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Little Known Bibliographic and Archival Materials
On Russian America

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LITTLE KNOWN BIBLIOGRAPHIC AND ARCHIVAL MATERIALS ON RUSSIAN AMERICA

By

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The history of Russian America - that is, of Alaska from 1741 until 1867 - is still far from complete. We know the general outlines, of course, and some fundamental works became available rather early, particularly those by William Coxe (1780), G. I. Shelikhov (1790), a number of outstanding accounts of voyages, Ivan Veniaminov (Innokentii) (1840), L. A. Zagoskin (1847-48), P. A. Tikhmenev (1861-63), and H. H. Bancroft (1885). These have been followed by a revival of scholarly activity in this field in more recent times, but there are still major gaps in our knowledge. In North American terms the history of this region and period resembles what was known of French Canada and the Spanish Southwest a century and a half ago. Researchers in those fields now know the routes of expeditions, when settlements were founded, what political and economic measures were taken, and biographic details of even minor personnel. Most of the sources likely to exist have been found, there are abundant bibliographic aids, and vast amounts of source material.

It is not so with the history of early Alaska. We must still reconstruct it, and retrieve materials and facts needed to fill out the record. Only then can we test old hypotheses effectively, devise new ones, and re-examine fundamental questions. This is a discourse on materials which will help fulfill these goals.

There is, first of all, no easy way; there are not likely to be any large caches of unknown, unused materials. Instead we have to be content

with smaller finds and must spend a great deal of effort seeking individual facts and going over known sources in order to see if anything was overlooked.

Secondly, there is no clearcut distinction between published and unpublished materials. It can be just as difficult to find an excessively rare book, perhaps available in only one or two copies, or an article buried in some obscure early 19th century periodical, as it is to find a rare unpublished document.

Moreover, we in the West are largely dependent upon Russian source materials. This requires not only a knowledge of the Russian language or the availability of translations but a certain ingenuity. Tikhmenev's documents, for example, were published with omissions, and the originals were either destroyed or, if any of them still exist, would be very difficult to find and use. In such cases other materials must be found, if possible, which will shed light on the question involved.

Finally, everything must be sought which can in any way contribute to the task. A building or the site of a settlement, a native tradition, or a contemporary sketch or early photograph can often tell us as much as anything in writing,

For these reasons, knowledge of sources is very important. Bibliographies must be combed thoroughly. Wickersham, Dall, Bancroft, Grewingk, Mezhov, and source citations must be examined, and libraries searched. The Alaska Historical Library at Juneau is one of the best in this field. The library of the University of Alaska at Fairbanks and the Heritage Library at Anchorage have valuable materials, and there are useful smaller collections - though without much Russian material - at Kodiak and in the Clarence Andrews collection at Sheldon Jackson College in Sitka. Farther south there is much Alaskan historical material in the library of the Provincial Archives of British Columbia, at Victoria, and the Northwest Collection at the

University of Washington Library.

The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, is one of those best known in this field. Its collection is based on materials left by Bancroft after publication of his History of Alaska (1885). It includes the manuscript series "Russian America," comprising translations of Russian sources on Alaska made by Bancroft's assistant, Ivan Petrof, and some of Petrof's interviews with individuals, an early use of oral history. The archive of early California documents copied from originals later destroyed in the San Francisco fire of 1906, provides a unique record of Russian relations with Spain and Mexico, with many references to trade, sea otter hunting, and the Russian establishment at Fort Ross. Many of the Alphonse Pinart and George Davidson materials relate to Alaska, and the recently purchased Honeyman collection includes originals of paintings and sketches of Alaska and California by G. H. von Langsdorf, made on his voyage around the world in 1803-1807.

Stanford University, at Palo Alto, California, has part of the materials collected by Frank Golder (1877-1929). In 1914, just before World War I, Golder was generously given access to the various Russian archives, which he searched for materials concerning American history. His hundreds of photostatic copies are now in the Library of Congress and the University of Washington. His papers, at Stanford, include copies and summaries of many documents not photographed, but mentioned in his Guide to materials for American history in Russian archives (1917-37).

The Library of Congress contains the great Yudin collection. Yudin, a Siberian merchant with a lifelong interest in the history of Siberia and Russian America, sold his collection to the Library early in this century. The books and periodicals were merged in the general collection; the

documents, kept in the Manuscript Division, include materials concerning Shelikhov and Rezanov.

The Manuscript Division also has the very extensive Alaska Church Collection, consisting of over 900 cartons of papers dating from the early 19th century, which were donated in 1940. This vast collection contains records of baptisms, marriages and deaths, and much information of value for ecclesiastical and social history. Previously almost unusable because of its extent and sketchy classification, it is now being catalogued.

The National Archives contains the Records of the Russian-American Company, the largest existing collection of company documents. When A. A. Baranov was replaced as chief manager in 1818 and sent back to Russia, all the files of his 28 year administration were sent with him. He died on the way, but the files presumably ended up in the Company archives in St. Petersburg, there to be kept until the entire archive was destroyed following liquidation of the company several years after 1867. Baranov's successors, following usual office procedure, accumulated incoming correspondence and kept letter books with copies of outgoing correspondence. These records were turned over to the United States in 1867. Records of the ports of Sitka and St. Paul (Kodiak) and of other settlements in Russian America must have been destroyed. However the governors' file is considerable, amounting to about 80,000 documents. Many are routine and repetitious, but there is abundant information on economic and administrative matters, and somewhat less on cultural and social matters. Except for the first few years, there is no list of the documents, but the remaining years will be listed in the course of translations now being made with the aid of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Yale University's Beinecke Library, at New Haven, Connecticut, specializing in Western Americana, has many rare books on Alaska, and many drawings made

by Ludwig Choris during his round-the-world voyage with Kotzebue, including some of Alaska natives. The New York Public Library, and the Widener Library at Harvard University both have large holdings of Western Americana. The library of the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia has the extensive Sheldon Jackson collection of books and papers, mostly pertaining to the post-1867 period, it is true, but with information relating to the earlier period. In Winnipeg, Manitoba, the Hudson's Bay Company archives contain many materials regarding relations with the Russian-American Company.

In other countries, most printed works on Russian America which are unavailable in the United States may be found in the University of Helsinki library, until 1917 a depository library receiving one copy of every work published in Russia. In France, materials on the voyage of LaPerouse may be found in the National Library, at Paris. In Spain, materials on Spanish voyages on the Northwest Coast are available in Seville and Madrid. The national library of Mexico has materials on relations with Russia, chiefly concerning Fort Ross.

Books and documents in many far-flung libraries can be difficult enough to find, and to reach, but materials in private hands, usually unknown, offer much greater difficulty. This turns the researcher into a sleuth, having to employ rumor, tips, genealogical research, and much correspondence and travel.

Most of the officials of the Russian-American Company left papers which, if they have survived changing regimes and the attrition caused by passage of time, are to be found in the USSR. However, the papers of some may be found outside of Russia, chiefly in Europe and in North America. This is particularly the case with chief managers (governors) of Russian America who were from the Baltic states and Finland. After Baranov (1790-1818), all of the governors were naval officers, and members of well-to-do families in the Baltic regions were naturally attracted to naval careers.

Hagemeister (1818) was from Estonia - I have not been able to find any descendants abroad. Ianovskii (1818-1820), Murav'ev (1820-1825), and Chistiakov (1825-1830) were all Russians. But then, in 1830, came Baron Ferdinand Petrovich von Wrangell, of a large Baltic German family. Some of his materials are in the USSR, but others are in the hands of descendants in various countries. In Bremen, West Germany, I found a great great grandson, Baron Wilhelm von Wrangell, who was a specialist in the family history. We shared information, and he told me of a relative, in New York, who had some pictures of Sitka. I got in touch with her, and was shown four fine little paintings made by an unknown artist in the 1830's, possibly the Baroness Wrangell. They have been published in the Alaska Journal in a series of sketches on the Russian governors of Alaska.

The University of Helsinki library contains a valuable document of Wrangell's time, a diary kept by young Reinhold Sahlberg, a Finlander who made a round-the-world voyage, spent a year at Sitka, and returned home across Siberia.

After Wrangell came Kupreianov (1835-1840) and then Etholen (1840-1845), a Swedish-speaking Finlander. Someone in Helsinki gave me the name of a great grandson living in Stockholm; he let me make copies of three paintings of Sitka in the early 1840's, also published in the Alaska Journal series, and several letters and other papers. Mrs. Etholen kept a diary, today kept in the library of the University of Turku (Abo), Finland. Deeply religious, her diary is suffused by mysticism and by her grief at the death of her infant son, Edward. (His grave marker, an iron cross, may be seen in the old Russian cemetery of Sitka). Probably at her insistence, they were accompanied on their voyage from Finland by a Lutheran pastor, Uno Cygnaeus, later prominent in education in Finland; a few of his papers are available, including a floor plan of the church he established at Sitka.

Another of that time was Lieutenant Johan Bartram, later prominent in Finland as a civil engineer. A few of his papers also survive, which I found in the hands of a descendant in Helsinki.

Dr. Edward Blashke, who served as a physician at Sitka, published a dissertation concerning it, stressing medical aspects, particularly from the point of view of topography and climate, which he thought had a strong effect on health. This book is in Latin, but three different unpublished translations exist.

After Etholen came Teben'kov (1850-1853). He is well known for the large atlas of the North Pacific, prepared at Sitka under his direction, based on the observations of company skippers for the past half century. The plates were etched at Sitka by a creole draftsman, Koz'ma Terent'ev, and sent to St. Petersburg, where they were published in 1852.

After Teben'kov came Rosenberg (1850-53), another Baltic German, then Rudakov (1853-1854), Voevodskii (1854-1859), and Johan Hampus Furuhjelm (1859-1863). Another company physician of the time was Dr. Franckehaeuser, whose descendants I found on a large farm outside of Helsinki, and who kindly gave me copies of some letters he had sent home. Descendants of Captain Krogius, a Finnish sea captain who sailed company ships on round-the-world voyages, let me copy two paintings of Sitka which he had brought back. Another item of interest is the diary of the Lutheran pastor Gabriel Plathan, in Sitka from 1845 to 1852, now kept in the University of Helsinki library.

Governor Furuhjelm, another Finlander, served the company as a skipper for a long time, and then as chief manager. Relatives in Helsinki had some of his letters, but others had been lost by fire during World War II. The surviving letters were provided me in typed copies, but unfortunately the originals have since been destroyed in another fire.

Of special interest were materials of the governor's brother, Enoch Hjalmar Furuhjelm, a mining engineer. Employed in Russia, in the Ural region, he was rejected by the girl he loved, and out of chagrin signed on with the Russian-American Company to go to the most distant place he could think of, Sitka. He was given the task of opening a coal mine at English Bay, Kenai Peninsula. His diary describes at length the tedious voyage around the world, and a trip to San Francisco, California to buy a steam engine and mining machinery. Letters describe in summarize his years at English Bay. His papers also included several pieces of valuable Russian-American Company paper currency, of a type devised specially for the coal mining project.

Probably more Russian-American Company material can be found in Finland. The national archives contain parish records which record the names of many people who left in the 1850's and 1860's for Sitka. These people must have sent home letters and souvenirs, which might still exist if their descendants can be found. Pastor Georg Gustaf Winter, who served in Sitka from 1853 to 1865, must also have written home, but Winter is a common name in Finland, and it would take a great deal of telephoning and correspondence to find descendants.

Similar material can be found elsewhere. After Furuhjelm came Prince Maksutov (1863-1867), the last Russian governor. He spent years in company service, and his first wife died in Sitka - her stone may be seen in Sitka cemetery. After 1917, one son left Russia and entered the U.S. merchant marine. He had a few small items - a notebook, a letter, and photos - pertaining to his father. These were handed to his son, a petroleum engineer who now lives in New York. They provide a record of round-the-world voyages and crossings of Siberia, two marriages, births and deaths in the family, and his later bankruptcy, a stark record, but useful for filling out the story of his life.

Well known in Alaska is Bancroft's assistant, Ivan Petrof. After a period of obscurity, in the late 1870's he was a U.S. Treasury agent on Kodiak. In 1880 he took the Alaska census and wrote his informative Report on the population, industries, and resources of Alaska (1884). Then he helped Bancroft write the History of Alaska (1885). Later he took the census of 1890, wrote another volume on Alaska, and soon after was employed to translate Russian-American Company documents for the U.S. delegation negotiating with the British in the Seal Islands Controversy. Then a junior clerk, practicing his Russian by comparing Petrof's translations with the originals, discovered discrepancies. Petrof had been falsifying his translations to improve the U.S. case! The heads of the delegation wanted no such help; they discharged Petrof immediately and apologized to the British. Petrof was also fired from the Census Bureau and his name was expunged from the 1890 census report.

The wretched Petrof dropped out of sight. Nothing was known of him for 70 years. Then the historian Morgan Sherwood, in his history of scientific exploration in Alaska, showed that Petrof had been prone to exaggerate some of his achievements in travelling in Alaska, and moreover that had deserted after serving in the Union Army at the end of the Civil War.

I then heard that Petrof's daughter had died in a traffic accident in Los Angeles about 1935. Thirty years had elapsed, but after some fruitless correspondence I wrote to the California State Department of Public Health, describing the approximate date, and got a death certificate. The date of death enabled me to consult the issue of the Los Angeles Times with the death notice and mention of surviving relatives. Letters to these finally gained a response from a lady in Oakland who had received the deceased's effects. She had the originals of the paintings which appear in the 1890 census volume, Petrof's letters to his wife and to his daughter, unpublished short stories

about Alaska which he had written trying to make a few dollars after his disgrace, and his date of death, near Philadelphia, in 1896. Other information then gradually appeared, and it became clear that he had been an enormous prevaricator, had enlisted in the army several times, evidently to get the bounty, and then deserted. Later he worked on the San Francisco Bulletin writing articles about the Russo-Turkish War of 1878, until he was discharged when it came to light that he was plagiarizing them from the New York Times.

These details may seem extraneous to the subject of Russian America, but they help to build up a picture of a man who compiled a great deal of Alaskan history for Bancroft, including translations from Russian works, and interviews. We need to know more about the man to evaluate his work. Some of his writings are indeed dubious. The diary of the monk Juvenal, to which Bancroft gives several pages, seems to be a fabrication. So, too may be the report of the promyshlennik Tarakanov concerning his captivity at the hands of the Spanish in California. These are often cited by anthropologists. These and other items, and the man himself need closer study in order to determine which of his many works have merit and which do not.

Other information may be obtained from the descendants of military personnel who were in Alaska after the transfer, government officials who served there, and members of old Sitka families. These sometimes combine with other items like pieces of a jig-saw puzzle. For example I had seen pictures of an ornate silver cup given by the Emperor Nicholas II to the Sitka resident George Kostromitinov in 1907, in recognition of his service to the Russian community and church. Later I found it in the hands of a descendant, living in California. She also had, I was pleased to find, several pieces of furniture, a samovar, and several other items from the old residence of the Russian governors at Sitka, popularly known as "Baranov's castle." In the Beinecke Library at Yale University there is a water color, made by a British naval officer, of the ballroom of the "castle." A postcard long on sale in Sitka shows a photograph of another room, with its furnishings. The Alaska

Historical Library at Juneau has an inventory taken in the early 1860's enumerating the items of furniture in different rooms in the castle and in other quarters occupied by company personnel. This in turn ties in with a sketch, in the Etholen family papers, which I found in Stockholm, showing the layout of both floors of the castle. These materials from different places give an idea of the castle interior, and combined with photographs taken before the loss of the building by fire in 1894, could even permit its reconstruction.

Museums with Alaska material usually contain much worth studying. The national museum in Helsinki, Finland, like the Museum of Ethnography in St. Petersburg, received priceless ethnographic materials collected by the various chief managers. Other such specimens reached Denmark, Germany, and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

Private collectors also have some interesting items, usually given little advertisement. A man in Montreal has a handsome imperial citation issued Lieutenant Waxell, one of Bering's officers, in the 1740's. Beautifully decorated, it contains miniature pictures of ships, including one of Bering's vessel, animals, natives, and Russian fur hunters. Another collector has several pieces of the rare Russian-American Company paper currency.

Much useful information can also be derived from native traditions. A great deal has been lost, but the Tlingit of Yakutat have handed down for generations a vivid and consistent story of the establishment of the Russian settlement of Slavovossia and of its destruction in 1806. In the Aleutians there have been traditions of early visits of Russian explorers and fur traders. Around Sitka, I am told, there are traditions of the destruction of Old Sitka, and of the retreat over the mountains by the natives after the Russian reconquest in 1804.

Archeological investigation of the sites of Russian settlements would also be informative, if undertaken, but so far only Old Sitka, in the 1930's,

and Slavorossia (Yakutat) have been excavated. Other sites - St. Michael, Ozerskoi redoubt (near Sitka), Nuchek, Voskresenskaia Gavan' (Resurrection Bay, near Seward) and the English Bay coal mining settlement have not been touched.

All of the foregoing - books, documents, and material objects - contribute to our overall knowledge of the subject. Inevitably, there are also losses; sometimes we can only guess at what there may have been. A newspaper article enumerating Alaskan items which were being assembled for display at the first Seattle exposition mentioned paintings by Natalia Shelikhov, who with her children spent the years 1784 to 1786. What were these? There is nothing else to indicate that she could paint, but even if they were not hers and were paintings from later in the Russian time they would still be of interest, so what became of them? I tried to find further mention of them in some inventory of the Alaska exhibit, but failed.

The Etholen papers include a description of Sitka on the basis of several paintings of the town made by looking in various directions from "the castle". The three I obtained copies of were not the same. Where are they?

A female descendant of Baron Wrangell had some of his Alaska letters. She became a missionary, took the letters to India, and died there during World War II. All of her effects vanished.

The catalog of a Philadelphia dealer, for 1966, listed papers of General Tidball, with the U.S. army force which took over Alaska in 1867, including lengthy diaries about Sitka and Kodiak, sketches and correspondence, on sale even then for \$10,000. I wrote the dealer twice, got no reply, then went there last spring. The firm had changed hands, but I was given the number of the woman who had it formerly. Sorry, she said, but all of the material had been stolen soon after the sale was announced, and never recovered. It is out there still, in someone's bureau drawer or safe deposit box.

A great deal of Alaska material went up in smoke in the San Francisco fire following the earthquake of 1906. Some of it was in private hands, much was in the Alaska Commercial Company building which was destroyed. Some Alaska Commercial Company papers, it should be added, are to be found at the University of Alaska and at Stanford University.

After the sale of Alaska a Major Bell made a number of sketches of Sitka. These were copied in the 1870's, but where are the originals? A woman residing in Sitka had them as late as the 1940's. Then she and her husband parted; she remarried and settled in Jamaica; there she died, the second husband remarried; then he died. My efforts to trace the paintings by correspondence ended in nothing.

Material things also perish rapidly - fire destroyed the old governors' residence and the cathedral - the latter happily restored - and decay and demolition have accounted for most of the other buildings at Sitka; a road was put through the cemetery; the site of Old Sitka is said to have been bulldozed off during World War II; tidal waves and urban improvement have taken their toll; pot hunting has gone on at various sites in lieu of competent investigation.

Much, then, has been found, and much has been lost. However, it is fruitless to spend too much time on search alone; eventually something coherent has to be written down, and conclusions reached. The best fund of source material comes from patient, painstaking search through the ample amount of material already available, retrieving the small facts which when pieced together with other facts will yield something new.

Finally, what are the specific needs for advancement of the study of Russian America? They may be divided into short term and long term needs. Much more needs to be done with bibliography. Wickersham's list is still the extensive, but needs to be expanded. A biographical dictionary is needed, which can piece together in accurate fashion the facts on the great number of

people - native, Russian, British, French, Spanish, and American, who have figured in important events during the period studied. The Russian Obshchii morskoi spisok (general naval list), published before World War I, gives biographies of naval personnel from the 18th century to the late 19th century, many of whom figured in Alaskan history. The Russkii biograficheskii slovar' (Russian biographical dictionary), and the old Brockhaus-Efron Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' (encyclopedic dictionary) contribute to this. So too do the impressive compilations of the Grand Duke Mikhail, a historian in the Imperial family, who before World War I recorded thousands of names, dates and epitaphs on grave markers in St. Petersburg, Moscow and other cities, published as the Peterburgskii nekropol' and Moskovskii nekropol' (Petersburg necropolis and Moscow necropolis).

A detailed chronology is needed. The last attempt at this was by William Healey Dall, in his Alaska and its resources (1870). Done in detail, with close attention to dates, this could unearth bibliography and provide a standard against which many accounts of events could be corrected.

A list of ships for the Russian period would be useful. Judge Howay, in his List of Trading vessels on the Northwest Coast, 1785-1825 made little mention of the Russian voyages. Yet ships have always been important in Alaskan history; they have definite dates of arrival and departure, they bring people and goods, take off others; they are a handy source of information on change. It is worth getting all this together, but it is an exacting, wide-ranging task, requiring close study of existing accounts, and obtaining information from a variety of obscure sources.

Paintings and sketches made during the Russian period bear study, as the only visual record we have. More can probably be turned up, and it is to be hoped that more of those in collections in the USSR can be published.

Ethnohistory, a new concept of investigation, needs to be pursued more extensively with the sources of the Russian period. Featuring the use of archeology, ethnography, history and other disciplines, it offers a chance to learn more about native society at the time of first contact with Europeans, and subsequent exchange of cultural traits. Oral history is a related technique which should be used to greater effect. Close attention to the recollections of old timers in a community like Sitka, even at this late date, can provide information which if coupled with other research, can help to reconstruct the society of the years following the American purchase of Alaska, and even before.

Another source of possible use would be the genealogical data collected a few years ago by the state of Alaska in connection with native claims. Proof of native blood was required, so genealogies were assembled going back in many cases to the early Russian period. This information, combined with that in the Records of the Russian-American Company and the Alaska Church Collection would make it possible to list most of the people who were in the Russian occupied areas of Alaska during that period and down to the present. Computer science would enable conclusions to be drawn as to origins, occupations, longevity, age and sex ratios, and public health. At present this is data in search of a problem, but it will eventually find use.

Much more should be assembled regarding daily life in Russian America. We need a more realistic idea of what life was like, and of the culture which was lost in 1867, or which slowly declined thereafter. Native artifacts were cherished for their curiosity value, whereas Russian artifacts of this period were commonplace in 1867, hence were used up, worn out, and eventually discarded. We need to know more about their uniforms and everyday dress, how they burned charcoal, about their handicrafts, how they loaded ships, about their architecture, weapons, kitchen utensils, songs, reading

matter, bookkeeping, social groups and holidays. At present we have only a foggy idea of these matters, so that it is difficult to assemble museum exhibits, or to provide a coherent picture of the time in the schools. A study of existing sources, archeology, and examining life of that day in eastern Siberia would help to narrow this gap.

Achievement of these objectives requires, first of all, more interested and qualified personnel. Research in this field is still on an amateur, self-taught basis. Not one school anywhere has more than one general course touching on Russian-America. Secondly, more knowledge of Russian language and history are needed. Thirdly, we need expanded library collections dealing with this period, less restriction on copying, and more interest in building up collections through microfilms and xerox copies. Fourthly, more publication is needed, of primary sources, secondary sources and monographs. The Alaska Journal has filled a long-felt need in this field, but it needs more support. More funds are needed to aid research and publication. Fifth, more conferences are needed, and more joint participation with Soviet counterparts.

Even if the above mentioned needs are not satisfied immediately, work in this field will go forward, so that twenty-five years from now there may be little left to do. It will be worked out, like an exhausted oil field or gold deposit. Or perhaps not. Every generation is apt to have its own ideas of what it seeks from history. Perhaps then, with better museum exhibits, more informative school texts, and more gripping historical novels, more people will take an interest in the field. With a truer idea of what life was like at that time, Russian America will take its proper place with other historic periods, helping those interested to realize that present-day problems are generally not unique but part of the continuous experience of people in every age, and that, it seems to me, is one of the things that history is about.

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