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UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
OFFICE OF TERRITORIES

GENERAL INFORMATION

ALASKA



Road to Harding Lake on Richardson Highway near Fairbanks

Alaska is the largest peninsula of the North American continent. Surrounded on three sides by water, it is connected with Canada by a land base 600 miles wide along the 141st meridian between the Arctic and Pacific Oceans. Southeastern Alaska is not a part of this peninsula but is, geographically, the coastal section of northern British Columbia. Alaska is approximately 586,400 square miles (375,296,000 acres) in area, including rivers, lakes, etc., or one-fifth the size of the United States. The actual land area is 571,000 square miles. Physiographically, Alaska may be divided into three distinct major regions, varying in geologic origin and surface expression. The three sections are the Pacific Mountain, Central Plateau, and Arctic Slope regions.

HISTORY

American history of the Territory of Alaska can be said to date from 4:00 a.m. March 30, 1867, when the Treaty of Purchase was signed by Baron de Stoeckl for Russia and Secretary Seward for the United States. This Treaty was proclaimed by President Andrew Johnson June 20, 1867, whereby the United States acquired from Russia the title to an area known as "Alaska", for the sum of \$7,200,000. The appropriation for this purchase was made July 14, 1867, and the formal transfer took place at Sitka, October 18, 1867. This purchase was negotiated by Secretary of State William H. Seward, who was severely criticized for what was termed "Seward's Folly."

GOVERNMENT

The bill providing for civil government in Alaska was introduced in the United States Senate in December 1883; was passed by that body in January 1884, and by the House of Representatives in May 1884, when it was signed by President Arthur and became a law. The "Territory of Alaska," as such, was created in 1912 by the passage of what is known as the "Organic Act." The Territorial Legislature, which meets for a period of sixty days biennially beginning with the fourth Monday in January of uneven years, is composed of 16 Senators and 24 Representatives. The Governor is appointed by the President, subject to ratification by the Senate of the United States. A delegated elected every two years represents the Territory in the Congress. He may prepare and introduce legislation, act as a member of committees, but has no vote.

CLIMATE

Alaska is not a frozen wasteland as many people believe. The southeastern area has the same average temperature as that of Baltimore and Philadelphia, the western area climatically is similar to New England, and the interior is comparable to Montana and the Dakotas. It is notable that Barrow, on the Arctic Ocean coast, has a higher winter temperature record than Fairbanks, 120 miles below the Arctic Circle. Alaska's proximity to the North Pole is about that of Scotland, Norway, Finland, and Sweden.

Specifically, the southeastern area has mild winters, cool summers, with heavy precipitation. The south-central area has moderate winters, warm summers, with heavy precipitation on the coast and light rain and snow inland. Along the Alaska Peninsula and Aleutian Islands, the winters are stormy but not exceptionally cold, the summers are cool with considerable rain and fog. Interior Alaska has very light rainfall and great extremes in winter and summer temperatures. More rivers and harbors subject to freezing exist in the States than from the Aleutians to southeastern Alaska. With the exception of Cook Inlet, which is little used for navigation because of high tides, Alaska has no freeze-ups east and south of Bristol Bay owing to the warm ocean currents and warm winds traveling eastward from the Asiatic coast. Precipitation is heavy in some sections, exceeding that of many areas of the States. This is an advantage in southeastern Alaska as the rain encourages the dense forest growth of Tongass National Forest and feeds the thousands of streams in which the salmon spawn every year. At the same time, it provides the vast, unharnessed waterpower which will enable private capital to open pulp and paper mills and utilize the great forest resources. Average annual precipitation of 150 inches in the southeastern region quickly drops to 15 inches or less north of the Alaska Range and steadily decreases to 5 inches on the Arctic coast.

POPULATION

In 1940 the population of Alaska was 72,524 and on April 1, 1950, the count was 128,643. The 1940-50 increase represents the greatest population growth rate in Alaska for any decade since the 1890-1900 gold rush decade.

LIVING CONDITIONS

Alaska's cities and towns are not unlike those in the United States. The same pattern exists of shopping streets, schools, churches, chambers of commerce, civic organizations, and clubs that are found in almost any town in the States. The great difference is that Alaska towns are scattered widely throughout the Territory, separated by vast areas of sparsely populated land. Some of the towns are connected with other centers only by ship, river boat, or airplane; others are also connected by railroad and highway. Other roads and means of communication are being constructed as rapidly as possible. Most cities and towns are modern and progressive and have churches, theaters, bowling alleys, baseball parks, night clubs, department stores, dress shops, bus lines, taxis, modern hospitals, clinics, banks, radio broadcasting stations and other modern services and equipment familiar to Americans. Schools are modern, educational standards are high and the instructors carefully chosen. The University of Alaska is located at Fairbanks and compares favorably with institutions of a similar nature in the States. Airplanes are used widely by passengers and for hauling freight. Information concerning the larger cities and towns may be obtained by writing the local chamber of commerce or the Alaska Development Board, P.O. Box 50, Juneau, Alaska

THE PEOPLE

While it is true that Alaska needs people--people with initiative and ability--it also is true that many residents of the north country have lived there a long time. Many of the men and women who went there before, during, and after the fabulous gold rush of 1898 and 1901 still live in the Territory. Like residents of long standing in any pioneer or new community, they have acquired, through the years, dignity, wisdom, tolerance and friendliness and have made substantial places for themselves in a society which is as stable as any in the continental United States. Citizens of Alaska are citizens of the United States. They receive most of the privileges and, of course, are subject to the duties and obligations of citizenship, including service in the armed forces and payment of Federal income taxes. People of Alaska have the right to vote for their own legislators and various Territorial officials, but they do not participate in Presidential elections because Alaska does not have votes in the electoral college.

Many Alaskans are aborigines--Eskimos, Aleuts and Indians. Groups inhabiting four areas are: Eskimos of the north and northwest, Aleuts of the southwest and Indians (Tlingit, Tsimshian, and Haida) of southeastern Alaska. A few of these people have retained their tribal traditions, but in most cases they have adopted modern ideas and living conditions. They serve in the Territorial Legislature and other government offices, the unions, chambers of commerce and other organizations. In keeping with progressive educational and governmental ideals, equal opportunities exist in Alaska for all members of society.

ESKIMOS

Among the native people the most numerous is the Eskimo. They live along the Arctic Ocean and Bering Sea and in the deltas of the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers. More than other natives, Eskimos have preserved their ancient customs, habits, and language. They are fur trappers and fishermen. They also engage

in ivory carving and mining. In the early days, Eskimos lived chiefly on meat and fish, supplemented by a variety of native berries, edible plants (greens), and a few tuberous roots. Today, they have become accustomed to a modern diet.

During World War II many Eskimos served in the Army or Navy. Others worked on airfields or supplied meat to the armed forces. Eskimo women and children sewed winter clothing for soldiers and sailors and many Eskimo villages subscribed heavily to war bonds.

ALEUTS

The Aleuts live in the Aleutian Islands, the Pribilofs, along the Alaska Peninsula, and on Kodiak Island. Over 500 resident Aleuts live on the Pribilof Islands and work in the government-administered sealing operations. They are closely related to the Eskimos, although there has been much interbreeding between these people and the whites, dating back to their first encounter with Russians. Aleuts are able seamen and clever fishermen. They have their own language and retain in part their traditions. An Aleut has deep respect for his religion, his graves, and the church in which he worships. His knowledge of local geography is reliable.

INDIANS

Approximately half of Alaska's Indians are Tlingits, a great race living on the islands and the broken coast of southeastern Alaska. The Tlingit country is noted for its tall, gaily-painted totem poles.

To a Tlingit, trees are friends. Throughout his history he has depended on them for his canoes, beams and rafters, the boxes which contain his family treasures, ceremonial hats and dancing masks, drums, shields and weapons, and totem poles. When the white man came, the Tlingits battled fiercely for their ancestral forests. Although modern Tlingits have lost many of their former ways of living, they are still a fishing people. Many of them own and operate their own fishing boats, others work in southeastern canneries during the summer, supplementing such income with trapping and hunting in the fall and winter. Others carry on the traditions of their people by carving and woodworking. The famous Chilkat blankets are made by Tlingits.

In the past, Tlingit people never remained rich for long. When one of them saved a number of blankets, which were used for money, he held a great feast, called a potlatch, at which he gave everything away. The more he beggared himself, the more honor he received. In reality, this was his manner of attaining social security--for those who had received gifts from him were obligated to assist him in time of future need. This custom is almost extinct today, but the Tlingits continue to be good business people and occupy positions of importance in the economy and development of Alaska.

The Tsimshian Indians came from British Columbia, led by William Duncan, a missionary. They settled on Annette Island in southeastern Alaska in 1887. Most of them live in their model village of Metlakatla, which is quite successfully run, partially on a cooperative basis. Among the cooperative enterprises are a salmon cannery, including several fish traps; a water system; a community hall; an electric plant; and a sawmill. The individuals own their own fishing boats and operate the stores in the village. Two churches are in the village.

The Haida Indians came several generations ago from British Columbia to southeastern Alaska. They settled in the southern part of Prince of Wales Island where they built their wooden villages on beaches just above the high-water mark. Relatives of the Tlingits, they also carved totems, were grouped in clans, gave potlatches, and lived by fishing and hunting. They are noted for their fine slate carvings and the precise and delicate adornment of articles

of wood, bone, and shell. Their mode of living now is much the same as the Tlingits with fishing and related enterprises contributing the major portion of their income.

The Athapascan Indians are thinly scattered in interior and southcentral Alaska. Most of them are poor and their villages are small. They live largely by fishing and trapping and are clever at making many useful and ornamental objects.

TOTEM POLES

Contrary to popular belief, the totem pole is not an idol, has no religious significance, and is based on the tribal past. Totem poles are deeply carved cedar trees, some 40-feet high, covered with figures of animals, birds, whales, fish, and other forms of wildlife, the family emblem, and figures immortalizing any historical event to heroes in the family life. They are colored with natural vegetable and mineral paints prepared according to age-old methods and are a work of art. The largest and most interesting group of totem poles standing in Alaska has been gathered in Totem Pole Park at Saxman, two miles south of Ketchikan. The original locations of these renovated poles were on canoe harbors seldom visited by tourists. Five major northwest linguistic groups carved totem poles or allied monuments similar to totem poles. The carvers were the Tlingits, Haidas, and Tsimshians of Alaska, and the Kwakiutis and a branch of the Salish tribe residing in British Columbia on the Bella Coola River, often referred to as the "Bella Coolas." These totem poles were abandoned by the natives when larger towns offered more employment. The poles were gathered and refurbished, or copied, in 1938 by the United States Forest Service and Indian artisans.

LAND OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN

Because of Alaska's high northern latitude, the length of day varies much more between summer and winter than in the United States. At the Arctic Circle on the shortest day of the year the sun touches the southern horizon at noon, then drops from sight again. Below the Arctic Circle the sun rises a correspondingly longer time, but farther north it stays below the rim of the horizon on this day. For instance, on December 21 at Fairbanks, about 2.5 degrees south of the circle the sun rises at 9:58 a.m. and sets at 1:40 p.m. At Barrow, about 4 degrees north of the circle, the sun is not seen from late November until late January. In summer the length of the days is the reverse of the winter. At the Arctic Circle on the longest day the sun dips to the horizon at midnight, then rises. Farther south the sun goes below the horizon, while above the Arctic Circle the sun circles the sky, never setting. At Fairbanks on June 21 the sun rises at 12:57 a.m. and sets at 11:48 p.m. At Barrow the sun does not go below the northern horizon from early May but circles the sky, and is highest in the south at noon and lowest in the north at "midnight." The sun first sets at Barrow early in August. Thus, Alaska is as much a "land of the midnight sun" as northern Norway.

EMPLOYMENT

Definite advice regarding employment opportunities in Alaska is difficult to offer because the situation is constantly changing and much of the work is seasonal. A safe rule to follow, in all cases, is to make a thorough investigation as to specific job vacancies. Persons going to Alaska to seek employment should have available sufficient funds for expenses. Wages are generally

higher, in line with expenses, than in the States and vary from one part of Alaska to another, in keeping with the cost of living and labor supply in the different areas. Inquiries concerning employment, wages, transportation and other pertinent details may be addressed to the Alaska Territorial Employment Service--offices at: Juneau, Anchorage, Fairbanks, Ketchikan, and Petersburg. Persons interested in The Alaska Railroad should write the General Manager, Anchorage, and inquiries in connection with road construction and maintenance should be addressed to the Commissioner of Roads for Alaska, Alaska Road Commission, Juneau.

THE ALASKA RAILROAD

The Alaska Railroad, running from Seward to Fairbanks, a distance of 470.6 miles, provides transportation of freight and passengers from the coast to the interior of the Territory. In addition, the Railroad operates freight and passenger boats on the Yukon and Tanana Rivers, between Nenana and Marshall during the summer months.

THE ALASKA HIGHWAY

The Alaska Highway begins at Dawson Creek, British Columbia, and extends to Big Delta, in Alaska, where it joins the Richardson Highway and continues on to Fairbanks. The total distance from Dawson Creek to Fairbanks is 1,523 miles. For specific information on the Alaska Highway, write to the Department of Mines and Resources, McLeod Building, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Only 302 miles of the highway are in Alaska.

ACQUISITION OF LAND

More than 90 per cent of Alaska is under the jurisdiction of the United States Department of the Interior. The major portion is open to the establishment of homesteads under the homestead laws. Preference is accorded veterans in connection with the homestead, homesite, and small tract rights. A large number of leases on small tracts for business purposes, as well as home and cabin sites, have been made. These new home builders are creating outlying communities in the vicinities of Anchorage and Fairbanks. Individual homesteaders, associations, or corporations are required to record in a Land Office, Bureau of Land Management, settlement claims for surveyed and unsurveyed lands. Offices are located in Anchorage and Fairbanks. This recordation covers claims for homesteads and use of the public lands for trade and manufacturing sites, headquarters, and homesites. Inquiries concerning land in the Matanuska Valley should be directed to the Alaska Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, Palmer, Alaska.

GENERAL AGRICULTURE

In general, almost all kinds of hardy vegetables and berries and some grains can be raised in Alaska. Potatoes are a standard crop and grow well. On a few crops, such as tomatoes, corn, and tree fruits, will not mature in the open. Dairying is one of the principal farm activities in the Matanuska Valley, and other successful dairies are in operation in the Fairbanks area and adjoining some of the larger towns. The farmer or homesteader should raise as much as possible of the food consumed by his family and his livestock in order to avoid the necessity of buying products, which, because of high cost of transportation from the States, are expensive and sometimes unavailable. Chicken farming has

not been extensively undertaken in Alaska, because of the high costs of importing food. However, most farmers maintain small flocks and where feed is grown locally, chicken farming can be successfully undertaken on a commercial basis.

At the present time no funds have been provided for colonization projects in Alaska, and neither the Federal nor the Territorial Government pays for the transportation of settlers to Alaska or advances funds for this purpose.

COMMERCE

The fishing industry is the first in importance in Alaska and the next industry in importance is mining. Although gold has led all other minerals in total value, silver, copper, lead, platinum, coal and other types of minerals are also mined. Furs derived from trapping of wild animals and from fur animals bred in captivity, form the third largest source of income for the Territory.

TIMBER

Huge growths of virgin timber in the Tongass and Chugach National Forests located in the southeastern part of the Territory, as yet scarcely touched by the hand of man, afford great opportunities for the paper and pulp industries. Specific information may be obtained from the Regional Forester, Juneau, Alaska.

TRANSPORTATION

Much passenger travel to Alaska is from the port of Seattle, by ship or by air. There is no railroad transportation from the United States to Alaska. Information concerning travel rates and schedules can be obtained from your local travel agent or by writing to the following companies, all at Seattle, Wash: Alaska Steamship Company; Alaska Airlines; Pacific Northern Airways; Pan American Airways, and Northwest Airlines.

MAPS

This department has no maps available for free distribution. However, maps may be purchased from the Geological Survey, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C.

PICTURES

This Office has no pictures of Alaska available for distribution. Inquiries should be directed to the chamber of commerce of one of the larger towns in the area of particular interest. All of the larger towns have a chamber of commerce.

PASSPORTS

For a citizen of the United States, no visa is necessary to travel to Alaska or any of the territories of the United States, nor is any passport or visa necessary when traveling through Canada to Alaska.

ALASKA'S FLAG

Alaska's flag was selected from designs submitted in a flag contest held in 1927 in the public, private, and native schools of the Territory by the American Legion, Department of Alaska. It was designed by Benny Benson, aged 13, a student in the 7th grade of the Mission Territorial School near Seward, and adopted as the official flag by the Territorial Legislature on May 2, 1927. The design is eight gold stars in a field of blue. The blue, one of our national colors, typifies the evening sky, the sea and mountain lakes, and wild flowers that grow in Alaskan soil; the gold is significant of the wealth that lies hidden in Alaska's hills and streams. Seven of the stars simulate

the constellation Ursa Major, the Great Bear. This is the most conspicuous constellation in the northern sky and forms the Dipper. The Pointers point toward the eighth star in the flag, Polaris, or the North Star, the ever-constant guide for the mariner, explorer, hunter, trapper, prospector, woodsman, and surveyor.

FLOWER

The forget-me-not is Alaska's floral emblem.

SONG

Alaska, My Alaska, composed by Mountain A. Snow of the class of 1903 of the Juneau High School, has been adopted by the Pioneers of Alaska as their official song. It is sung to the tune of Maryland, My Maryland.

VARIOUS NAMES

Alaska has been known by various names. The Aleuts called it Alakhshhak, probably meaning Great Country or Great Land, and it has been suggested that Alaska is an English corruption of this native word. The country has also been referred to as Seward's Folly, Walrussia, American Siberia, Zero Island, Polaria, Icebergia, and Land of the Midnight Sun.

The words most associated with Alaska are Eskimos, dogsleds, northern lights, Cheechako (tenderfoot), glittering gold, and sourdough. A sourdough is one, in the vernacular of the north, who has spent a winter in the Yukon Basin and seen the ice go out in the spring. The term originated in the days when the pioneers of this remote region baked their own bread from sourdough, which they prized as more precious than gold because it provided the leavening for dough and pancakes.



Map showing the size of Alaska as compared with the United States