

THE RUSSIAN STEAMER *POLITKOF*SKY

A RUSSIAN-AMERICAN LEGEND

TEACHER'S RESOURCE MANUAL



Fig 1.0: The Politkofsky, *courtesy of Michael Burwell*

“In the hulks of old ships...which decades ago were proud passenger steamers, freighters, and towboats, can be read much of the history of Puget Sound and Alaska.”

-The Seattle Times, October 29, 1939

INTRODUCTION

This activity allows students to travel back to the time of early peoples and pioneers of Alaska on a journey to the 1700's, when the Russians assumed authority of Alaska. Students learn about different cultures, lifestyles and events of this time period. They understand the purchase and transfer of Alaska from Russia to the United States, the historic gold rush that brought a flood of pioneers to Alaska seeking their fortune, and learn of other events that helped to shape Alaska's history.

Our vehicle for this adventure will be the last known artifact of Russian-American shipbuilding in North America, the *Politkofsky*. Today, she lies partially preserved beneath Norton Sound's frigid waters, silent but not unheard. This story and the activities prepared will be sure to capture student's imagination and inspire creativity for further research. This true tale of adventure will help your students witness history through the chronicles of a real Russian ship.

Overview of Objectives/Standards from the Alaska Department of Education.

Information obtained in this manual can provide lessons based on these Standards:

- A. Student/Concept Objectives (+ where it fits into the curriculum)
 - i. **When given a list of important events, students will put their dates of occurrence in correct chronological order.**
 - a. Understand chronological frameworks for organizing historical thought and be able to place significant ideas, institutions, people, and events within time sequences (*Alaska Dept. of Education & Early Development, History Standard A*).
 - ii. **Students will identify and describe at least three major events that have shaped the history of Alaska.**
 - a. Understand the people and the political, geographic, economic, cultural, social, and environmental events that have shaped the history of the state, the United States, and the world (*Alaska Dept. of Education & Early Development, History Standard B*).
 - iii. **When given a map, students will identify the region of the world, locate the main areas and trace the major routes studied within the lesson.**
 - a. Be able to use maps and globes to locate places and regions (*Alaska Dept. of Education & Early Development, Geography Standard A*).
 - iv. **Students will be able to explain why the areas within the lesson serve as major settlements, trading sites and ports.**
 - a. Know that the need for people to exchange goods, services, and ideas creates population centers, cultural interaction, and transportation and communication links (*Alaska Dept. of Education & Early Development, Geography Standard D*).
 - v. **Students will be able to identify and describe some reasons for the sale and transfer treaty of Alaska and customs and maritime laws involved within the lesson.**
 - a. Be able to compare and contrast how different societies have governed themselves over time and in different places (*Alaska Dept. of Education & Early Development, Government/Citizenship Standard A*).

ABOUT THIS LESSON

This lesson is based on materials about the sidewheel tug and towboat, *Politkofsky*, which embodies major themes in Alaska history. Other sources include materials on the history of Alaska Natives and the history of Russian America. This manual was written by Helena Batman, a student at the University of Alaska and intern for the INSTEP program at the U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service, Anchorage, Alaska. It was written with extensive research done by Michael Burwell. The material presented allows lessons to be derived from the Alaska Standards for Social Studies guidelines including: History, Geography and Government/Citizenship.

TEACHER PREPARATION

1. Teacher will introduce each chapter through introduction, class discussion, group brainstorming, or fast write of what students know of the Russian period in Alaska's history. Teacher will model by telling/showing students what she/he knows of Russian history in Alaska.
2. Teacher will give an overview of what the unit will cover and give information of what the assessment will cover. Teacher will require students to take notes.
3. Teacher will provide materials, chapter reading materials, library/computer time for research work.
4. Teacher may copy and assign students to read each chapter and answer the questions at the end of each chapter.
5. Teacher may construct appropriate questions and activities based on the information in this manual.

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Chapter 1: *Introduction*

The *Politkofsky* was a sidewheel steamer built in Russian America in 1863, prior to the transfer of Alaska from Russia to the United States. The *Politkofsky* was named after the son-in-law of Gregorii Shelikhov, a Russian fur-trading merchant whose idea of combining Russian fur companies led to the establishment of the Russian-American Company. The Russian-American Company was successful in introducing schools and churches throughout Alaska. The *Politkofsky* is believed to be the last known artifact of Russian shipbuilding in Alaska, and so will be used as the vehicle to carry imaginations throughout Alaska's changing years.

The Russian steamer *Politkofsky* has witnessed Alaska's historic changes including the transfer to the United States, early fur trading, and the Klondike Gold Rush. She has steamed the icy Gulf of Alaska and has carried weary workers throughout the Puget Sound. Steamers were built and beached while the *Politkofsky* made it to the end of an era. Her 4,000-mile journey from the Puget Sound to the Norton Sound finally brought her to rest beneath the waters near the entrance of the Yukon River, where thousands of fortune seekers voyaged to the Klondike gold mines.

Alaska's history unfolds with each chapter in this manual. From early Russian exploration and settlements, the transfer of Alaska to the U.S., and the Klondike Gold Rush, the *Politkofsky* is sure to capture a child's imagination.

This manual provides a basis for lessons on Alaska history, which lead to the legend of the *Politkofsky*. Many chapters have links to further investigate information related to the reading, provide recommended websites, review "fun facts," and offer activities related to the reading.

Chapter 2: *Russian Exploration*

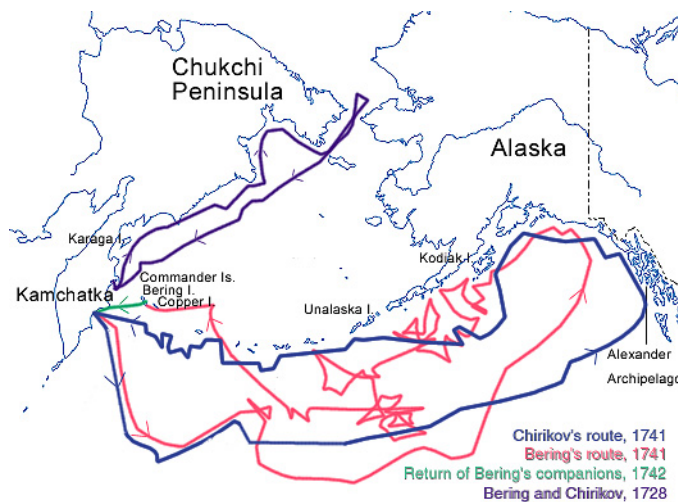


Fig 1.1: Bering Expeditions (Courtesy of: *Meeting of Frontiers: Russian Discovery of Alaska*)

Today, people travel to Alaska from around the world in search of new opportunities or to experience Alaska's majestic beauty. But a long time ago, people did not know of Alaska. Explorers in search of new lands discovered Alaska and her inhabitants. In 1725, explorers hired by the Russian Czar Peter the Great voyaged across the northern Pacific Ocean to find out what existed between Asia and America. Peter the Great employed Vitus Bering, a Danish man who had captained many ships, and Alexei Chirikov as Bering's assistant.

The expedition began on February 5, 1725, from St. Petersburg. It took 3 years for them to get through Russia to the Kamchatka Peninsula (on the coast of the Pacific) to begin the voyage on the open ocean. After sailing northeast on the ship *St. Gabriel*, Bering spotted an island known today as St. Lawrence Island. He then passed the Diomedede Islands and finally sailed into the Arctic Ocean. Seeing that the continent of Asia was out of sight, he concluded that Asia and America were indeed separated by an ocean. Bering did not see the land to the east as he sailed back to the Kamchatka Peninsula. If he had, he probably would have continued his expedition to the new land.

In June of 1740, under the permission of the Russian Senate, Bering began another mission to find land on the other side of the ocean. Two ships were built in Petropavlovsk, one to carry Bering and the other to carry Alexei Chirikov. Bering's ship was named *St. Peter* and Chirikov's ship was named *St. Paul*, both after the Christian Saints Peter and Paul. The ships were ready to voyage the next year and so set sail in 1741. Bering and Chirikov had intended to sail together, but they eventually got separated. Alexei Chirikov made it to what is now Sitka harbor and was able to sight Natives in that area. But unable to go to shore Chirikov decided to return to Russia, not knowing the fate of Bering and his ship.

Meanwhile, Vitus Bering had sighted Mt. St. Elias and landed on Kayak Island. A naturalist and physician, named Georg W. Steller, accompanied Bering on his expedition. While there, they explored and mapped the island and found evidence of human inhabitants. Bering decided to return to Russia, but the trip home was difficult. Strong seas delayed them and most of the crew fell ill, including Bering himself. Not being able to make it any longer, they landed on an island, which is now named Bering Island. The ship they were on wrecked to pieces and the crew fell sick. Many died there, including Vitus Bering.



Fig. 1.2: Mt. St. Elias on Kayak Island (Courtesy of Deborah Mercy)

LINK 1***

DID YOU KNOW?

- After Czar Peter the Great died in 1725, his wife Catherine I took control and administered Peter the Great's desired expeditions to the New Land.
- A Czar is a male emperor of Russia that ruled before 1917. The Russian Revolution ended the era of czars.
- Catherine I was the first empress of Russia.
- The town of Petropavlosk on the Kamchatka Peninsula was founded in 1740 by Vitus Bering and Alexei Chirikof. Petropavlosk means "the town of Peter and Paul."
- Georg Steller became the first European naturalist to observe and record North American plants and animals. His records were later published and used by other early explorers, including Captain Cook. Today, a number of animals and birds are named after him including the Steller Sea Lion, Steller's Jay, and Steller's Eider.

After Bering's death, the survivors were able to live off the island's resources. Sea mammals were the main source of food, especially the sea lion. Also plentiful were the sea otter, fur seal, and many foxes. These furs were very valuable, especially the sea otter. They discovered a huge stock of precious furs that motivated them even more to return to Russia. Russian fur traders had hunted and trapped many animals throughout the continent of Asia and had depleted many of the fur-bearing animal populations.

Because Russia and China had established a fur-trading agreement, the discovery of an abundance of furs would replenish the market for Russia.

With materials from the wreckage they were able to build a boat. Nine months later, they sailed back to their homeland bringing new charts of the discovered land and, more importantly, a multitude of valuable furs.

With the information that Vitus Bering and Alexei Chirikov attained, the mystery of the uncharted lands unfolded. These first explorations led the way for later expeditions that would change the fate of Alaska forever and begin Russian settlement. Today, Vitus Bering is known as the first explorer to “discover” Alaska (Andrews, 1938).

LINK 1 Cont'd.**

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES FOR MORE INFORMATION ON:

- Vitus Bering:*** WorldHistory.com at: <http://www.worldhistory.com/wiki/V/Vitus-Bering.htm>
- Alexei Chirikov:*** Discoverers Web: Chirikov at:
<http://www.win.tue.nl/~engels/discovery/chirikov.html>
- Bering Expedition:*** Meeting of Frontiers: Alaska: Russian Discovery of Alaska at: <http://frontiers.loc.gov/intldl/mtfhtml/mfak/mfakdis.html>
Large map of Bering’s Voyages: ExploreNorth.com at:
<http://www.explorenorth.com/library/maps/n-beringmap1.htm>
- Georg Steller:*** Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia at:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georg_Steller
- Marine Mammals and Conservation:*** University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Marine Advisory Program at: <http://www.uaf.edu/MAP/conservation/>
- Russian Czars:*** Meet the Romanov Rulers, Romanov Timeline at:
<http://www2.sptimes.com/Treasures/TC.2.3.html>

Questions/Activity for Chapter 2

True/False

- 1) In 1725, Vitus Bering sailed with Peter the Great to the Arctic Ocean. _____
- 2) Georg Steller became the first European naturalist to observe and record animals, Plants, and birds on Bering's Expedition. _____
- 3) Other explorers, such as Captain James Cook, used Georg Steller's records to educate them in their explorations. _____
- 4) Catherine I took over Peter the Great's throne in 1725 and became the first Russian Empress. _____
- 5) The town of Petropavlosk was founded in 1740 by Saints Peter and Paul. _____
- 6) tus Bering sighted St. Lawrence Island in 1728 but did not set foot on it. _____
- 7) Alexei Chirikof was Vitus Bering's assistant. _____

Put these events in the order by which they first happened.

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 1)_____ | A) The town of Petropavlosk was founded. |
| 2)_____ | B) Vitus Bering landed on Kayak Island. |
| 3)_____ | C) Alexei Chirikov anchored in Sitka Harbor. |
| 4)_____ | D) Vitus Bering spotted St. Lawrence Island. |
| 5)_____ | E) Vitus Bering landed on Bering Island. |
| 6)_____ | F) Bering and Chirikov set out for their second adventure. |
| 7)_____ | G) Many furs were brought to Russia from Bering Island. |

LINK 1 Cont'd.**

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES FOR MORE INFORMATION ON:

<i>Vitus Bering:</i>	WorldHistory.com at: http://www.worldhistory.com/wiki/V/Vitus-Bering.htm
<i>Alexei Chirikov:</i>	Discoverers Web: Chirikov at: http://www.win.tue.nl/~engels/discovery/chirikov.html
<i>Bering Expedition:</i>	Meeting of Frontiers: Alaska: Russian Discovery of Alaska at: http://frontiers.loc.gov/intldl/mtfhtml/mfak/mfakdis.html Large map of Bering's Voyages: ExploreNorth.com at: http://www.explorenorth.com/library/maps/n-beringmap1.htm
<i>Georg Steller:</i>	Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georg_Steller
<i>Marine Mammals and Conservation:</i>	University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Marine Advisory Program at: http://www.uaf.edu/MAP/conservation/
<i>Russian Czars:</i>	Meet the Romanov Rulers, Romanov Timeline at: http://www2.sptimes.com/Treasures/TC.2.3.html

More Questions for Chapter 2

1. Define expedition. Why did the explorers from Russia try to find Alaska?
2. Who was Vitus Bering? Alexei Chirikov?
3. What was the "land to the east" when Bering sailed back to the Kamchatka Peninsula on the first expedition?
4. Which explorer made it further on the second expedition?
5. Identify some resources Bering's crew used to survive on the island they wrecked on.
6. What has been named after Vitus Bering?
7. Why were furs valuable to Russian markets?

Chapter 3: *Russian Fur Trade*

Fur-bearing animals have been sought after since the beginning of humankind. Animals not only provided food, their pelts were used as clothing and for products that could be made out of the skin and hair. Sea otter pelts were the most desired because of their silky texture, warmth, and beauty. These pelts were also highly demanded in the Chinese trading industry, which Russia had a trade agreement with.

The Russian fur hunters and traders, or the *promyshlenniki*, had a large business with China. The Treaty of Kiakhta had opened trading ports between Russia and China. Russia could exchange items such as furs, hides, and leather for Chinese silk, rice, and tea.

The Russian government was not entirely interested in pursuing possession of Alaska or fully interested in further exploration of the new land. But the arrival of Bering's highly prized furs in Russia sparked the interest of fur hunters across Siberia. Many *promyshlenniki* readied for the adventure of sailing to the new islands knowing that the many fur-bearing animals would bring them wealth.

Upon reaching the new islands, the *promyshlenniki* were greeted by the Aleut Native people unique in appearance and language. Communication was made by gestures; and because both cultures knew the concept of trading, immediate trade of materials began. The Natives were excited to receive the new items including clothing, tobacco, pipes, needles, and knives. In exchange, the Russians were given food, ornaments, and other items, which they thought were "primitive." They discovered that the Natives did not have access to modern weapons. Also, because they wanted to gather the furs in the quickest manner, they encouraged--and even forced--the Natives to provide the animals for them. The *promyshlenniki* forced them to comply by taking their wives and sometimes their children as hostages.

LINK 2***

DID YOU KNOW?

Alaska's name was given by the Aleuts of the Aleutian Islands. They called their land "Alyaska" or "Alaksu." The Russians interpreted it as "Alaska" and the United States Congress later accepted this name.

The hunters had to travel further northeast as the animals became scarce. Native contact throughout the whole journey to the American mainland revealed different groups of Natives throughout the region. The Aleut presence proved to be helpful, as the Aleuts were able to communicate more easily with other groups of Natives. And, because of their subsistence lifestyle, they were fully adept at gathering food and materials. Observing their skills and absorbing their styles, the Russians were able to advance and improve their own hunting and boating skills. They were able to adapt to this lifestyle and eventually settled in Alaska with the intention of establishing fur-trading sites. But

many Alaska Natives were not happy with the idea of permanent Russian settlements, especially with their use of force with weapons and hostage taking. Eventually, Russian hostility and exploitation of Native land and resources caused a fight between the Natives and the Russians.

Thousands of animals were taken from the Aleutian Islands. The Steller's sea cow is an example of an animal that became extinct because of overhunting. It was discovered in 1741 by Bering's crew stranded on Bering Island. It grew up to 35 feet long and weighed up to 8 tons. Steller's sea cows did not have any teeth; they ate marine algae and kelp. They had a very thick layer of skin, so they were able to live in cold water. These animals were also slow moving and had no fear of humans, which made it easy for the well-armed Russian hunters to harvest them. The hunters ate the meat and used the tough skin for making boat covers, clothing, and leather. They hunted the sea cow so persistently that in 1768, less than 30 years after it had been discovered, the sea cow became extinct.

LINK 2 Cont'd.***

DID YOU KNOW?

The Steller's sea cow, although it resembled a whale, was placed in the same family as the manatee. It was also closely related to the elephant.

The sea otter was the most prized fur-bearing animal sought. In fact, between 1750 and 1790, so many animals had been killed that the sea otter was near extinction. Because the sea otter's population was very low, a hunting ban was later enforced under American rule and the trade for sea otters collapsed. Because of protection from the International Fur Seal Treaty in 1911, the population has increased.

LINK 2 Cont'd.**

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Russian Fur Trade	Meeting of Frontiers: The Alaskan Fur Trade at: http://frontiers.loc.gov/intldl/mtfhtml/mfak/mfakfur.html
Steller's Sea Cow	Explore North- The Steller's Sea Cow at: http://www.explorenorth.com/library/yafeatures/bl-seacow.htm
Aleut People	Quick overview and links to information on Aleuts at: http://www.ontalink.com/native_americans/aleuts.html

LINK 2: Early Alaska: People and Facts

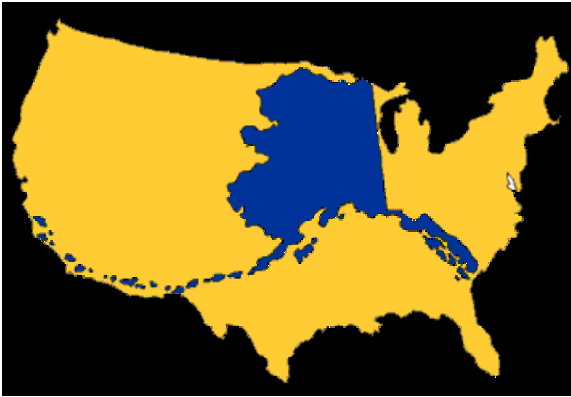


Fig. 2.1 (Courtesy of Multimakers, 1999 @Alaska's Best Homepage)

DID YOU KNOW?

Alaska covers 586,412 square miles, which is twice the size of Texas, one-fifth the size of the whole continental United States, and larger than Sweden, Norway, and Finland combined. Alaska is the only state to have coastlines on three different seas: the Arctic Ocean, the Pacific Ocean, and the Bering Sea. The coastline is 33,904 miles long (State of Alaska website). Alaska is the northernmost, easternmost, and westernmost state in the United States (Alaska Trivia and Information Website).

It is believed that long ago there was a great ice age that caused the land to be exposed between Siberia and Alaska. Many anthropologists speculate that people traveled to Alaska from Siberia to find food by following herds of animals to hunt and to gather plants and berries. After the Ice Age, the water level rose to cover this land mass between Siberia and Alaska. This land mass was called *Beringia*.

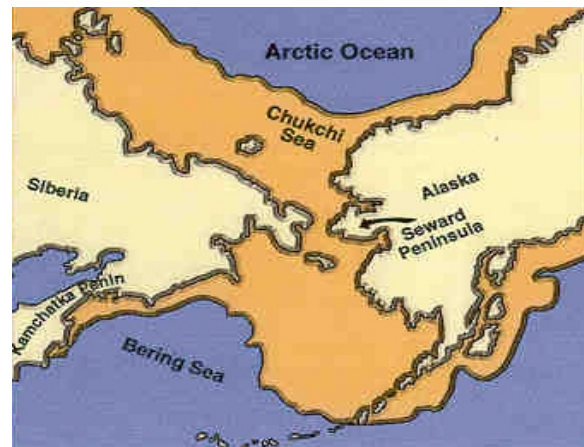


Fig. 2.2: Map of Beringia (Courtesy of the Beringian Heritage International Park Program, National Park Service)

These first people who stayed in Alaska and their descendants are called *Alaska Natives*. Because Alaska is such a large territory, people migrated and settled in different areas. Each group developed its own language and lifestyles. One thing common among all Alaska Natives, or aboriginals, is the subsistence lifestyle. They lived off the land by what the environment had to offer--by hunting and gathering wild plants, berries, fish, and game, which provided needed food, clothing, and materials. Each geographical region of Alaska offered different animals and plants to support these lifestyles and the survival of each group.

During this early time period in Alaska, there were no cities, airplanes, or stores. There were no modern houses. Some people did not live in one location year-round. As the seasons changed, they traveled to different places to live in order to find food. For example, families would often leave their winter homes in the spring to move near a river

to catch fish for winter use. They would call this spring and summer home a fish camp. Groups also created preservation methods to preserve their catch for winter, as there were no refrigerators or freezers. In fact, each Native group developed its unique fashion of clothing, shelter, tools, and methods of hunting that would enable its members to be successful in their hunting and their survival. Each group's diet and material resources were based on the variety of animals and plants available in its region. Because Alaska is so large, many people moved to regions where renewable resources were available. Trading between villages and other Native groups was done for the benefit of receiving items such as food and tools not available in its own region. For example, coastal Eskimos often traded seal oil for moose meat with the interior Indians.

It is believed that there were close to 80,000 Alaska Natives spread throughout the territory when explorers first came in contact with them. Alaska Native cultures are unique and are classified into five major groups: *Aleut*, *Yuit* (Southern Eskimos), *Inupiat* (Northern Eskimos), *Athabascans* (Interior Indians), and *Southeast Coastal Indians*, which include the Tlingit and Haida (Langdon, 1993). They were grouped by language, similar lifestyles, and residence within a relatively close proximity to each other.



Fig 2.3 Map from http://www.nationalgeographic.com/greatland/ax/primary_fs.html

(1) *The Aleut* people live on the rocky islands of the Aleutian chain up to the Alaska Peninsula. Foreign explorers came into contact with these people first, because they lived directly between the Asian and North American continents. At the time of contact, the Aleut population was estimated at about 18,000 people (Langdon, 1993).

(2) *The Yuit* people, or Yupik-speaking people, include the Eskimos along the coast stretching from St. Lawrence Island to Prince William Sound. They can be further classified into the Bering Sea group and the Pacific group. Within these groups, different languages are spoken. The St. Lawrence Island group speaks Siberian Yupik; the Yukon and Bristol Bay groups speak Central Yupik; and the Eastern group, from the Alaska Peninsula to Prince William Sound, speaks Alutiiq. At the time of contact, the total *Yuit* population was estimated at more than 30,000 people (Langdon, 1993).

(3) *The Inupiat* people are located along the northern shores of Alaska from the Seward Peninsula through the northern mainland of Alaska to Canada. These people can also be further classified into four Eskimo groups, depending on their exact location. These include the *Bering Straits*, *Kotzebue Sound*, *Interior North Alaska*, and *North Alaska*

Coast people. At the time of contact, it is estimated that the *Inupiat* population was 9,600 (Langdon, 1993).

(4) *Athabascan Indians* are located in the vast interior of Alaska, north and east of the Brooks Range and south to the Cook Inlet. This group can be further classified into nine groups, depending on location and language. These groups of people include the *Ingalik*, *Koyukon*, *Tanana*, *Holikachuk*, *Kutchin*, *Han*, *Upper Tanana*, *Ahtna*, and *Tanaina*. The *Athabascan* population at the time of contact was estimated at about 11,000 (Langdon, 1993).

(5) *The Southeast Coastal Indians* include the Tlingit and Haida Indians. They are located along the southeastern shores and mainland. They are closely related to the Indians that occupy the west coast of America. At the time of contact, it is estimated that the *Southeast Coastal Indian* population was roughly 15,000. They too can be further divided by language and location (Langdon, 1993).

Alaska Natives continue to live throughout the state and many still speak their Native languages and follow their subsistence lifestyles. Today, the population of the State of Alaska is approximately 627,000 (U.S. Census Bureau). There are fewer than 100,000 Alaska Natives throughout the state, making up only 19% of the total population (*USA Today*).

By 1866, the Aleut population had decreased by 75% since the first Russian occupation in the late 1700's.

Alaska Environments

Alaska's climate varies throughout the state. The *Interior* is the most extreme for temperature differences. This central area lies between the Alaska Range and the Brooks Range. It has long, cold winters and short, hot summers. There are no large mountains, but the landscape is filled with tundra, small trees and rolling hills, and often has thunderstorms and forest fires in the summer. The *Arctic* region stretches along the southwest coast up to the northern region into Canada. Cold winters and moderate summers are normal in the southern area, while colder winters and cool summers characterize the northern region. Trees and tundra inhabit the southern region, while the northern region has tundra but not many trees. The *Southcentral and Southeastern* regions are characterized by having a moderate climate throughout the year. Rainfall is more prevalent in the Southeast, and the temperatures are mild throughout the year. Towering trees occupy this mountainous region and crisp water is everywhere, as it is made up of many islands. The Southcentral area has colder winters, more snowfall, and warmer summers. This region hosts abundant trees, large valleys, and tall mountains.

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES FOR MORE INFORMATION ON:

<i>Beringia:</i>	The National Park Service, <i>Beringian Heritage International Park Program</i> at: http://www.nps.gov/akso/beringia/index.htm
<i>Alaska Natives:</i>	Alaskool Central at: http://www.alaskool.org
<i>Alaska Facts:</i>	State of Alaska, Of Interest, <i>Alaska Facts & Visitor Information</i> at: http://www.state.ak.us/ National Geographic Society, <i>Alaska: The Great Land</i> at: http://www.nationalgeographic.com/greatland/ax/primary_fs.html

Questions for LINK 2

1. Select one Alaska Native group and describe the area they inhabited. What geographical region of Alaska did they settle in? What do you think their climate is like?
2. Pretend you are a child living in 1705, *before* any European contact. Select an area of Alaska that your family settled in and give a brief description of what your diet would consist of.
3. How do you think the early people of Alaska traveled between settlement sites?

4. Identify two items each that might have been traded between the coastal Inupiat people and the interior Athabascan people. Give brief description of these items and why each group would want to trade these items.

Chapter 4: *The First Russian Settlement*



Fig. 3.1: Grigori Shelikhov, courtesy of *Meeting of Frontiers: Alaska*

In 1784, Grigori Shelikhov, a fur trading merchant, led an expedition to the southeastern part of Kodiak Island. Because of Kodiak's protected waters and available resources, he chose that area for their first [permanent] year-round post. This Russian settlement was named Three Saints Bay after the ship that Shelikhov arrived in. Storehouses and other buildings were built to establish New Russia. But after a while, timber became scarce. In 1792, they decided to move the capital from Three Saints Bay to the northern part of Kodiak because of the plentiful forests there. Their new establishment, which they named Pavlov Harbor, or St. Paul Harbor, became the new Russian American capital. This is where the city of Kodiak is today.

LINK 3**

DID YOU KNOW?

By the end of Russian colonization in 1867, the population of Alutiiq people in Kodiak had decreased from about 8,000 to 2,000.

Grigori Shelikhov returned to Russia and began his mission to obtain rights for fur-trading in the New Land. He appointed Alexandr Baranov to take over his duties at the new capital and appointed him manager of the Russian Trading Post, which held the monopoly of the fur-trade industry in Alaska. Alexandr Baranov was a trading merchant from Kargopol, Russia who frequently did business with the *Chukchee* people on the Kamchatka Peninsula. He was a strong-willed man who had a vast knowledge of the trading business, and Shelikhov trusted him.

In the meantime, many other explorers with established fur-trading companies were invading Russian America. Baranov saw that there was intense competition for trading relations with the Natives. Something had to be done quickly to establish the one Russian trading company that would hold all rights to the New Land, and he hoped that Shelikhov would hurry.

First Shipbuilding in Alaska

Because of the new fur-trading frenzy, many ships were wrecked and lost on the voyages, and the goods they were carrying, including the many furs harvested, never made it to their destinations. The loss of those ships and the many lives were detrimental to the region's trading business, including the importation and exportation of goods and services. Years could go by before a ship with everyday supplies would arrive from Russia. Although Baranov was forbidden to conduct business with foreign ships, he was forced to trade with them and occasionally needed to lease a whole ship. In turn, the leased ships were protected by the Russians from Natives who were hostile to foreign invasion and suppression. Also, the owners of the ships were permitted to occupy the Russian ports and use Russian resources. Protection of the foreign crews and their generous hospitality required valuable time and a depletion of limited Russian resources. Russian ships were needed, and eventually the request for local shipbuilding was approved by the Russian government.

Materials were sent by Shelikhov to Three Saints Bay. However, because of the vast forests for lumber and other valuable resources located on the mainland, a place on the south side of the Kenai Peninsula, near present-day Seward, was chosen as a suitable first shipyard site. Workmen were sent, along with the scant supplies, to begin building a ship. Because they did not have enough materials, they had to use various local resources including spruce gum and whale oil for tar, whale oil and other pigmented materials for paint, and a distilled mixture from pine trees for turpentine. The ship was constructed with hand-hewn planks. This first ship to be built in Alaska, the *Phoenix*, was completed in August 1794. It was 73 feet long, 23 feet wide, 13.5 feet deep and weighed 180 tons. The *Phoenix* had two decks and three masts with the sails crafted from pieces of scavenged canvas found between the Kamchatka Peninsula and Kodiak Island.

Two smaller ships were built near Kodiak in 1795, named the *Olga* and the *Delphin*. These ships allowed travel to Native villages and rival posts which, in turn, allowed Shelikhov to retake the regions that were being invaded by the French, British and rival Russian companies.

DID YOU KNOW?

Hand-hewn planks are pieces of wood cut and shaped with hard blows of a heavy cutting instrument such as an axe or a chisel. Trees were cut down, stripped of their bark and formed into flat timber and boards.

Ships were very important to the many promyshlenniki who wanted to voyage to the rich fur-bearing animal areas in the Aleutian Chain. Okhotsk, is located at the mouth of the Okhota River on the Sea of Okhotsk, which lies between the Kamchatka Peninsula and the Kurile Islands. This was a major center for shipbuilding, because of its location, but there was a shortage of materials needed for basic ship construction and a lack of knowledgeable shipwrights to build the ships. But because ships were greatly needed,

rudimentary ships were built, called *shitiks*, which were sewn together with natural materials such as willow wands. But the *shitiks* were too unstable, and the limited resources were needed for longer lasting ships. The shipyards started building *galiots* and *brigs* which were larger and more seaworthy. Meanwhile, shipbuilding in Russian America had begun with the construction of the *Phoenix*, but there were not enough men and materials to continue. Also, the timber used in building the ships was not suitable for the ribbing of the ships, so the effort to continue building ships was postponed indefinitely.

LINK 3 Cont'd.**

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:	
<i>Grigorii Shelikhov</i>	Meeting of Frontiers, The Russian-American Company at: http://leweb2.loc.gov/intldl/mtfhtml/mfak/igcompany.html
<i>Alexandr Baranov</i>	Discoverers Web: Baranov at: http://www.win.tue.nl/~engels/discovery/baranov.html
<i>Kodiak</i>	AK Native Knowledge Network at: http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/aeb.html#iid Alutiiq Museum and Archaeological Repository in Kodiak at: http://www.alutiiqmuseum.com/index.htm
<i>Sitka</i>	Sitka Convention and Visitor's Bureau at: http://www.sitka.org/
<i>Russian Shipbuilding</i>	1RSS-First Russian Sailing Ships at: http://www.1rss.com/main/index_eng.htm

Questions/Activity for Chapter 4

- 1. Research different types of ships and identify differences between these ships.**

Examples of ships: Shitik, Galiot, Brig, Schooner, Barge

- 2. Challenge students to use the library or online resources to create a map showing the routes of travel for Russian explorers and the first Russian settlements.**

****LINK 4: *Russian-American Company/Treaties***



Fig. 4.1 The Russian American Flag, courtesy of: <http://www.mcn.org/1/rparks/fortross/Curriculum/flag.htm>

From the beginning, Shelikhov had a vision of obtaining all the rights of fur trading in the new land. His plans of combining the Russian fur companies together and to extend Russia's colonization were partially met by the Russian government promising him exclusive rights to the trade profits in Russian America. These rights were granted to Shelikhov and his partner Ivan Golikov in 1783 and the company was named the Shelikhov-Golikov Company. After Shelikhov's death in 1795, his son-in-law Nikolai Rezanov, assisted Shelikhov's widow in managing the company. Rezanov wanted to fulfill Shelikhov's desire for a company that would obtain all rights to the trading business in the New Land, but also thought that it could actually become something more powerful. He had a plan. With help from the Russian government, Rezanov helped to enact a law in 1797 that all Russian companies unite under one new corporation named the United American Company. Rezanov then proceeded to change the company's name and its position. He wanted a company that would not only monopolize all sources of profit gained in the new colony but would also serve as a kind of government within a government and would employ armed forces to "govern" the land. Not wanting to have to answer to the Russian Government meant that Rezanov's company would be in charge of everything in the new colony and any new colonies that would be established. This company became known as the *Russian-American Company*.

The Russian-American Company brought huge profits to its shareholders at home and in turn, the company was given whatever it needed to pursue Russian possession of the New Land. The Russian-American agreement in 1799, with the Russian government, "allowed the privileges and duties held by the Russian-American Company for twenty years." After that, the government could renew its contract or take over the colony (Chevigny, 1965). The agreement included "the use of everything discovered, or to be discovered, to make new settlements and to the use of appropriate defense" (Andrews, 1938). Alexandr Baranov was appointed Governor of the new colony.

The first 20 years were so successful for the Russian-American Company and the Russian government, that the agreement between them was renewed in 1821 for another 20 years. Churches and schools were built in Russian America. The rights of the people,

including the Natives, were upheld and progress was made to acquire further colony sites along the American west coast.

The Russian Orthodox Church

After the establishment of the first Russian settlements, Baranov, in cooperation with Shelikhov, requested Catherine I and the Russian Orthodox Church to send missionaries to Russian America. They wanted to extend their faith to the Natives and to care for the spiritual needs of the Russian settlers. Empress Catherine sent eight monks from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1794. But it was not until 1826 that the first Russian Orthodox Church was dedicated in Russian-America in Unalaska. Today, the Russian Orthodox faith is still a prominent religion in Alaska.

The Russians had explored and had settled along the west coast of America from Southeast Alaska to Washington Territory south to California during this time. Because of the increasing costs of maintaining these new settlements, they eventually leased Southeastern Alaska from Portland Canal to Cape Spencer to the British and eventually sold their property at Ft. Ross in California. The cost of maintaining the posts in distant Alaska was a constant strain on Russian shipping resources, and the Russian government over time grew discouraged over the cost of protecting Russian American interests from other European powers.

The Hudson's Bay Company was an English fur-trading business that originated in England but occupied the lands that were near and along Hudson Bay. They traded with the Natives of Canada (called the *First Nations* people) for furs and then shipped them back to Europe, where they were sold for a large profit. They had no rival companies and were satisfied that they did not have to search for furs, because the Natives brought the furs to them. That soon changed with the introduction of the North West Company from Montreal, and an intense rivalry began in the search for more furs. This led the first Europeans down through the Rocky Mountains and to the west coast of America, where they encountered new lands and eventually the Russians. To prevent company rivalries, the Russian-American Company and the Hudson's Bay Company signed an agreement that gave the British company trading rights and privileges in Southeast Alaska. Today, Hudson's Bay Company still exists, serving as a major retail outlet. They have stores throughout Canada.

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES FOR MORE INFORMATION ON:

<i>Russian-American Company</i>	Meeting of Frontiers: Gallery, The Russian-American Company at: http://lcweb2.loc.gov/intldl/mtfhtml/mfak/igcompany.html
<i>Hudson's Bay Company</i>	Exploration, the Fur Trade and Hudson's Bay Company at: http://www.canadiana.org/hbc/
<i>Nikolai Rezanov</i>	Meeting of Frontiers: Gallery, Nikolai P. Rezanov at: http://frontiers.loc.gov/intldl/mtfhtml/mfak/igrezanov.html
<i>Russian Orthodox Church</i>	Firebird Videos. Com. Producers of Educational Materials about the Orthodox Faith and Cultures, Life of St. Innocent/Alaska at: http://www.firebirdvideos.com/saintslives/lifeofinnocentak.htm

LINK 4 Questions

DRAW A LINE TO THE CORRECT Trading Company

RUSSIAN-AMERICAN CO.

HUDSON'S BAY CO.

- Monopolized all trading sources in Russian America
- Furs were obtained by *First Nations* people and shipped to Europe
- Previous names include United American Company and Shelikhov-Golikov Company
- Company still exists today as a major retail outlet
- Had an agreement with Russian Government for rights and privileges in New Land for twenty years
- First rival company was the North West Company from Montreal



Fig. 5.1: Sitka, Alaska

Chapter 5: The founding of “*New Archangel*”

In 1799, Baranov proceeded across the Gulf of Alaska, to the Southeast islands, into a harbor he had seen before, where he had been planning for some time to establish a settlement. The “Sitkans,” Natives in that area, already had a settlement there, but Baranov swiftly negotiated the purchase of land for a Russian site nearby, located about 6 miles north of present-day Sitka. Later, Baranov moved to the Native site, built a barracks surrounded by a stockade and named the settlement “Novo Arkangelsk” or “New Archangel,” a place we now call Sitka, Alaska. There, ships carrying explorers from England, France, Spain, and America that were already frequenting nearby waters came to New Archangel to trade.

Russians were still enlisting the Natives as slaves, and exploiting the land and natural resources, so local Tlinget Natives were not friendly. There were many tribes within the area of Sitka, referred to as the *Kolosh* people by the Russians. These Tlinget tribes, including the *Kakes* and the *Chilkats*, surrounded the Russian settlement camp while other tribes, as far south as Vancouver, BC, came to retake their land. War took place and the Russians were driven out, only to return later with guns, ammunition and cannons five years later. In 1804, the lost settlement was regained and New Archangel became the new capital of Russian-America.

During this time, shipwrecks were common because of the hurried construction of ships, lack of materials, and uncharted waters. Many ships that were built to patrol Russian territory and to trade on other shores, including the *Phoenix*, wrecked and were lost. To provide for the needs of transportation and trade, shipbuilding had to be continued at New Archangel. The new settlement was a good place for ship construction because the tall yellow cedar trees used to construct ships grew in abundance there.

Shipbuilding at New Archangel began shortly after the establishment of the Russian American capital with the intention of using these new ships to trade and patrol their waters. It took an average of two years to build a ship. But that’s only if the materials were readily available. Fir, larch, cypress, ash, and cedar were all used as different construction materials. The design for building ships was not done from reading any plans or “blue prints.” They were built from memory and by visually copying other ship designs. Although these were primitive techniques, many ships were built this way. Not just anyone could build a ship. Some Russians were sent to school to learn to build ships.

But in Russian America, there were no schools and there weren't many Russians who had received instruction on shipbuilding. Therefore, Creoles (people of Native and Russian blood) were sent to Russia to be educated as shipwrights (shipbuilders).

Tenders, brigs, schooners and tugs were among the first vessels built in the very early 1800's in New Archangel, including the *Avos*, which was a steam tender. The steamers *Nikolai I* and the *Mur* were both constructed in 1839. The *Mur* was named after an American engineer who had been employed by the Russians to build the boat and other vessels. In 1847, the *Mur* was sold and the *Baranof*, replaced her.

Fur-trading was a very lucrative business, and other foreign companies were illegally moving in on the northern fur trade. In 1821, the Russians restricted trade on the coast to only Russian ships and told all other foreign ships to stay off the shore 100 miles unless there was an emergency. A treaty of trade with Great Britain was made in 1825 agreeing upon the boundary between Canada and Russian America (which remained after the sale of Alaska to the U.S.). Later, the U.S. allowed the same agreement with the British, letting their ships frequent Alaska waters and trade with the Natives.

LINK 4***

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES FOR MORE INFORMATION ON:

Ship Construction

Alaska Department of Natural Resources: *Kad'yak*
Site at: <http://www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks/oha/kadyak/kadyakindex.htm>

Russian Shipwrecks

MMS, Alaska OCS Region Shipwreck site at:
<http://www.mms.gov/alaska/ref/ships/>

Chapter 5: Questions

1. Research the Treaties of Trade pertaining to Alaska waterways.
2. How did the settlers learn to build ships?
3. What materials did they use to build ships?

Chapter 6: A Russian Gunboat

In 1862, construction of a new steam tugboat began in New Archangel. The ship was built of Alaska yellow cedar. This wood was chosen because it was a local tree that was very strong, durable, and resisted decay. The ship's boiler and the spikes that held the planking to the hull were said to be made of copper that was mined locally. The copper boiler was $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ in. thick and the copper spikes were pounded by hand to secure the planks. This vessel was named the *Politkofsky*. She was named after the Russian-American-Company chairman, Vladimir Gavrilovich Politkofskiy, who was married to Aleksandra Shelikhov, Grigorii Shelikhov's daughter. V.G. Politkofskiy became chairman of the Russian American Company in 1848 after spending four years as a member on the board of directors and became a military general in 1850. V.G. Politkofskiy was chairman of the Russian-American Company for the next 15 years (Marine Digest 1986, By Capt. Kevin Hekrdle).

The *Politkofsky* was a sidewheel paddle steamer, 125.5 ft. long, 21.3 ft. wide, 8.9 ft. deep and weighing 152 tons. She was built to take the place of the ship *Imperator Nikolai I*. The engine was salvaged from the *Nikolai* and put into the *Politkofsky*. The "Polly," as she was later called, used a crosshead steam engine until 1896, making it the oldest running steam engine and the last of its kind on the West Coast. Her old fashioned steam engine only produced 15-30 lbs. of steam pressure, while more modern steam engines produced 200 lbs or more. Although the engine was outdated and slow, the *Politkofsky* was so successful in towing and hauling, that she competed well with "modern" ships.

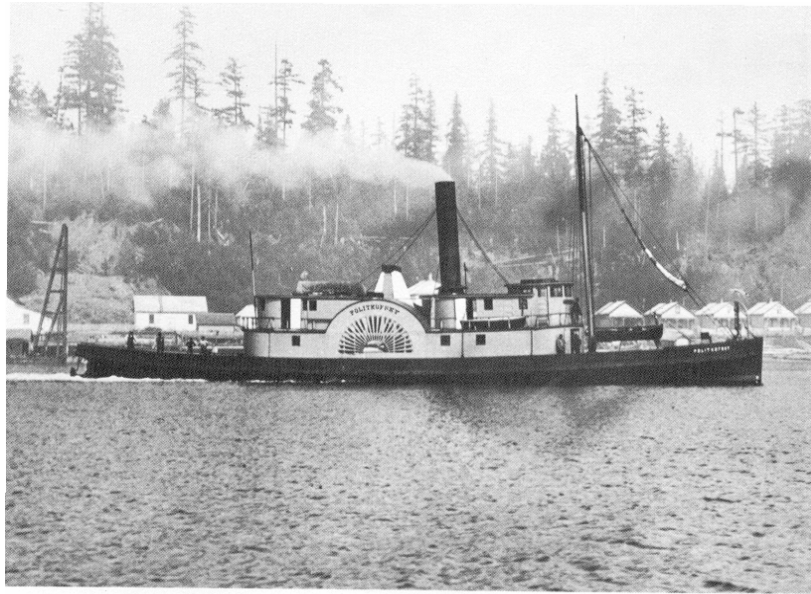


Fig. 6.1: The *Politkofsky*

It was once believed that the *Politkofsky* was built as a "gunboat" for precaution against the unruly Natives, against illegal trading between the Hudson's Bay Co. and the French, and against the British fleet threatening New Archangel. But further evidence proves that

although there were guns on board, she was mainly a working boat, used as a tug, towing and trading vessel. Or was she?

In October 1865, the *Politkofsky* was placed into service. She was not fast or fit for the open sea so she was stationed in the port of New Archangel. The steamer visited many Native villages on trading expeditions, transported barges and rafts filled with wood and coal, and towed sailing ships into the harbor of New Archangel and out to sea. She was a popular and usual sight to see among the local waters and was used faithfully until her boiler sustained extensive damage after towing the ship *Kamchatka* out to sea in November 1866. She was then docked and another boiler was ordered from Victoria, BC for delivery by the fall of 1867.

But something more important was about to take place and efforts to repair her were postponed.

RECOMMENDED WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION ON:

Russian-America

Meeting of Frontiers: Alaska, The Russian Colonization of Alaska at:

<http://frontiers.loc.gov/intldl/mtfhtml/mfak/mfakrcol.html>

Ch. 6 Questions/ Activity

- 1) Why do you think building the *Politkofsky* was important?
- 2) Would the *Politkofsky* receive her new boiler and be ready for Russian service in 1867?
- 3) Research Alaska during this time period. What important event was about to happen?
- 4) Was it possible that the *Politkofsky* was a gunboat? Why? What are some reasons that she would be a gunboat?
- 5) What were her main duties in 1865?

Chapter 7: *The Transfer of Russian America to the U.S.*

The sole purpose of the Russians coming to the new territory and establishing permanent settlements was because of the fur trade. Fur trading was a great resource for quick and large sums of money and Russia had a market for furs in China. Fur-bearing animals, such as the sea otter, were plentiful when the Russians arrived in Alaska and for many years they hunted and killed these animals only for their fur. Soon the animals could not reproduce fast enough and the animals became scarce. It didn't help that the Hudson's Bay Company competed in the fur market.

Russians in Russian America never numbered more than four hundred at any given time (Chevigny, 1965). Russian America was a fur producing colony and the Russian government never wanted to over commit valuable resources to its development.

The Russians gradually lost control in America. Profits from the furs were declining and the cost of maintaining the posts in Alaska was too high. Also, Russia became more interested in developing territories north of China, as they would be easier to develop and maintain because they were on the same continent. Eventually, the Russian government became open to the idea of selling Russian America.

Although the Hudson's Bay Company was a strong candidate for taking over the New Land, the Russians were firmly opposed to Great Britain, their adversary in the *Crimean War*. Meanwhile, hearing of the possibility that Russia might sell, and wanting to extend U.S. borders further to the West, United States Secretary of State, William Seward swiftly negotiated a deal with Russian Minister, Edouard de Stoeckl for an original \$5 million sale. It was finally negotiated and agreed upon by the U.S. government to offer \$7.2 million. In May 1867, the sale of Alaska to the United States was official, and since Alaska has roughly 586,412 square miles, the purchase came to less than 2 cents/acre. Some members of the U.S. Congress opposed this purchase because of the large undertaking of manpower to control the land, and its seeming lack of resources. To William Seward, the sale of Alaska seemed profitable. Seward saw in Alaska vast forests for lumber, rivers and streams for producing an abundance of fish, numerous mineral deposits, and of course fur-bearing animals.

DID YOU KNOW?

Members of the U.S. Congress called Alaska:
“Seward’s Folly,” “Seward’s Icebox,” “Land of Icebergs,” and “Walrussia.”
They thought of Alaska as “worthless” and “barren.”



Fig. 7.1: Cancelled check used to pay for Alaska

At 3:30pm on October 18, 1867, the *Politkofsky* was likely witness to the ceremony which transferred Russian America to the United States. Russian troops headed by Capt. Peshchurov, and U.S. troops headed by General Rousseau had recently arrived at New Archangel. The difference of the two nations was apparent as the cloudy, gray afternoon displayed the dark-uniformed Russians contrasting with the blue-uniformed Americans. The American soldiers outnumbered the Russians. With the majestic mountains and crisp waters adding to the scenic backdrop, the ceremony transferred Russian America to the United States.

Three American ships, the *Ossipee*, the *Jamestown*, and the *Resaca* were present in the harbor. The flag exchange took place in front of Russian Governor Maksutov's mansion. Alternating shots from Russian and American cannons were fired, as the Russian flag was lowered and the United States flag was raised. As the Russian flag was being lowered, the wind caught and tangled it, and it was mistakenly dropped from the pole; the American flag was swiftly raised.

Some accounts say that the *Politkofsky* was even more involved in the transfer ceremony. The *Seattle Post Intelligencer* in a June 6, 1909 article stated that the ceremony took place on the deck of the *Politkofsky*, with her large bronze whistle loudly signaling the transfer. No one can prove this ever happened but it makes for a great story and enriches the narrative of the steamer.



Fig. 7.2: 37-Star U.S. Flag in 1867

The sale of Russian America also led to the sale of the Russian-American Company. Its resources were purchased by Americans who eventually formed the Alaska Commercial Company which had a multiyear monopoly on fur seals skins in the Pribilof Islands and proved to be a very profitable enterprise. After the fur-trading industry dwindled, the “AC Company” moved into the retail business, and sold merchandise throughout Alaska.

After the sale, many Russians who had transportation back to their homeland left, while those who stayed were promised U.S. citizenship.

America’s Politkofsky

The Russian-American Company wanted to liquidate as many of its assets as possible. They sold their incidentals, fort merchandise, and even ships, including the *Politkofsky*, for very low prices to American investors. The *Politkofsky* was sold to Hayward M. Hutchinson, an American contractor, who purchased a large part of the Russian-American Company merchandise and Abraham Hirsch, his partner. Hutchinson would later be recognized as was one of the founders of the Alaska Commercial Company. On January 15, 1868, the *Politkofsky* became an American vessel as authorized under the Transfer Treaty.

On April 10, 1868, the *Politkofsky* was sold by Hutchinson and Hirsch to the newly formed American company called the Hutchinson, Kohl and Company, which later became the Alaska Commercial Company. Later that afternoon, the *Politkofsky* was loaded with cargo consisting of copper sheets and bolts and Russian iron and departed for San Francisco to be overhauled. Captain William Kohl was in command of the steamship. It took nine days to reach their first anticipated stop, Victoria, British Columbia. Her popularity became evident as the local paper, the *Colonist*, described her, as “one of the most magnificent specimens of home-made marine architecture...” After three weeks of temporary repairs, she sailed for San Francisco. Six days later, she arrived in San Francisco, her farthest travel yet.

Upon arrival, her goods were unloaded and her heavy copper boilers were sold for an estimated \$4400, which would turn out to be more than Hutchinson originally paid for her. There she sat until March 1869, when she was sold to George Meigs who ran a lumber mill in Port Madison on the Puget Sound. Her intended purpose was to be a towboat and to haul freight for the lumber mill. There she worked alongside the steamer *Eliza Anderson* and even assumed her duties when the *Anderson* was tied up for repairs. Steam power was still new technology on the West Coast and the *Politkofsky's* small draft allowed her access to the mills on the Puget Sound. Thus, her long service on the Puget Sound began in April 1869.

Although she had been through repairs and had some additions, she was not a sleek-looking ship. She was referred to as “snub-nosed” and clumsy. But no one really cared because the *Polly* was a very dependable, hard-working craft. She worked as a mail and passenger boat, tugboat, and freighter. Because she worked for so long on Puget Sound, her decks provided training quarters for many shipmen who would eventually run newer ships. She towed day in and day out, only resting for repairs.

Because of George Meigs' financial problems, the *Polly* went through two more owners until she was sold to Captain William Renton, owner of the Port Blakely Mill Company. He grew so fond of the *Polly* that he called the tug his “pet.” She spent her final thirteen years of labor at the Port Blakely Mill. During this time the *Polly* was part of a fleet that welcomed President Benjamin Harrison to Seattle in 1891.

In 1896, the *Polly* was retired. Her engines and her cannons were taken off and she was cut down and made into a barge. She was beached at Port Blakely that same year. This was a new era of faster, sleeker vessels in Puget Sound and the *Polly* was outdated.

But the legend of the *Politkofsky* was still in full swing. Her beginning as a Russian gunboat, her journeys between Alaska and California, and the dependable service she achieved in Puget Sound proved her tireless capabilities and helped to create her ongoing story.

“Rocks can't hurt the Old Polly....we never felt uneasy when she hit the beach.”
- Martin Paup-engineer on the *Polly* for 16 years

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES FOR MORE INFORMATION ON:

Transfer Treaty

ExploreNorth: The Transfer of Alaska from Russia to the U.S. at:

<http://www.explorenorth.com/library/yafeatures/bl-Alaska1867.htm>

Chapter 7 Questions

1. Research the Treaty of Cession. Explain what it is and why it is important to Alaska.
2. Does the Alaska Commercial Company still exist? If so, where are they located and what is their business?

Chapter 8: *The Klondike Journey*

The *S.S. Portland* had an interesting career from the beginning. She was a two-deck wooden vessel built in 1885 in Bath, Maine. She was originally named *Haytien Republic* because it was intended that she carry passengers and freight between the United States and Haiti. During one of many Haitian Revolutions, she was seized, held for ransom, then released due to the arrival of the U.S. Navy. Back on the East Coast, she was repaired and recruited as a supply ship for Alaska. She sailed around Cape Horn, but only made it to San Francisco because of the large expense of fueling her. The *Haytien Republic* then went through two more owners and is believed to have been used in illegal smuggling operations. The *Haytien Republic* was mortgaged and released but caught in the act of transporting illegal aliens, so she was sold again. Her future looked better as she was completely overhauled and renamed the *Portland*. Her new journeys took her to British Columbia to retrieve coal. Later, she was chartered by the North American Trading and Transportation Company in Seattle to transport passengers to St. Michael, Alaska and back. On June 17, 1897, the *Portland* finally became prestigious by bringing in two tons of Klondike gold to Seattle, gaining the nickname “Gold Ship,” and effectively starting the Klondike Gold Rush overnight.

In August 1896, gold miners Skookum Jim Mason, George Washington Carmack and Dawson Charlie discovered gold in today’s Bonanza Creek, which is located in the Klondike region of the Canadian Yukon Territory. News of this discovery spread slowly throughout the region and almost a year would go by before the discovery would spark a flurry of excitement for money-minded prospectors. The *S.S. Portland* arrived in Seattle, Washington on July 1897 carrying an excited group of miners with an estimated two tons of gold (worth almost \$1 million) retrieved from the Klondike mines. Thousands of people, intent on sharing the wealth, would begin their arduous journeys to the greatest gold rush site in history.

There were two main routes to get to the Klondike gold fields in the Yukon. And no way was the easy way. From Seattle, the miners would sail 1,000 miles through the Inside Passage to Skagway where they would embark on the 32 miles up the Chilkoot Trail. From there, they would arrive at the Yukon River where they had to travel another 500 miles to get to Dawson City.

Actually there were two trails originating out of the Skagway area. One, the White Pass Trail, and the other, the Chilkoot Pass Trail, led out of nearby Dyea. Both met at Bennett Lake where there was still another 500 miles to travel down the Yukon River by boat to Dawson. The miners had to build boats at Bennett Lake, the headwaters of the Yukon River. More than 100,000 people from all around the world set out on this grueling journey to the Klondike.

The other main route was the 4,000 mile sea route. It took prospectors out of Seattle through the Juan de Fuca Strait, through the Gulf of Alaska, through the Aleutian Chain at Umiak Pass, stopping to coal at Unalaska in the Aleutians, and up through the Bering

Sea to the town of St. Michael on Norton Sound. From there, they would embark on the trip to Dawson by river steamer up the Yukon River.

By the end of 1897, the Klondike Gold Rush was in full swing and every available ship was needed to take the flurry of miners north. One year after the *Polly* was retired, she was pulled off the beach and converted into a two-masted barge to haul coal. The Yukon Transportation Company immediately put the *Polly* and her old pal the steamer *Eliza Anderson* into service. The *Eliza Anderson* had also been beached and was quickly pulled off during the rush to Dawson. In her hasty repair, she was not seaworthy but used anyway. The *Politkofsky* was needed to carry coal for the *Eliza Anderson*. The *Richard Holyoke* was the tug employed to pull the *Politkofsky*, the schooner *Bryant*, and the *W.K. Merwin*, which would be used to take the gold miners up the Yukon River to Dawson. The journey was 2,300 miles from Puget Sound to St. Michael.



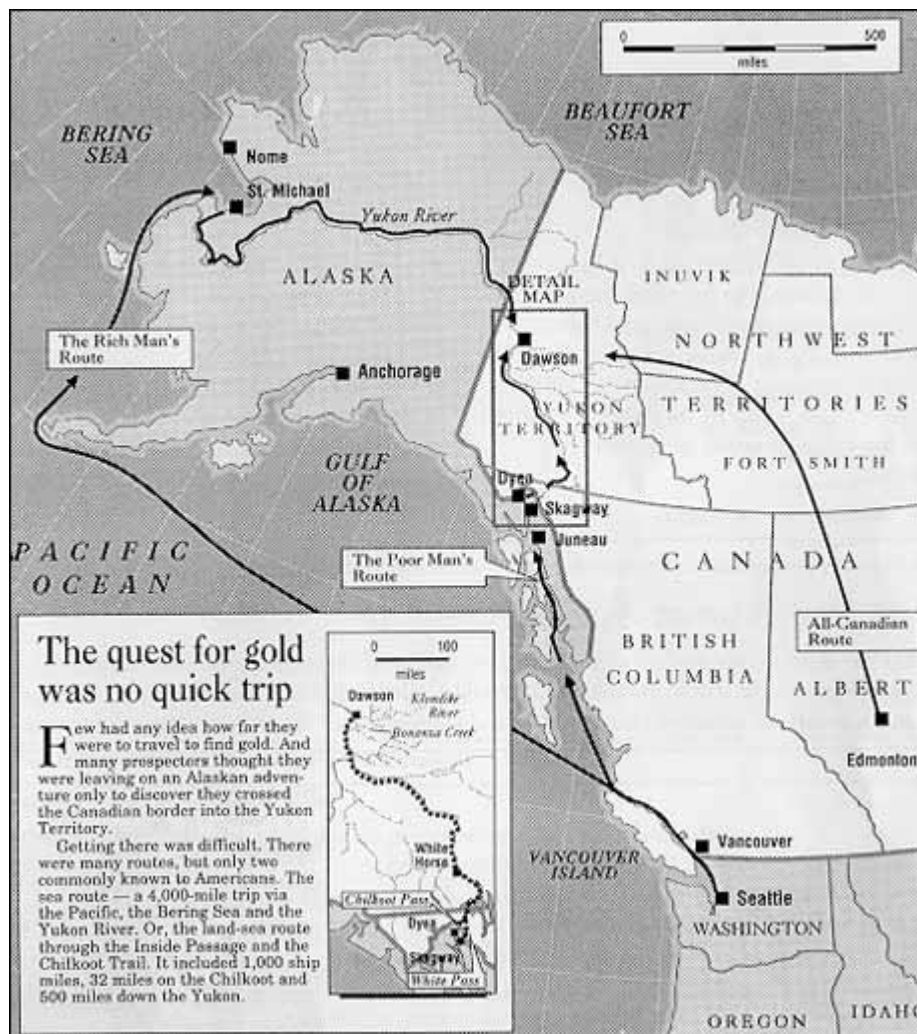
Fig 8.1: The Journey to the Yukon

They departed on August 10, 1897 on the journey that would take at least forty days. First, the *Eliza Anderson* left and was followed by the *Richard Holyoke* towing the *Merwin*, the *Politkofsky*, and the *Bryant*. A large crowd gathered to see the odd procession of ships leaving Elliott Bay.

Troubles immediately began with the *Eliza Anderson*. There were too many passengers and not enough staterooms, so the passengers were outraged. Crew bunks were relinquished and the passengers were told to sleep in shifts. The *Eliza Anderson* also rammed a clippership while enroute and needed to be repaired. On that arduous journey north, the *Eliza Anderson* had the opportunity to get coal from the *Politkofsky* only twice. Later, the *Eliza Anderson* got separated from the *Richard Holyoke* during a storm. The *Richard Holyoke* proceeded on to Dutch Harbor while the *Eliza Anderson* ran out of fuel and supposedly foundered at sea. It was later learned that her crew had to chop up the furniture and walls of the ship to throw into the furnaces to maintain power. On one lucky day, they arrived at an abandoned site near Thin Point on the Alaska Peninsula where they found enough wood and coal to get the *Eliza Anderson* to Dutch Harbor.

Unfortunately, upon arrival at Dutch Harbor, the *Eliza Anderson* further wrecked and was beached for lack of materials and coal to continue the journey to St. Michael. In the meantime, still not knowing the fate of the *Eliza Anderson*, the *Richard Holyoke* made its way to St. Michael with the *Polly*, the *Merwin*, and the *Bryant* still in tow. They made it to the mouth of the Yukon River, 29 days after leaving Seattle, and in good condition. On September 11, 1897, the *Holyoke* left St. Michael with the *Bryant* in tow. Meanwhile, twenty-eight people from the *Eliza Anderson* still wanted to get to the gold fields, so they chartered the whaling schooner *Baranoff*. Once in St. Michael, they boarded the sternwheeler *Merwin*, and left up the Yukon River. Bad luck would not leave them and only two hundred miles upriver, the *Merwin* got trapped in the ice, where she would have to wait until the following spring to travel again. And almost a year later, the *Merwin* actually arrived in Dawson with the exhausted yet determined miners who had persisted with the very difficult journey to the Klondike.

Chapter 8 Questions/Activity



- 1) Review the map of the two main routes to the Klondike. Which route did the *Eliza Anderson* and the *Politkofsky* take?
- 2) How long would it take them?
- 3) Research the Klondike Gold Rush. Write an essay that explains the two journeys to Dawson City.

Chapter 9: *The End of “Polly”*

After making it to St. Michael in September 1897, the *Politkofsky* was sold to the North American Transportation and Trading Company. Since being reconfigured as a barge, she was described as having one deck, two masts, no head, and a round stern. With limited capabilities now, she was said to have been used as a lightering platform and landing barge for ships and steamers coming into the bay. She was tied up near shore for almost a year and was later beached by winter storms. Photographers and written accounts place the *Polly* ashore, in front of the NAT&T Company warehouses, beginning in 1898. There she was deserted and forgotten and considered a “disabled hulk” and a “derelict.” In the next two decades, her cedar planking would pull away from her ribs and decay around the copper spikes which the Russians had skillfully hammered out for her by hand. Passersby pulled these copper spikes and took them as souvenirs of their journeys to the gold rush.

Eventually the weather, ice and tidal action dragged the *Polly* relentlessly away from the shore. In April 1915 a storm finally demolished any visible sign of her above the water’s surface.

The Politkofsky Today

But the destruction of the *Politkofsky* would only intensify and enhance her long list of unique and characteristic tales. Rumors about the copper spikes would increase their worth in trading. In 1951, local Natives would identify the “exposed ribs of an old wreck lying a short distance off shore” as the *Polly*. In the mid-1980’s, an instructor at a community college in Valdez indicated, through research, that the remains of the *Politkofsky* were still there. In 1997, an Iditarod musher noted the presence of a ship beneath the shallow waters off of Healy.

The *Politkofsky* still exists, her remains submerged and preserved beneath the waters of St. Michael Bay. Efforts are being made to interview local elders to see what they remember of the old steamer. Also, locating the wreck and doing a survey of what remains of the *Polly* would increase the chances of classifying the *Politkofsky* as a Registered National Historic Site. Today, the *Politkofsky* is known as the sole surviving artifact of Russian-American ship building in North America.

The *Politkofsky* has a colorful past, one that is remembered today because the vessel had been present for the most important times of Alaska and Pacific Northwest history. She has many stories about her, although she was not a ship to see far off lands and open seas. Although her journeys were short in comparison to many larger ships, she encountered many important people and witnessed many important events. Major events and astounding journeys include:

- Her creation that began with Russian explorations
- A personal view of relations between Alaska Natives and foreign explorers
- The Russian Fur Trade
- The establishment of large new settlements
- Introduction of the Russian Orthodox Church and schools for children
- An intimate look at the transfer of Alaska to the U.S.
- Voyages that brought her to San Fransisco, Puget Sound, Gulf of Alaska, the Aleutian Islands and the Bering Sea.
- The famous Klondike Journey

***Politkofsky* Artifacts**

The *Politkofsky* was famous enough to ignite myths still spoken of today. The ship's story as Russian gunboat, its part in the Alaska transfer ceremony, and as part of the *Eliza Anderson* gold rush flotilla lent an importance to the vessel's artifacts, and it is through them that the *Politkofsky's* legacy continues to live. At the Transfer Ceremony in Sitka on October 18, 1867, the *Politkofsky's* cannons were said to have been fired, in salute to the performance, and her great bronze steam whistle sounded throughout Alaska's beautiful Sitka harbor. It is also said that President Taft opened the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition by blowing the *Politkofsky's* bronze whistle in 1909. Even the copper spikes that were used to hold her together, have been collected by gold seekers at the mouth of the Yukon, near St. Michaels, and are still being sold today on e-Bay.

The Hull

An intriguing chronicle of the *Polly's* hull is the story of Captain "Billie" Moore, famed Yukon River steamer master and son of the founder of Skagway, sending Alaska Governor J.F.A. Strong a cribbage board made from a piece of the *Politkofsky's* cedar hull. Unfortunately, the cribbage board has never been found.

Copper Spikes

When the *Politkofsky* finally went ashore at St. Michael, it was little more than an old barge with a colorful past. As the elements and local salvors tore pieces from the wreck and it gradually disintegrated, more and more of its hull became splintered and exposed, revealing a favored item among tourists and enterprising traders. These were the 8-inch long, hand-forged copper spikes that fastened the ship's planking to the ribs. Many spikes

were pulled from the hull in this era and sold as curios to tourists stopping at St. Michael at the conclusion or beginning of their Yukon River voyage.

Steve Henrikson, Curator at the Alaska State Museum, confirms that the museum has six spikes from the *Politkofsky*, four of the original copper spikes, as well as two iron spikes, and the museum also has a letter opener made from a copper spike. Three copper spikes from the *Politkofsky* have found their way into the collection of the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, one of which was donated by famed Alaska artist Fred Machetanz.

In February 2000 a *Politkofsky* letter opener appeared at auction on e-Bay. Miles Collier ex-Alaskan and Alaskan collector from Whittier, CA won the auction. He paid a whopping \$305 for the spike. On the blade of the 9 ¾ inch letter opener it reads:

Forged from Original Spike from Shipwreck of Russian Gun Boat
"Politofski" built near Sitka Alaska in 1852
Wrecked at St. Michael Alaska About 1902

Both dates and the spelling of the ship's name are incorrect; nevertheless, this letter opener is likely one manufactured specifically for tourists in the late 1920's and early 1930's.

A little over a year later, in April 2001, a copper spike from the *Polly* appeared for auction on e-Bay. The winning bidder was David Sampson, a Juneau teacher of Alaska history with a Russian-American specialization.



Politkofsky Copper Spike

Cross-Head Engine

The *Politkofsky's* 60 horsepower crosshead steam engine was originally purchased for the Russian steamer *Nikolai I* in Boston or New York. The engine machinery and probably the boiler were brought around Cape Horn by sailing ship to New Archangel in 1838. On board was Edward Moore, a Yankee machinist, to install the steam engine and boiler in the newly built side-wheel steamer *Nikolai I*. Moore trained the local Creoles as shipwrights, ran the foundries, and was engineer on the *Nikolai I*.

The *Nikolai* was scrapped around 1852, and her engine and boiler were placed in the hull of a new steamer, the *Imperator Nikolai I* (also called the *Nikolai*), in 1853. On November 1, 1861 the *Imperator Nikolai I* wrecked in Chatham Strait. The crew was able to salvage all of the steam engine and other machinery. This salvaged steam engine is the same one that would eventually power the *Politkofsky*.

Once on Puget Sound in the hand of her new American owners, the *Politkofsky's* crosshead engine was one of the last operating crosshead steam engines in the country and the oldest steam engine of any design operating on the West Coast.

Cannons

Many accounts have the *Politkofsky* taking an important role in the Transfer Ceremony in Sitka by firing its cannon and sounding its huge glistening whistle of dark bronze to commemorate the event. Some sources even claim that the ceremony itself took place on the steamer's deck. The truth is it has not been proven that the tug was even in port that day. Nevertheless, its suspected participation in the Transfer Ceremony probably assigned more historical identity to the ship and its artifacts than any other event.

No one agrees on the number or type of cannon the steamer carried. Various sources have the number of cannon ranging from 4, 6, 8, and 16 guns, up to as many as 24. In Sitka for decades, cannons had been constantly trained on the Indian part of town, and Russian boats in the harbor carried cannon as mobile armed platforms. On trading trips to the Native villages, it was standard practice for a vessel to let local Native villagers know it was armed by firing or "exercising the guns" when entering port.

A recently discovered photograph of the *Polly* being rebuilt in San Francisco proves that the tug had at least three gunports on the aft deck, and port and starboard gun ports forward. It is now clear that the *Politkofsky* had some armament aboard for protection, signaling, and for "exercising the guns"--probably 4 to 5 guns and a small brass gun for signaling.

One of the *Polly's* cannons was displayed at the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in Seattle in 1909; another found its way to Tacoma, Washington in 1878. This gun was fired to celebrate the Northern Pacific Railroad's decision to build a switchback over the summit of the Cascades and bring the first railroad terminus in Washington Territory to Tacoma. In July 1887 it was fired again to celebrate the first train traveling east over the

new rail line from Tacoma and the first train arriving from the east later in the day. Its most important sounding was its 42-gun salute fired on Nov. 11, 1889 when President Harrison signed the bill admitting Washington to statehood.

The second known cannon from the *Polly* was given to the University of Washington's Burke Museum at the turn of the century. It was later donated to the Museum of History and Industry in Seattle. This cannon has the Russian imperial double eagle design cast into the metal.

The third cannon is at the Alaska State Museum and arrived in Juneau from Seattle April 29, 1916 on the steamer *Alameda*, a gift of the Port Blakely Mill Company. It is still in Juneau, and its dimensions match those of the gun at Tacoma. The cannon is in the permanent collection of the Alaska State Museum but is not on display due to the Museum's concern that the ramp and elevator leading to the Russian-American exhibit on the second floor cannot support the gun's weight. The cannon sits on a wheeled wooden pallet nestled in a bed of dense white foam packing in the State Museum basement, sharing a closet with a washing machine and dryer, called affectionately the "laundry-cannon room," by curator of collections, Steve Henrikson.

The fourth cannon is in the hands of the MacMillan family in Seattle who were given the gun by the Port Blakely Mill in 1891. Today, the cannon graces the grounds of the MacMillan's summer home at Sequim, Washington.



Politkofsky Cannon

The Steam Whistle

Probably the greatest representative of the old sidewheeler *Politkofsky's* legacy is its large bronze whistle. It is said to have been sounded in Sitka when Alaska was transferred to the United States in 1867, and its alleged participation in this monumental occasion began its career as official herald for later important events in Pacific Northwest history.

A newspaper narrative appearing in the June 6, 1909 *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, described the transfer ceremony ending with a blast from the *Polly's* whistle:

The guns crashed out mightily and leaped back against their restraining tackle as the cross of Imperial Russia came down and the Stars and Stripes floated to the masthead. Then, from the throat of the huge glistening whistle of dark Chinese bronze came a roaring bellow that drowned out the barking of the guns and echoed and reverberated through the hills behind the town.

As charming as these narratives paint the whistle's early years, the standard pipe threads in its base probably mean its installation on the tug couldn't have occurred until after she reached Puget Sound in 1869. Even so, the huge bronze whistle was quite old, said to have been cast in China "in the middle part of the last century." The whistle has an overall length of 37 inches, a bell length of 18½ inches, a circumference of 32 inches, and weighs 117 pounds. For years it was considered the most powerful whistle on the Pacific Coast and in earlier years it laid claim to being the most powerful steam whistle in the world.

While the *Politkofsky* towed log rafts and lumber schooners and delivered freight from 1869 to 1896, her whistle was heard throughout Puget Sound for all those 28 years and was described as "a welcome sound to lonely loggers" when the tug arrived bearing supplies and mail. When the vessel was finally past its prime and beached at Port Blakely in August 1896, the whistle was taken off the ship and warehoused in Seattle.

A number of years later, in 1909, the whistle was installed in the steam power house at the University of Washington campus--also the grounds for the soon to open Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition. The whistle was electrically linked by telegraph to the White House where exactly at noon on June 1, 1909, President William Howard Taft pressed a telegraph key fashioned from Klondike gold nuggets, sending a signal westward that activated a powerful steam blast from the *Politkofsky's* whistle, formally opening the exposition.

After the AYP Exposition, the whistle remained on the university campus "loudly proclaiming crew race victories, New Year arrivals and other celebrations" until 1929 when a new power plant was built on campus. The whistle changed hands a number of times until it eventually found its way to the Puget Sound Maritime Historical Society in the 1950s.

In 1962, the whistle was again pressed into service to open another world's fair, this time Seattle's Century 21 Exposition. The whistle was hooked up to a local steam supply for the special blow that would open the fair on April 21. True to the historical pattern established by President Taft opening the AYP in 1909, a special telephone line connected President Kennedy to the World's Fair Headquarters and the steam plant in Seattle. Kennedy at the Kennedy family compound in Palm Beach, Florida opened the Seattle World's Fair by pressing the same gold-encrusted telegraph key used by Taft. The

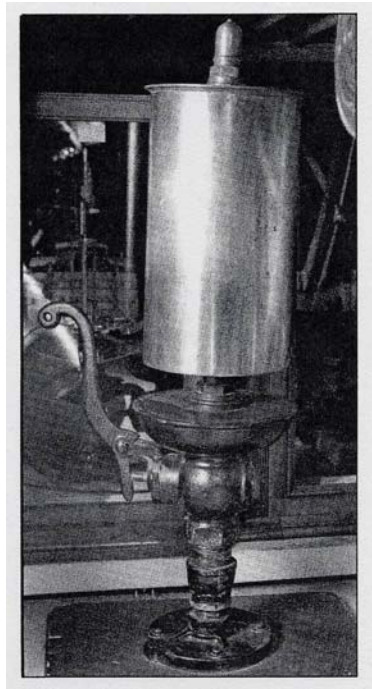
historic blast from the *Politkofsky's* whistle opened Century 21 at 11:59 a.m. on Saturday, April 21, 1962.

Unlike President Taft's telegraph signal, Kennedy's electronic signal took a wildly circuitous route to the fair. Seattle historian, Murray Morgan writes of the opening signal:

Kennedy's touch activated a computer in Andover, Maine, which focused a radio telescope on the star Cassiopeia A--60,000,000,000,000 [sixty quadrillion] miles away--picking up a vibration that had started across space exactly ten thousand years before and relaying it to Seattle, where its arrival set bells ringing, people cheering, cannons booming, and two thousand balloons inscribed with the invitation "SEE YOU IN SEATTLE" floating upward.

The whistle's job continued as its blast sounded for every one millionth visitor who passed through the gates of the fair.

The legacy of the *Politkofsky* continues a vigorous existence through its material remains, yet, strangely, its most important contribution as artifact seems to have been overlooked: as the sole example of Russian-American ship construction remaining in Alaska, if not North America.



Politkofsky Whistle

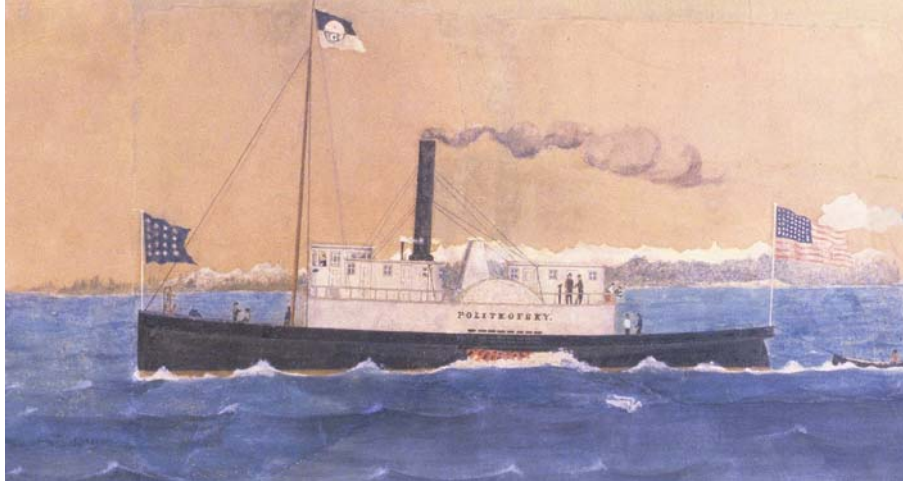
The Lost Painting of the *Politkofsky*

For years the location of the original painting of the *Polly* was a mystery. until a copy of Michael Burwell's original paper on the *Politkofsky* found its way to the Bainbridge Island Historical Society in 1993. Katy Warner, local Bainbridge Island historian, wrote the author explaining that her great Uncle John Moss--handy-man and sign painter--painted the picture around 1879, and that for years it had hung in the saloon of the Bainbridge Hotel at Port Blakely. The picture is now displayed at the Bainbridge Island Historical Society. Before this author's recent research inadvertently made this connection, the location of the original painting was unknown and the photograph of the painting by Ashael Curtis at the Washington State Historical Society in Tacoma was considered the "original" image.

The "primitive" folk-art painting is roughly 9½ X 24 inches, done in oils on fiber board. The artist Moss was better known as a local handy man and sign painter. Katy Warner believes Asahel Curtis must have photographed the painting while it hung in the Blakely Hotel bar. Warner's father, Alvin G. Welfare, kept the painting after it was given to him by the bartender when the saloon closed in the early 20's. It hung in the Welfare home for many years, but Katy's mother couldn't stand the picture and finally put it in the attic where the mice gnawed off a corner. Katy rescued the painting and donated it to the Bainbridge Island Historical Society. The Society has recently restored the painting.



Politkofsky Painting Gnawed by Mice



Politkofsky Painting Restored

Vickers' Monument

While not really an artifact, the Charles Vickers monument is still a part of the *Politkofsky's* legacy. This large marble grave monument is the largest and most ornate in the Kane Cemetery at Port Madison, Bainbridge Island, Washington. It was erected after Vickers, a second engineer on the *Politkofsky*, was killed in engine accident aboard the tug in 1875. The name "*Politkofsky*" and smoke rising from the stack can still be made out below the bas relief carving of the steamer underway at the center of the monument.



Vickers' Monument

It is little wonder that her cannons and whistle have continued to carry the historical legacy of the ship today. It is also little wonder why the *Politkofsky* holds dear in the hearts of historians, shipwreck seekers and educators. It is hoped that one day soon, the *Politkofsky* be recognized in the National Registry of Historic Sites.

Chapter 9 Questions/Activity

1. Research on the Internet or at the library articles, pictures and artifacts of the *Politkofsky*. Identify where her whistle is today. Identify where her cannons are. Where are her copper spikes? Are there any books written about the *Politkofsky*?
2. Who is said to have blown *Politkofsky*'s bronze whistle to open the Yukon-Pacific Exposition?

TIMELINE OF POLLY/AK EVENTS

1728

Vitus Bering sights St. Lawrence Island and one of Diomedes Islands

1741

Alexei Chirikov sights mainland, Vitus Bering sets foot on New Land

1784

First European settlement in Alaska, on Kodiak Island

Aug. 1794

First ship, *Phoenix*, built in Alaska

1799

Czar Paul claims Alaska as Russian possession

1799

Russian-American Company established

1804

First Russian-American capital at Sitka

1835

Steam engine built in Boston (New York?)

Jan. 8, 1863

Construction of the last vessel built in Russian America began under the administration of Chief Manager Furuhjelm

Nov. 19, 1864

Hull completed and launched at New Archangel harbor

Sept. 6, 1865

Began sea trials

Oct. 1865

Placed into service as steam tug transporting wood and coal at the Port of New Archangel

Mar. 1867

Convention formalizing the sale of Russian-America

May 14, 1867

Russia ratified Treaty

May 28, 1867

U.S. ratified Treaty

May 29, 1867

Politkofsky sold to Hutchinson & Hirsch

June 30, 1867

Admitted by Treaty

Oct. 18, 1867

Politkofsky present at transfer ceremony; blew steam whistle/fired cannon?

Jan. 15, 1868

Politkofsky becomes American property

Apr. 11, 1868

Departs for San Fransisco

May 1868

Copper boilers sold

Apr. 4, 1869

Polly departs for Puget Sound

Aug. 1896

Politkofsky beached after three decades of towing in Puget Sound

1897

Pulled off beach, converted to schooner barge

Aug. 10, 1897

Politkofsky left Seattle under tow of Richard Holyoke

Sept. 11, 1897

Politkofsky made it to St. Michael, Alaska

1903

Politkofsky wrecked, drifted on beach

1909

Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition opened; *Politkofsky*'s bronze steam whistle blown by Pres. Taft to open ceremonies

1912

Noted that hull still intact

1915

Hull finally breaks up in storm

LINK 5**

DEFINE/IDENTIFY:

Beringia-

Peter the Great-

Vitus Bering-

Alexei Chirikov-

Promyshlenniki-

Treaty of Kiakhta-

International Fur Seal Treaty-

Grigorii Shelikhov-

Alexandr Baranov-

Ivan Golikhov-

Nikolai Rezanov-

Russian-American Company-

Hudson's Bay Company-

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