

The operations of the Alaska Commercial Company in Alaska and the Yukon territory form interesting reading, and in a large measure is the result of the early history of the country. Long before any other trading company entered this field and years before gold was discovered in the Klondike the A. C. Co. was established in Alaska and at points along the lower river.

In the same year that the purchase of Alaska from Russia by Secretary Seward was consummated (1867) this company purchased from the Russian-American Company all their interest in the then almost unknown territory of Alaska in which district the Russians enjoyed a flourishing trade with the natives. The Pribyloff Islands were leased to the company for 20 years commencing May 1st, 1870, under an act of congress which was approved the following month of the same year for

...The Great Plant of... The Alaska Commercial Co.

A Story of the Oldest Company Operating in Dawson

Millions of Dollars Invested in River and Ocean Steamers. Immense Stores and Warehouses Filled with Commercial Wealth.

Michael, Nome, Andreofsky, Anvik, Nulato, Tanana, Minook (Rampart), Fort Hamlin, Circle City, Koyukuk, Bergman, Fortymile and Dawson City.

During the season of open water the A. C. Co. carries the U. S. mail by

Portland, Rainier, Dora, Fay and Bertha.

The St. Paul is a new steel steamer built by the Union Iron Works in the spring of '98, and has been placed on the regular run between Nome, St. Michael and San Francisco. She is

value an idea can be formed by the stranger of the wonderful growth of this enterprise in but a little more than three years of commercial activity in this city. The buildings of the company occupy one solid block on the main thoroughfares of the city, exclu-

country a perfectly appointed department store, but such is the fact and under the management of men of special experience in the different and diverse lines of trade. Naturally an immense business is done with the miner in outfitting for the mines and from the different departments are drawn the various articles which go toward making the complete outfit. There is not a necessity and hardly a luxury which cannot be found at this emporium. The volume of trade handled in Dawson alone by this concern annually seems incredible and is counted by the millions.

A steel safety deposit vault guards the treasure of the company and in it are stored fabulous sums of money not only of the company but hundreds of others as well, who look in special boxes their wealth, doubly guarded by special officers who are on duty night and day.

The vault is built in the offices of the main building and is made from case-hardened steel 12x14 feet and 9 feet high, containing 222 private boxes. There are two doors guarding the entrance with diebold locks and bolts. The outer door is of double thickness and with the most improved pattern of combination locks. The inner door is of case-hardened steel. The whole vault is surrounded with two feet of solid masonry and concrete, making the vault as safe to depositors as the Bank of England, with the exception that it is not submerged at night. The receptacle is never without a guard night or day, and one man is specially engaged waiting upon the patrons of the deposit boxes.

It is in the internal arrangements, however, that patrons are particularly pleased as the boxes are easy of access to the holders of keys properly authenticated. The 222 boxes are of hardened steel with case-hardened steel doors and two-key locks—that is to say there are two keys which must simultaneously be placed in the lock before the miniature safe will open. One key is retained by the owners of the vault, and the other remains in the possession of the renter. By this arrangement there are two men whose presence is required at the opening of this box. The keys to each of the 222 boxes are made entirely different, consequently a depositor is assured that his particular box cannot be opened by any other key.

The docks of the company embrace all the water front contiguous with the main buildings and here during the few months of navigation the company's steamers land their immense cargoes of merchandise and passengers. At this time the greatest activity is manifested and hundreds of men are employed in unloading the steamers which arrive and depart with the greatest possible dispatch. Under the long shed of the dock a steamer load is deposited from which it is immediately rushed to the warehouses to make room for the next boat's cargo.

As every Dawsonite is aware the great dread of fire is ever before us, for have we not suffered from that dread monster repeatedly. In this regard the A. C. Co. has carefully guarded against the destruction of its vast interests by putting in a complete system for fire protection, which not only can be used in its own interests, but should necessity demand, can be utilized for fighting fire in the vicinity of its stores and warehouses.

A well is sunk at the river bank 42 feet deep which penetrates the front line and from which can be pumped an unlimited supply of water. Hose is ready at a moment's notice to connect with a large force pump, which is kept in constant motion.

A steam heating plant is also in operation which heats the warm storage warehouses, the stores, living rooms and mess-house. Three thousand feet of two-inch pipe is used for this purpose. A remarkable fact in this connection is that after passing through all this length of pipe in its various ramifications a distance of over one-half a mile, the steam is apparently as effective as when it entered direct from the boiler.

A private telephone system is installed connecting all the different departments and warehouses. An organized fire department is part of the working force of the institution, the employees taking the keenest interest in the work, responding as readily to an alarm in the vicinity of the store as though a conflagration was in progress in the great store of the A. C. Co.

The home office of the company is in San Francisco, with branches in New York and Seattle. The officers are as follows:

Lewis Gerstle, president; Louis Schjoss, jr., general manager; Louis Grenbaum, secretary; James M. Wilson, superintendent of Yukon district, and Edgar A. Mizner, resident manager at Dawson.

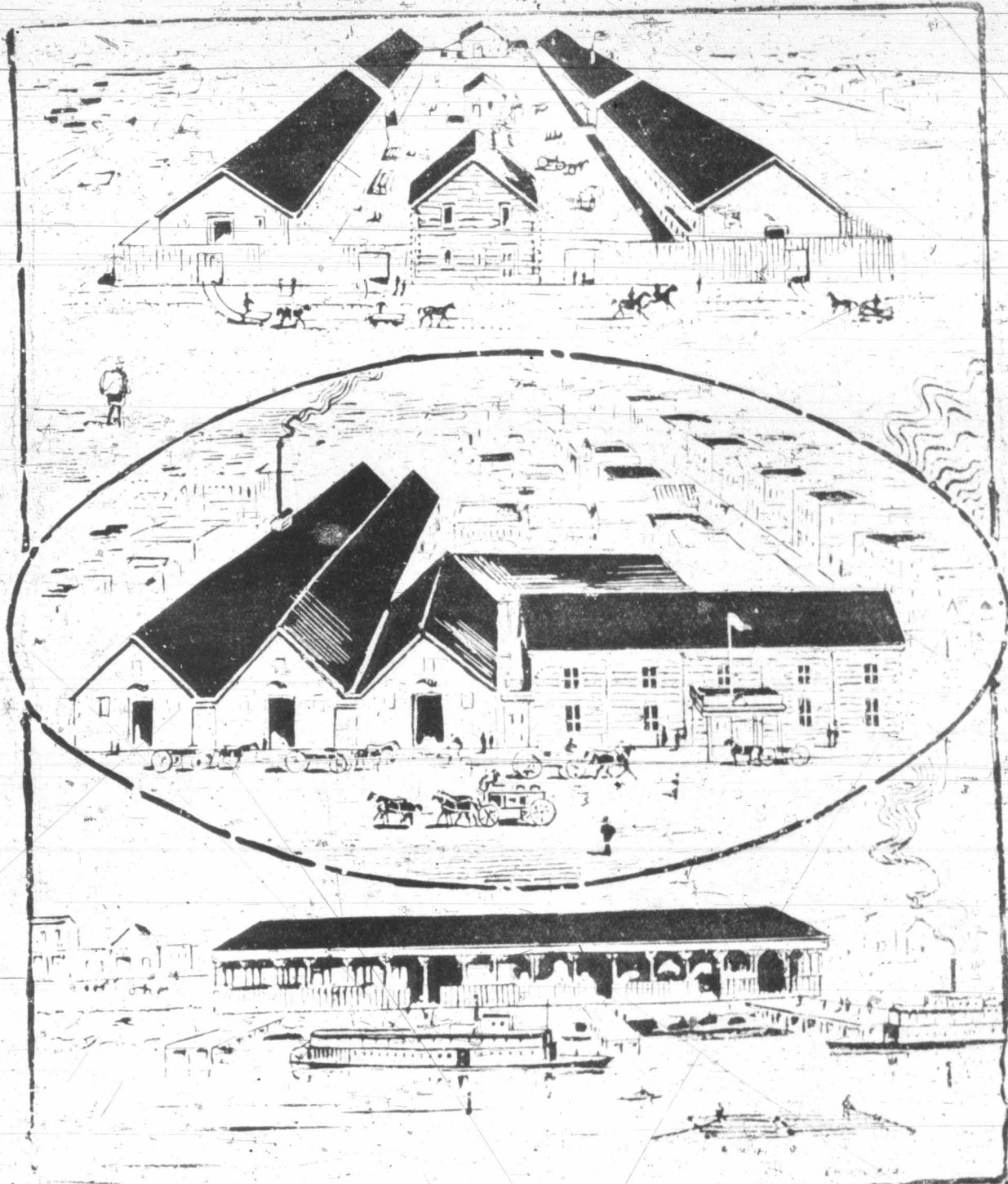


ILLUSTRATION SHOWING WAREHOUSES, STORE BUILDINGS AND DOCK OF THE A. C. CO

a rental of \$55,000 per annum and an additional tax of \$2.62 on each seal skin taken which amounted to \$317,000 per annum. In the period during which this charter was operative the Alaska Commercial Company paid to the United States government the enormous sum of \$7,000,000, almost the full amount paid for Alaska by congress in 1867.

During the years 1868 and '69 posts were established at all the principal points in Alaska and the first passenger and freight boat to churn the waters of the Yukon was dispatched up that river long before the tributary country was heard of as a gold producing region. The company at that time was engaged in the collection of furs and trading with the different Indian tribes on the coast and along the course of the Yukon. In 1886 the first gold ever sent down the river was carried out by the company and from that date up to the present time whenever gold was discovered and new camps sprung up the A. C. Co. was first in the field to open a trading post. At present the company operates at St.

their river and ocean steamers to and from St. Michael, Nome, Cape York, Behring sea posts, and all points on the Yukon river to and below Dawson. During the past 30 years the A. C. Co. has kept ever in the lead in the development of the country and to day it operates an immense fleet of river and ocean steamers, which carry to its different posts the great tonnage distributed by the company through its various stores. The following A. C. Co.'s steamers are, during the season of navigation, in operation:

River Steamers.

Sarah, 500 tons carrying capacity; Hannah, 500 tons; Susie, 500 tons; Louise, 500 tons; Sadie, a tow boat used for towing barges in the mouth of the river; Leah, 300 tons; Alice, 300 tons; Bella, 300 tons; Margaret, 400 tons; Victoria, a pilot boat on the flats, Yukon, another pilot boat on the lower river; Florence, 100 tons; and the new river boat City of Paris.

The number of through passengers carried by the river boats last summer were 521 from Dawson and 620 from the lower river. The freight brought in foots up some 6000 tons, all consigned to the A. C. Co., except a few hundred tons of special merchandise carried for other concerns.

The ocean steamers are the St. Paul,

288 feet long, 38 feet beam and 2440 tons register, with accommodations for 260 first cabin passengers. The staterooms are commodious, well-lighted and illuminated with electricity. The steamer Portland is another large steamer of 1500 tons register and is equally as desirable for either a freighter or passenger carrier as the St. Paul, although of course not as large; the Rainier is a steam schooner of 1500 tons carrying capacity; the Dora, Sadie and Fay are smaller craft which were placed on the run between St. Michael and Nome last season. The Bertha runs from Seattle along the coast, touching at all posts as far north and west as Unalaska and carries the U. S. mail to and from those points.

These steamers constantly ply during their season of activity, which necessarily is controlled by the opening and closing of the Yukon and Behring sea, between the different posts of the A. C. Co., carrying the immense cargoes of general merchandise which is distributed over the vast area in which the company operates.

The A. C. Co.'s store is one of the greatest institutions of the country and when it is considered that in June of '97 the site upon which the mammoth plant of this company is now erected, was then a timbered tract of doubtful

size of its immense docks and warehouses.

A general idea of the plant is obtained from the accompanying illustration. The picture on the top represents the warehouses of the company, situated in that part of the city where the liability of fire is least probable and occupies 210x500 feet of ground. There are four huge warehouses 35x195 feet in the enclosure, each separated from the other and with a storage capacity collectively of 12,000 tons. The center picture shows the front of the A. C. Co.'s stores, warm and cold storage buildings with the roof of the company's office building just visible. Back of that is the large mess-house in which the employees of the company live. This was the first store in Dawson and the original building was a shack put up on the lot on which Sam Bonfield is now located, a large tent being erected along side in which was stored the first shipment of goods. The first store building erected on the present location is the big log structure which stands today on the corner of First avenue and Third street and was built under the supervision of Capt. Hansen and E. A. Mizner at a cost of \$60,000.

A stranger who enters the magnificent store of the company would hardly be prepared to find in this far away