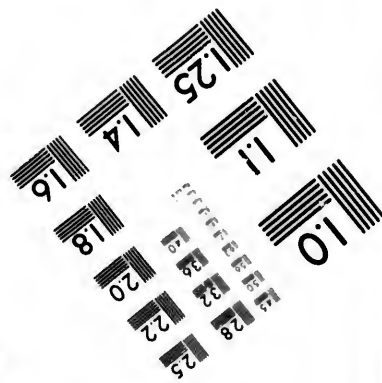
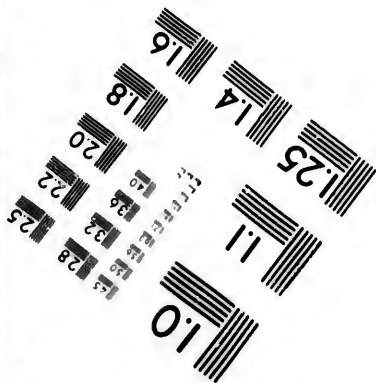
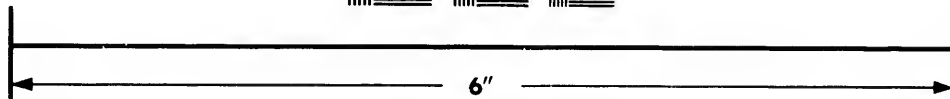
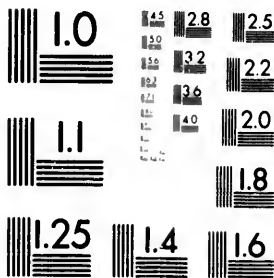


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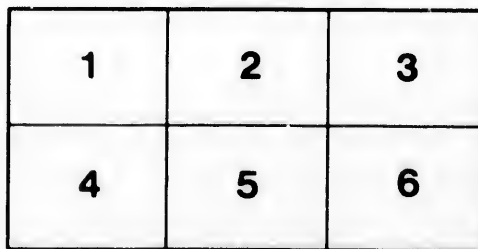
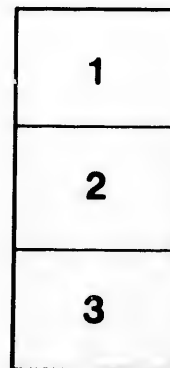
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PURCHASE
OF THE
RUSSIAN POSSESSIONS IN NORTH AMERICA
BY
THE UNITED STATES.

PAPERS RELATING TO THE VALUE AND RESOURCES OF THE COUNTRY.

Mr. Collins to Mr. Seward.

NEW YORK, April 4, 1867.

SIR: The many erroneous statements in the press of the day in regard to the country of Russian America has induced me to lay before you a number of facts not generally known to the public, and which, I trust, may be valuable to the Department of State.

In my investigations to determine the route of the Russian American Telegraph, I sought the highest sources of information in regard to the physical and topographical condition of the north-western limb of our continent. As early as 1856, when I first visited St. Petersburg, I embraced every opportunity to become acquainted with Russian officers and parties high in authority who were competent to enlighten me on the subject, and studied all the maps and books that could be found relating to the country.

Rear-Admiral Fyrichtin, now Governor of the Amur country, and who held the office of Governor of Russian America for five years, has also given me much valuable information. I have also had frequent conferences with the Governor and Directors of the Russian American Company, from whom much has been learned.

The boundaries and general outline of Russian America are so well known that nothing can be said as to its location. Commencing at 54° 40' N. latitude, on the Pacific, the mainland is marked by a succession of islands to the Peninsula of Alaska, so that open boats or small river steamers can navigate safely between the islands and the mainland. Many of these islands are clothed with splendid timber, and the waters abound in fish. The coast of the mainland is densely timbered, which fact was one of the causes which induced the location of the Russian American telegraph to be made inland and east of the mountains.

The first river of any importance that enters the sea in Russian America is the Steeken, or St. Francis, in about 56° N. latitude. This river has been followed by the telegraph exploring parties to the Cascades, where it breaks through the coast range of mountains dividing British Columbia from Russian America. This river is found navigable for boats, according to the reports of traders, for a considerable distance towards the Rocky Mountains. Game and fish are abundant, timber good, and gold mining has already been commenced by a party of Americans. Natives are quite numerous during the fishing season, but are reported friendly and anxious to trade furs, etc., for merchandise. It is said that the prospect for gold on this river is equal to the old 1849 days of California.

There are many small streams as you ascend along the coast and passes over the mountains into British Columbia, and parties of natives trade with the interior tribes more to the east and north by following some of these streams, and thus arrive in the valley between the Coast Range and Rocky Mountains.

The next river of any importance is the Copper Mine, which enters the sea in view of Mount St. Elias, in about 60° N. latitude and 142° W. longitude. This river is of importance in consequence of its location and the access it gives to the interior, as it unites by a lake with the waters of the Yukon within Russian territory, giving almost uninterrupted navigation from the coast, on the Pacific, by way of the Yukon and the Kritchpak, to Behring Sea, thus giving easy access through a large part of the southwest limb of this country.

Next comes Cook's Inlet and a river entering into it, which the Russian American Company use, in connection with the Koosequequin, to reach the Kritchpak and Fort St. Michael.

After passing the Peninsula of Alaska we find a considerable river entering into Bristol Bay. This stream, by a system of lakes, is said to connect with Cook's Inlet.

Next in order comes the Koosequequin, a river of considerable magnitude, and of importance

to the country in giving navigation to the interior. This section of the country affords considerable trade to the Russian American Company, in which they have trading stations.

The largest, most important, the chief and queen of all the rivers west of the Rocky Mountains and north of 49° N. latitude is the Great Kritchpak, which enters the Behring Sea between 64° and 65° N. latitude by several mouths, and on a parallel of 165° W. longitude. This great river has an easterly course for some 6°, then bends abruptly to the north some 4°, thence nearly east to a point not far distant from the British frontier, where it receives the Porcupine or Rat River from the northeast, and the Yukon from the southeast. The junction of these two rivers forms the Kritchpak. It is navigable to the sea a distance of one thousand (1,000) miles for steamboats.

This river had never been seen by white men in its whole course previous to explorations for the construction of the Russian American telegraph. In fact, on many maps the Yukon was traced as an affluent of an imaginary river emptying into the Arctic Ocean; but these explorations have determined a great geographical fact, which places the Kritchpak at the head of all rivers on the northwest coast, and giving Russian America the largest river north of 49°.

As we proceed north through Behring Strait and enter the Arctic Ocean, we find Kotzebue Sound, which is fed by a considerable river, on which is a large population. Here is found, like on the coast of Arctic Siberia, extensive deposits of animal remains, where fossil ivory may become, as in Siberia, an article of valuable commerce.

Further east there are many bays and sounds, and beyond Point Barrow the Colville River enters Garrison Bay. This river has its main course to the south, and the natives report it navigable and inhabited from a point not far from the northern bend of the Kritchpak to the sea.

Fort Yukon, the head station of the Hudson's Bay Company west of the Rocky Mountains, is on Russian territory. This fact has not been established by government survey, yet it is well known in both Russia and England. No difficulty has grown out of it between the two governments, because the Russian American Company and the Hudson's Bay Company, who have enjoyed exclusive trade in these regions, came to an understanding as to their mutual interests along the line of disputed territory, in order that there should be no conflict on any way or the other among the natives. They were for peace along the boundaries, and no doubt pursued a wise course.

Major Kennicut, chief of the telegraph exploring party, who died on the Kritchpak last year, had passed, some years previously, a winter at Fort Yukon. He describes the country as favorable to trade, and of great importance to the Hudson's Bay Company. He explored a large district of the country around the fort, generally on foot. He entered the country, on his first visit, by the Mackenzie River Pass, returning the same way. On his voyages for the exploration of the route of the telegraph, he entered by way of Fort St. Michael, near Behring Strait. On the upper waters of the Kritchpak, and upon the whole course of the Yukon, timber is plentiful; the country abounds in game, and the rivers and lakes afford fish; salmon descend the Kritchpak in great numbers, and are largely taken by the natives for food both for themselves and for their dogs during winter. The natives are reported by Major Kennicut, and by employees of the Hudson's Bay Company, as peaceable and wonderfully honest, theft being rarely known among them. They are voracious, enterprising people, and very fond of foreign trade and merchandise, though the difficulty and cost of transportation by way of Mackenzie's River route limits the supply to much below the demand. Navigation by way of the Kritchpak would increase the trade and value of this country one hundredfold in a few years; in fact the Kritchpak, with steam upon it, would reveal a new world to enterprise and adventure. By this stream the whole of a hitherto unknown country is brought within the reach of steam communication from San Francisco; and when the stars and stripes shall float at Fort Yukon, we may look for mines of gold and silver being discovered quite as rich as those further south. The furs of this country are wonderfully plentiful, and form a valuable and extensive commerce both to the Russian and British traders. That the Hudson's Bay Company can afford to transport their merchandise and supplies overland from Hudson's Bay, or by way of St. Paul, and return their furs over the same route, is a striking evidence of the value of the trade, because transportation over this long route cannot cost less than one dollar per pound. With the Kritchpak open to steam navigation, ten cents a pound from San Francisco would pay handsomely.

Upon the whole, Russian America, with her dependencies, the islands attached thereto, is a valuable country in itself, viewed intrinsically. It is not such a country as Oregon or Washington in climate or soil, but it has, nevertheless, many sources of wealth.

In the southern section gold is known to exist; on Coppermine River (whence its name) there is copper, though as a matter of policy the Russian American Company have not encouraged mining, because they feared that mining, even if successful, would soon break up their monopoly of the fur trade and open the country to the searching eyes of foreigners and the demoralizing influences of cheaper goods and more lucrative employment of the natives.

The fisheries along the coast and islands will build up a population and commerce there which, at no distant day, will rival Newfoundland and the coast of the Atlantic east of Cape Cod. The shoals and banks along the islands of Russian America are the resort of myriads of codfish, unsurpassed in size or delicacy. Once give a lodgment there, fishing towns will soon spring into existence, giving for our Pacific coast a nursery for first class seamen, which, in the growing commerce of the Pacific, will be just what we want there in the future, in order to give us the supremacy of that great ocean. The fisheries alone are worth more to us than the whole cost of the country, and will repay us in the future amply for the investment. The immense population of Asia and the islands of the Pacific will be good customers for our surplus fish, and will readily take all we may have to spare.

Timber for building purposes is abundant and convenient; saw-mills will soon make the lumber trade a source of profit not only for domestic use, but for export to Asia and the more southern islands; boat and ship building can be carried on profitably where good timber is so abundant and easily procured.

The acquisition is also valuable on account of several deposits of coal along the coasts and islands. At Cadiac the Russian American Company have worked a coal vein for some years past, and have used it in their forges and workshops, as well as on their steamers employed in carrying on their commerce with California and Asia.

Nor is this country to be counted as nothing in an agricultural point of view. Wheat, barley, and oats can be produced as far north as 60°; gardens flourish along the coasts in the Russian settlements, producing all the vegetables requisite for domestic use.

It must always be remembered that the Pacific coast of America, of equal degrees, is much warmer than the Atlantic coast.

The isothermal line of Sitka (New Archangel) is equal to Newfoundland or St. Petersburg; that is, about 40° to 45° of Fahrenheit, and the mean of the thermometer is ascertained to be 45° 4'; winter 34° 7'; summer 66° 2'.

Taking it, then, as a whole the country of Russian America cannot be considered, as some would have it, a dreary waste of glaciers, icebergs, white bears, and walrus, and only fit for the Esquimaux and drinkers of train oil.

One more article of commerce must not be lost sight of; that is ice. On the islands there are many fresh-water lakes, which afford an inexhaustible supply of very pure ice. The trade in ice, so far, has been carried on either by the Russian American Company, or under their permit; consequently, the ice trade has not been developed to any extent. This trade, in the hands of Americans, would soon grow to wonderful proportions, for the reason that these lakes in Russian America supply the only ice suitable for shipment on the Pacific north of the equator.

I did not mention in order, when speaking of the fisheries, that all the way north, from Cadiac to the Arctic, whales are found in great abundance. Cadiac and Bristol Bay are old whaling grounds, and many a New England town owes its wealth to the large catch of whales in Russian American waters.

Walrus are as plentiful at and about Behring Strait as blackberries are with us in August. With American fishing settlements along the coast, the ivory and oil of the walrus will become no small source of wealth to our enterprising fishermen.

One more fact in regard to climate and temperature. Major Kennicut died at the great eastern bend of the Kritchpak, five hundred miles, by the course of the river, from its entrance into Behring Sea. The ice in the Kritchpak broke up on the 23d day of May, 1866, and on the 25th of May a portion of his companions embarked ~~on the river~~ taking with them Major Kennicut's remains, navigated the river to the sea without obstruction, and then coasted north seventy miles to Fort St. Michael, a post of the Russian American Company. This proves a great deal as to the favorable temperature of that country, and makes the Kritchpak nearly as early as the St. Lawrence in point of navigation.

I have the honor to be,

Very truly, your obedient servant,

P. McD. COLLINS,
U. S. C. A., Amour River.

Hon W. H. SEWARD, *Secretary of State,*
Washington, D. C.

Major General Meigs to Mr. Seward.

1208 WALNUT STREET. PHILADELPHIA, April 4, 1867.

MY DEAR SIR: I am surprised to find it stated that objections are made to the acquisition of Russian America.

I can conceive of no greater boon to our Pacific States, and I cannot suppose that Atlantic Senators will deny to the people of those States the fisheries depending upon Russian America, now within their grasp.

We need such a nursery of seamen; such a commerce as these fisheries will produce. They will feed the coasts and islands of the Pacific, and the rigorous climate will breed a race of hardy adventurers to repeat on the Pacific, softened by Christian civilization, the deeds of the old Norse sea kings on the Atlantic.

As a lover of my country, anxious for the growth and prosperity and strength and virtue of the nation, I should value Russian America, its fisheries and mines, beyond the hot plains of Mexico or the fertile plantations of Cuba.

I trust that no effort needed to secure this great acquisition will be omitted.

The execution of the treaty will crown our generation with the praises and thanks of future ages.

I am, truly and respectfully, your friend and servant.

M. C. MEIGS, *Quartermaster General.*

Hon. WILLIAM H. SEWARD, *Secretary of State.*

175374

The following telegram was received on Thursday :

SAN FRANCISCO, (CAL.) April 4, 1867.

Hon. EDWIN M. STANTON, *Secretary of War*:

I learn from a gentleman who has recently visited many parts of Russian America that its value is greater than has been supposed. The rejection of the treaty will cause great dissatisfaction on this coast, especially in California.

H. W. HALLECK, *Major General*.

Extract from a letter dated 3d April, received at the Department of State from Commodore John Rodgers, commandant of the Navy Yard, Boston.

"I think the Russian American acquisition would be valuable, and, if worth anything, the price would be a bagatelle.

"A few houses in Broadway would amount to as much.

"I see in the papers that the value of the ground in New York proposed for the post office is estimated by some parties at five millions of dollars."

"The stretch of coast to the southward of Mount Elias, left out in the Herald's map, is the important part."

"The southern part of the Russian possessions in America, in latitude 55°, is in the same latitude as the northern part of England."

"We should get a strip of shore much like Norway, which supplies Europe with enormous quantities of timber."

"The shore being an eastern coast, as regards the ocean, is much warmer than a western one."

"The furs are a minor consideration; fisheries and timber may be very valuable, the timber particularly so to a coast as bare as that of the Pacific."

SOME ACCOUNT OF RUSSIAN AMERICA.

The following is the substance of information in regard to Russian America derived from Professor Baird, of the Smithsonian Institution :

MEANS OF INFORMATION.

He has had two explorers in that field between one and two years, who returned last autumn, bringing a complete collection of specimens of natural history, extending from the British Possessions to the shores of the Polar sea.

CLIMATE—TEMPERATURE.

The coast from Prince of Wales Island to the entrance of Behring Straits, during the winter months, has about the same climate and temperature as at Washington city. There is little snow and much rain, and during the summer months the weather is very foggy.

TIMBER.

The whole country, well up to the northern coast, is heavily timbered, chiefly hard pine forests. There are small trees up to the very shores. Some of the islands are heavily timbered with pine forests and dense underbrush; some of them are covered with grass of luxuriant growth.

THE SOIL.

on the west coast produces excellent barley, and roots, such as radishes and turnips, and esculents, such as lettuce, cabbage, etc.

ANIMALS.

Furred animals, such as sea otter, river otter, sable, furred seal, mink, foxes, black, silver, red, etc., abound in great numbers. Red deer are on the south and reindeer on the north side.

FISH.

Herring, salmon, halibut, and codfish abound in exhaustless numbers. In Behring Sea and northward great whales are very numerous.

MINERALS.

Surface washings of gold have been discovered on the headwaters of the streams on the east side of the coast range of mountains. The geological developments are the same on the west slopes. Native copper has been discovered in various places on the coast and in the vicinity of Copper River. There is iron ore of excellent quality, and believed to exist in exhaustless quantities, which is now being melted and worked by Russian artisans in repairing ships, &c.

Coal is found in large quantities, and is used by the Russians for naval purposes. It is similar to the New Brunswick coal, and not equal to Cumberland coal. Recent discoveries have been made of what is believed to be a better quality of coal. It has not yet been tested.

INHABITANTS.

Five or six thousand Russians and fifty or sixty thousand Indians and Esquimaux. The Esquimaux inhabit the coast on the Northern Sea. They are industrious and peaceable, and live by hunting and fishing. The Indians inhabit the interior. They are peaceable, and live by hunting, fishing, and trapping.

Mr. Gibbs to Mr. Seward.

WASHINGTON, April 6, 1867.

SIR: I regret exceedingly to hear that there is even a possibility of the rejection of the Russian treaty. As a citizen of Washington Territory, a resident for many years on the Pacific coast, and having made its interests a matter of study, I can state, without hesitation, that the country relinquished by Russia is the most important acquisition that we could obtain. I know that I speak the sentiments of the entire population of the Pacific when I say that its loss will create there a feeling not only of disappointment, but of injury. In the whole line of the coast belonging to the United States, the harbor of San Francisco is the only one at once accessible to vessels of heavy draught and defensible. Puget's Sound, with all its bays and harbors, is entirely at the mercy of an English fleet, which, secure in the easily fortified ports of Vancouver Island, commands the whole Strait of Fuca, its entrance. In case of war with any maritime nation, our commerce would again be swept from the North Pacific, as it was during the late rebellion, by a single cruiser. With, however, the innumerable bays which lie among the islands or run far into the coast of Russian America, we could, without keeping a powerful fleet on that sea, or a numerous land force, protect it against the world.

To enumerate the other considerations urging the ratification of the treaty would expand this letter into an essay, and I will not trespass further on your patience.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

GEORGE GIBBS.

HON. WM. H. SEWARD,
Secretary of State.

Mr. Fletcher to Mr. Seward.

[Extract.]

MOUNT AIRY, PHILADELPHIA, April 3, 1867.

DEAR SIR: I beg leave respectfully, as one of the nation, to return you my thanks for the great benefit you have conferred upon the whole Union by your recent treaty with Russia, obtaining thereby the vast fishery grounds extending into those northern seas.

We shall want all the fish that can be caught there to feed our rapidly increasing population.

Respectfully, your friend,

CHARLES FREDERICK FLETCHER.

HON. WILLIAM H. SEWARD,
Secretary of State United States of America.

