore.

Hutchinson had made a fortune selling shoes during the American Civil War and was looking for a second fortune in Alaska.\textsuperscript{15} When he landed at New Archangel, he skillfully managed to buy from the acting agent of the Russian-American Company all of the Company's ships, merchandise, buildings and equipment, including all of the Pribilof Islands' equipment, for the shockingly low price of $155,000. Of course, Hutchinson was able to sell this equipment for a considerable profit, but this speculation was not his main goal. His real purpose in Alaska was to reach the Pribilof Islands and to somehow secure the fur seal trade for himself and the San Francisco businessmen he represented.

Early in 1868 three American ships arrived at the Pribilofs stocked with food, liquor, and clothing to trade for fur seal skins. For the first time in the history of the Islands, the Aleuts were able to sell the skins competitively and received considerably more for them than the 40C a skin that the Russians had been paying.\textsuperscript{16} One of the new ships carried Mr. Hutchinson; another ship was piloted by Captain Ebenezer Morgan from Connecticut.\textsuperscript{17} Hutchinson, however, had the advantage over the
other American traders because he had with him an Aleut navigator named Captain Archinandritov who had previously been a Russian colonial administrator. This navigator, together with the Russian Orthodox priest on St. Paul, persuaded the Aleuts to sell their furs to Hutchinson rather than the other American hunters on the Islands. During the 1868 sailing season, while Hutchinson was consolidating his control over the Islands, 365,000 seal skins were taken. As soon as his control was secure, Hutchinson put an end to the competitive bidding for the fur skins by refusing to pay the Aleuts more than 40C a skin. In so doing he turned his back on the very people who had permitted him to establish control on the Pribilofs. Free enterprise was clearly an economic principle only for the buyers of the skins, not for the Aleuts who harvested and sold them.

Later that year Hutchinson's business colleagues in California persuaded Congress to make the Pribilof Islands a government reservation. Congress ignored the natural claim the Pribilof Aleuts had to the Islands after having lived there almost 100 years. The brief period of political and economic independence was over for the Pribilof Aleuts; their experiment with competitive selling was crushed before it had a chance to establish a precedent.

In the fall of 1869, a United State ship, the "Lincoln," appeared off St. Paul Island with United States soldiers aboard to maintain the order that Hutchinson had established. It was a stormy day, but the sailors watched the Aleuts handle their bidars (large skin boats) with ease in the heavy surf. Considering the sea safe enough to land, several soldiers attempted to reach shore in the same way the Aleuts had done so easily. However, they misjudged both their skills and the heavy Bering Sea surf because the Aleuts had made the sea look deceptively calm. Several soldiers were drowned in their attempt to reach shore and were buried on the west slope of the black bluff overlooking the present village of St. Paul. This ill-fated landing party was the beginning of the official American presence on the Pribilof Islands.

In the same year, a Treasury officer, Captain Henriques, arrived on St. Paul and began to officially impose American law on the Islands. First he insisted that there were to be no dogs to harass the seals, and that day all the Aleuts' dogs were killed. No dog has ever been allowed on the islands since. Secondly, there were to be no guns, despite the fact that the Aleuts hunted frequently for food to supplement their seal
meat, and all of the Aleuts' guns were confiscated. Thirdly, there was to be no liquor on the islands, which was an affront to the people who had grown used to drinking the Russian kvass. The U.S. Government had also proclaimed a sealing holiday until it could establish the rules of the harvest. Therefore, the Aleuts were deprived of their major source of food. However, Captain Henriques permitted them to harvest 30,000 seals for their own food and clothing during the sealing holiday.

By 1870 Congress passed a law that stated that the Secretary of Treasury was to protect the fur-bearing animals on the Pribilof Islands and was delegated "... to make all needful rules and regulations ... for the comfort, maintenance, education and protection of the natives... ." In that year Congress also awarded a twenty year contract monopoly to harvest the seals to the highest bidder, the Alaska Commercial Company. The organizer and owner of the Alaskan Commercial Company was none other than the ambitious Hutchinson.

Hutchinson's contract with the Government had a number of provisions in it which specified what he had to provide for the Aleuts. For instance, the Company was required to furnish the Aleuts with 25,000 dried salmon, 60 cords of firewood, barrels for seal meat, housing, a school, a teacher, and a doctor. In addition, they were allowed to charge the Aleuts 25% over Seattle prices for all goods sold on the Islands. The Aleuts also had the right to come and go and their work had to be voluntary. However, if they didn't work their homes would go to others who would work. This ruling had the same effect as placing an American yoke on the Aleuts' shoulders if they wanted to remain in their homeland. The Americans, then, had assumed a Federal mandate to preserve the fur seal herds and at the same time protect the Aleuts as a necessary labor force in the harvesting of the seals. The Aleuts were inextricably linked with the fur seals, in the minds of Congress, the Alaskan Commercial Company, and even in the minds of the Aleuts themselves.

After the purchase of Alaska the U.S. Congress became increasingly absorbed by the problems of Reconstruction following the Civil War and forgot about the "Northern Icebox" Seward had talked them into buying. Congress made Alaska a customs district and then turned to more pressing national problems for the next 17 years. But despite Congressional neglect, public revenues from Alaska, specifically from the Pribilofs, began to quietly pour into the United States Treasury.
Within twenty years the revenues produced by the labors of the Pribilof Aleuts alone had almost paid for the price of the purchase of Alaska. If the private profits were counted, the fur seal herd and Aleut labor together paid for the Alaskan purchase within ten years of U.S. possession. The buying of Alaska was one of the best bargains Congress ever struck for the United States, yet it took many years for the Representatives to realize how profitable the fur seal herd was; it took even longer to realize that the Aleuts who harvested the seals shared almost none of the profit.

Only three years had elapsed between the monopolistic administration of a private Russian company on the Pribilofs and the administration of a private American firm. There was a good deal of opposition in the California business community to the U.S. government establishing a monopoly so quickly on the Pribilof Islands. A law suit was even brought against the Alaska Commercial Company charging, among other things, that the Company was exploiting the Aleuts. However, these charges were denied and ultimately dismissed as being without foundation, despite ample evidence on the Pribilofs to the contrary.

The Treaty of Cession had been negotiated in St. Petersburg and Washington D.C., not in Alaska or on the Pribilofs. When the Alaskan Aleuts, Eskimos and Indians heard of the Treaty they were outraged. A Treasury Department report in 1869 expressed their anger:

The dissatisfaction among the tribes on account of the sale of the territory did not arise from any special feeling of hostility, but from the fact that it was sold without their consent, they arguing that their fathers originally owned all the country, but allowed the Russians to occupy it for their mutual benefit, in that articles desired by them could be obtained from the Russians in exchange for furs; but the right of the Russians to sell the territory, except with the intention of giving them the proceeds, is denied.

The Aleuts, in particular, who had learned the Russian language, religion, and culture were not enthusiastic about their new rules. However, the treatment of the Pribilof Aleuts by the private Russian and American firms was to be remarkably similar. The managers spoke different languages, but profit has a universal tongue and was understood and practiced by both nationalities. Both companies were dependent on the Aleuts for the heavy work in harvesting the seals; the Aleuts
were likewise dependent on the companies for their only source of income and dry goods. The American government was more specific about the goods and services that were to be provided to the Aleuts than the Russian government as a means of insuring that their basic needs would be met. However, no amount of material provisions would ever be a substitute for the citizenship and independence to which the Aleuts were entitled both by treaty and by natural right.

However, despite the discrimination against native Americans which the U.S. government perpetuated in Alaska, an 80-year-old Aleut named Peter Kostromitin from Unalaska was not displeased with the change of governments in 1878.

I am glad that I lived to see the Americans in the country.... The Aleuts are better off now than they were under the Russians. The first Russians who came here killed our men and took away our women and all our possessions; and afterward, when the Russian-American Company came, they made all the Aleuts like slaves, and sent them to hunt far away, where many were drowned and many killed by savage natives, and others stopped in strange places and never came back. The old Company gave us fish for nothing, but we could have got plenty of it for ourselves if we had been allowed to stay at home and provide for our families. Often they would not sell us flour or tea even if we had skins to pay for it. Now we must pay for everything, but we can buy what we like. God will not give me many days to live, but I am satisfied.33

THE PURCHASE OF SEWARD’S ICEBOX

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