

Our North Pacific States.

SPEECHES
OF
WILLIAM h. sEWARD,
IN
aLASKA, VANCOUVER'S, AND OREGON,
AUGUST, 1869.

wASHINGTON, D.C.:
PHILP & SOLOMONS.
1869

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(letter pasted into front of pamphlet)

Hon James Wickersham.
Washington D.C.

My dear Sir. Your letter
of April 11th has been received.

You will find in Vol 3. of
my "Life and Letters of William
H. Seward"- page 415, to page
434 - the story of my fathers
trip to Alaska in the summer
of 1869. His speech to the
citizens of Sitka delivered
at the Lutheran Church August 12th
? also mentioned on page

431 & 432.

On page 392 of the

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same volume you will find
his testimony before the
Investigating Committee of the
House of Representatives.
upon the Alaska Purchase.

You will also find
the Sitka speech reported in
full on page 559 of the 5th of
"Sewards Works" published by
Houghton, Muffin [Mifflin] & Co of
Boston. - also his speech at
Victoria in August 1869 on
the North Pacific Coast page
569, and his speech in Mexico.

I think there is no
pamphlet edition of the
Sitka speech. Neither reporters
nor news papers existed then

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in Alaska. I was with him on
the "Active" and helped him prepare
the notes of his speech which I
brought to San Francisco and gave
to the newspapers there.

Very Truly yours
Frederick Seward

Montrose
on the Hudson
April 14th 1910,

Of course you will find
both works in the Congressional
Library.

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[title page]

ALASKA.
SPEECH
OF
WILLIAM H. SEWARD,
AT
SITKA, AUGUST 12, 1869

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Citizens of Alaska, fellow-citizens of the United States:

You have pressed me to meet you in public assembly
once before I leave Alaska. It would be sheer affecta-
tion to pretend to doubt your sincerity in making this

request, and capriciously ungrateful to refuse it, after having received so many and varied hospitalities from all sorts and conditions of men. It is not an easy task, however, to speak in a manner worthy of your consideration, while I am living constantly on ship-board, as you all know, and am occupied intently in searching out whatever is sublime, or beautiful, or peculiar, or useful. On the other hand, it is altogether natural on your part to say, "You have looked upon Alaska, what do you think of it?" Unhappily I have seen too little of Alaska to answer the question satisfactorily. The entire coast line of the United States, exclusive of Alaska, is 10,000 miles, while the coast line of Alaska alone, including the islands, is 26,000 miles. The portion of the Territory which lies east of the peninsula, including islands, is 120 miles wide ; the western portion, including Aleutian islands, expands to a breadth of 2,200 miles. The entire land area, including islands, is 577,390 statute square miles. We should think a foreigner very presumptuous who should presume to give the world an opinion of the whole of the United States of America, after he had merely looked in from his steamer at Plymouth and Boston harbor, or had ran up the Hudson river to the Highlands, or had ascended the

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Delaware to Trenton, or the James river to Richmond, or the Mississippi no farther than Memphis. My observation thus far has hardly been more comprehensive. I entered the Territory of Alaska at the Portland canal, made my way through the narrow passages of the Prince of Wales archipelago; thence through

Peril and Chatham straits and Lynn channel, and up the Chilcat river to the base of Fairweather, from which latter place I have returned through Clarence straits, to sojourn a few days in your beautiful bay, under the shadows of the Baranoff hills and Mount Edgecombe. Limited, however, as my opportunities have been, I will, without further apology, give you the impressions I have received.

Of course I speak first of the skies of Alaska. It seems to be assumed in the case of Alaska that a country which extends through 58 degrees of longitude, and embraces portions as well of the arctic as of the temperate zone, unlike all other regions so situated, has not several climates, but only one. The weather of this one broad climate of Alaska is severely criticised in outside circles for being too wet and too cold. Never the less it must be a fastidious person who complains of climates in which, while the eagle delights to soar, the humming-bird does not disdain to flutter. I shall speak only of the particular climate here which I know.

My visit here happens to fall within the month of August. Not only have the skies been sufficiently bright and serene to give me a perfect view, under the 60th parallel, of the total eclipse of the sun, and of the evening star at the time of the sun's obscuration, but I have also enjoyed more clear than there have been cloudy days, and in the early mornings and in the late

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evenings peculiar to the season I have lost myself in

admiration of skies adorned with sapphire and gold as richly as those which are reflected by the Mediterranean. Of all the moonlights in the world commend me to those which light up the archipelago of the North Pacific ocean. Fogs have sometimes detained me longer on the Hudson and on Long Island sound than now on the waters of the North Pacific. In saying this, I do not mean to say that rain and fog are unfrequent here. The Russian pilot, George, whom you all know, expressed my conviction on this matter exactly when he said to me, "Oh, yes, Mr. Seward, we do have changeable weather here sometimes, as they do in the other States." I might amend the expression by adding, the weather here is only a little more changeable. It must be confessed at least that it is an honest climate, for it makes no pretensions to constancy. If, however, you have fewer bright sunrises and glowing sunsets than southern latitudes enjoy, you are favored on the other hand with more frequent and more magnificent displays of the aurora and the rainbow. The thermometer tells the whole case when it reports that the summer is colder and the winter is warmer in Alaska than in New York and Washington. It results from the nature of such a climate that the earth prefers to support the fir, the spruce, the pine, the hemlock, and other evergreens, rather than deciduous trees, and to furnish grasses and esculent roots, rather than the cereals of drier and hotter climates. I have mingled freely with the multifarious population—the Tongass, the Stickeens, the Cakes, the Hydahs, the Sitkas, the Kootznoos, and the Chilcats, as well as with the traders, the soldiers, the seamen, and the settlers of various nationalities, English, Swedish, Russian, and

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American—and I have seen all around me only persons enjoying robust and exuberant health. Manhood of every race and condition everywhere exhibits activity and energy, while infancy seems exempt from disease and age relieved from pain.

It is next in order to speak of the rivers and seas of Alaska. The rivers are broad, shallow, and rapid, while the seas are deep but tranquil. Mr. Sumner, in his elaborate and magnificent oration, although he spake only from historical accounts, has not exaggerated—no man can exaggerate—the marine treasures of the Territory. Beside the whale, which everywhere and at all times is seen enjoying his robust exercise, and the sea-otter, the fur-seal, the hair-seal, and the walrus, found in the waters which embosom the western islands, those waters as well as the seas of the eastern archipelago are found teeming with the salmon, cod, and other fishes adapted to the support of human and animal life. Indeed, what I have seen here has almost made me a convert to the theory of some naturalists, that the waters of the globe are filled with stores for the sustenance of animal life surpassing the available productions of the land.

It must be remembered that the coast range of mountains, which begins in Mexico, is continued into the Territory, and invades the seas of Alaska. Hence it is that in the islands and on the mainland, so far as I have explored it, we find ourselves everywhere in the

immediate presence of black hills, or foot-hills, as they are variously called, and that these foot-hills are over-topped by ridges of snow-capped mountains. These snow-capped mountains are manifestly of volcanic origin, and they have been subjected, through an indefinite period, to atmospheric abrasion and disintegration.

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Hence they have assumed all conceivable shapes and forms. In some places they are serrated into sharp, angular peaks, and in other places they appear architecturally arranged, so as to present cloud-capped castles, towers, domes, and minarets. The mountain sides are furrowed with deep and straight ravines, down which the thawing fields of ice and snow are precipitated, generally in the month of May, with such a vehemence as to have produced in every valley immense level plains of intervale land. These plains, as well as the sides of the mountains, almost to the summits, are covered with forests so dense and dark as to be impenetrable, except to wild beasts and savage hunters. On the lowest intervale land the cottonwood grows. It seems to be the species of poplar which is known in the Atlantic States as the Balm of Gilead, and which is dwarfed on the Rocky Mountain. Here it takes on such large dimensions, that the Indian shapes out of a single trunk even his great war canoe which safely bears over the deepest waters a phalanx of sixty warriors. These imposing trees always appear to rise out of a jungle of elder, alder, crab-apple, and other fruit-bearing shrubs and bushes. The short and slender birch, which, sparsely scattered, marks the

verge of vegetation in Labrador, has not yet been reached by the explorers of Alaska. The birch tree sometimes appears here upon the river side, upon the level next above the home of the cottonwood, and is generally found a comely and stately tree. The forests of Alaska, however, consist mainly neither of shrubs, nor of the birch, nor of the cottonwood, but, as I have already intimated, of the pine, the cedar, the cypress, the spruce, the fir, the larch, and the hemlock. These forests begin almost at the waters edge, and they rise

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with regular gradation to a height of two thousand feet. The trees, nowhere dwarfed or diminutive, attain the highest dimensions in sunny exposures in the deeper canons or gorges of the mountains. The cedar, sometimes called the yellow cedar, and sometimes the fragrant cedar, was long ago imported into China as an ornamental wood; and it now furnishes the majestic beams and pillars with which the richer and more ambitious native chief delights to construct his rude but spacious hall or palatial residence, and upon which he carves in rude symbolical imagery the heraldry of his tribe and achievements of his nation. No beam, or pillar, or spar, or mast, or plank is ever required in either the land or the naval architecture of any civilized State greater in length and width than the trees which can be hewn down on the coasts of the islands and rivers here, and conveyed directly thence by navigation. A few gardens, fields, and meadows, have been attempted by natives in some of the settlements, and by soldiers at the military posts, with most encouraging results.

Nor must we forget that the native grasses, ripening late in a humid climate, preserve their nutritive properties, though exposed, while the climate is so mild that cattle and horses require but slight provision of shelter during the winter.

Such is the island and coast portion of Eastern Alaska. Kla-kautch, the Chilcat, who is known and feared by the Indians throughout the whole Territory, and who is a very intelligent chief, informs me, that beyond the mountain range, which intervenes between the Chilcat and the Youkon rivers, you descend into a plain unbroken by hills or mountains, very fertile, in a genial climate, and as far as he could learn, of boundless extent. We have similar information from

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those who have traversed the interior from the shore of the Portland canal to the upper branches of the Youkon. We have reason, therefore, to believe that beyond the coast range of mountains in Alaska we shall find an extension of the rich and habitable valley lands of Oregon, Washington Territory, and British Columbia.

After what I have already said, I may excuse myself from expatiating on the animal productions of the forest. The elk and the deer are so plenty as to be undervalued for food or skins, by natives as well as strangers. The bear of many families—black, grizzly, and cinnamon ; the mountain sheep, inestimable for his fleece; the wolf, the fox, the beaver, the otter, the mink, the

raccoon, the marten, the ermine; the squirrel—gray, black, brown, and flying, are among the land fur-bearing animals. The furs thus found here have been the chief element, for more than a hundred years, of the profitable commerce of the Hudson's Bay Company, whose mere possessory privileges seem, even at this late day, too costly to find a ready purchaser. This fur-trade, together with the sea fur-trade within the Territory, were the sole basis alike of Russian commerce and empire on this continent. This commerce was so large and important as to induce the Governments of Russia and China to build and maintain a town for carrying on its exchanges in Tartary on the border of the two empires. It is well understood that the supply of furs in Alaska has not diminished, while the demand for them in China and elsewhere has immensely increased.

I fear that we must confess to a failure of ice as an element of territorial wealth, at least as far as this immediate region is concerned. I find that the Rus-

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sian American Company, whose monopoly was abolished by the treaty of acquisition, depended for ice exclusively upon the small lake or natural pond which furnishes the power for your saw-mill in this town, and that this dependence has now failed by reason of the increasing mildness of the winter. The California Ice Company are now trying the small lakes of Kodiak, and certainly I wish them success. I think it is not yet ascertained whether glacier ice is pure and practi-

cal for commerce. If it is, the world may be supplied from the glaciers, which, suspended from the region of the clouds, stand forth in the majesty of ever-wasting and ever-renewed translucent mountains upon the banks of the Stickeen and Chilcat rivers and the shores of Cross sound.

Alaska has been as yet but imperfectly explored. But enough is known to assure us that it possesses treasures of what are called the baser ores equal to those of any other region of the continent. We have Copper island and Copper river, so named as the places where the natives, before the period of the Russian discovery, had procured the pure metal from which they fabricated instruments of war and legendary shields. In regard to iron, the question seems to be not where it can be found, but whether there is any place where it does not exist. Mr. Davidson, of the Coast Survey, invited me to go up to him at the station he had taken up the Chilcat river to make his observations of the eclipse, by writing me that he had discovered an iron mountain there. When I came there I found that, very properly, he had been studying the heavens so busily, that he had but cursorily examined the earth under his feet; that it was not a single iron mountain he had discovered, but a range of

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hills, the very dust of which adheres to the magnet, while the range itself, two thousand feet high, extends along the east bank of the river thirty miles. Lime-

stone and marble crop out on the banks of the same river and in many other places. Coal-beds, accessible to navigation, are found at Kootznoo. It is said, however, that the concentrated resin which the mineral contains renders it too inflammable to be safely used by steamers. In any case, it would seem calculated to supply the fuel requisite for the manufacture of iron. What seems to be excellent cannel coal is also found in the Prince of Wales archipelago. There are also mines at Cook's inlet. Placer and quartz gold mining is pursued under many social disadvantages upon the Stickeen and elsewhere, with a degree of success which, while it does not warrant us in assigning a superiority in that respect to the Territory, does nevertheless warrant us in regarding gold mining as an established and reliable resource.

It would argue inexcusable insensibility if I should fail to speak of the scenery which, in the course of my voyage, has seemed to pass like a varied and magnificent panorama before me. The exhibition did not, indeed, open within the Territory. It broke upon me first when I had passed Cape Flattery and entered the Straits of Fuca, which separate British Columbia from Washington Territory. It widened as I passed along the shore of Puget Sound, expanded in the waters which divide Vancouver from the continent, and finally spread itself out into a magnificent archipelago, stretching through the entire Gulf of Alaska, and closing under the shade of Mounts Fairweather and St. Elias. Nature has furnished to this majestic picture the only suitable border which could be conceived, by lifting the

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coast range mountains to an exalted height, and cloth-
ins them with eternal snows and crystalline glaciers.
It remains only to speak of man and of society in
Alaska. Until the present moment the country has
been exclusively inhabited and occupied by some thirty
or more Indian tribes. I incline to doubt the popular
classification of these tribes, upon the assumption that
they have descended from diverse races. Climate and
other circumstances have indeed produced some differ-
ences of manners and customs between the Aleuts,
the Koloschians, and the interior continental tribes.
But all of them are manifestly of Mongol origin. Al-
though they have preserved no common traditions, all
alike indulge in tastes, wear a physiognomy, and are
imbued with sentiments peculiarly noticed in Japan
and China. Savage communities, no less than civilized
nations, require space for subsistence, whether they
depend for it upon the land or upon the sea—in savage
communities especially; and increase of population dis-
proportioned to the supplies of the country occupied
necessitates subdivision and remote colonization. Op-
pression and cruelty occur even more frequently among
barbarians than among civilized men. Nor are ambi-
tion and faction less inherent in the one condition than
in the other. From these causes it has happened that
the 25,000 Indians in Alaska are found permanently
divided into so many insignificant nations. These na-
tions are jealous, ambitious, and violent; could in no
case exist long in the same region without mutually af-
fording what, in every case, to each party, seems just
cause of war. War between savages becomes the private
cause of the several families which are afflicted with the

loss of their members. Such a war can never be composed until each family which has suffered receives an indem-

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nitv in blankets, adjusted according to an imaginary tariff, or, in the failure of such compensation, secures the death of one or more enemies as an atonement for the injury it has sustained. The enemy captured, whether by superior force or strategy, either receives no quarter, or submits for himself and his progeny to perpetual slavery. It has thus happened that the Indian tribes of Alaska have never either confederated or formed permanent alliances, and that even at this late day, in the presence of superior power exercised by the United States Government, they live in regard to each other in a state of enforced and doubtful truce. It is manifest that, under these circumstances, they must steadily decline in numbers, and unhappily this decline is accelerated by their borrowing ruinous vices from the white man. Such as the natives of Alaska are, they are, nevertheless, in a practical sense, the only laborers at present in the Territory. The white man comes amongst them from London, from St. Petersburg, from Boston, from New York, from San Francisco, and from Victoria, not to fish (if we except alone the whale fishery) or to hunt, but simply to buy what fish and what peltries, ice, wood, lumber, and coal, the Indians have secured under the superintendence of temporary agents or factors. When we consider how greatly most of the tribes are reduced in numbers, and how precarious their vocations are, we shall cease to regard them as indolent or incapable,

and, on the contrary, we shall more deeply regret than ever before, that a people so gifted by nature, so vigorous and energetic, and withal so docile and gentle in their intercourse with the white man, can neither be preserved as a distinct social community, nor incorporated into our society. The Indian tribes will do here

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as they seem to have done in "Washington Territory and British Columbia : they will merely serve the turn until civilized white men come.

You, the citizens of Sitka, are the pioneers, the advanced guard, of the future population of Alaska; and you naturally ask when, from whence, and how soon, reinforcements shall come, and what are the signs and guaranties of their coming? This question, with all its minute and searching interrogations, has been asked by the pioneers of every State and Territory of which the American Union is now composed; and the history of those States and Territories furnishes the complete, conclusive, and satisfactory answer. Emigrants go to every infant State and Territory in obedience to the great natural law that obliges needy men to seek subsistence, and invites adventurous men to seek fortune where it is most easily obtained, and this is always in the new and uncultivated regions. They go from every State and Territory, and from every foreign nation in America, Europe, and Asia; because no established and populous State or nation can guaranty subsistence and fortune to all who demand them among its inhabitants.

The guaranties and signs of their coming to Alaska are found in the resources of the Territory, which I have attempted to describe, and in the condition of society in other parts of the world. Some men seek other climes for health and some for pleasure. Alaska invites the former class by a climate singularly salubrious, and the latter class by scenery which surpasses in sublimity that of either the Alps, the Apennines, the Alleghanies, or the Rocky Mountains. Emigrants from our own States, from Europe, and from Asia, will not be slow in finding out that fortunes are to be

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gained by pursuing here the occupations which have so successfully sustained races of untutored men. Civilization and refinement are making more rapid advances in our day than at any former period. The rising States and nations on this continent, the European nations, and even those of Eastern Asia, have exhausted, or are exhausting, their own forests and mines, and are soon to become largely dependent upon those of the Pacific. The entire region of Oregon, Washington Territory, British Columbia, and Alaska, seem thus destined to become a ship-yard for the supply of all nations. I do not forget on this occasion that British Columbia belongs within a foreign jurisdiction. That circumstance does not materially affect my calculations. British Columbia, by whomsoever possessed, must be governed in conformity with the interests of her people and of society upon the Ameri-

can continent. If that Territory shall be so governed, there will be no ground of complaint anywhere. If it shall be governed so as to conflict with the interests of the inhabitants of that Territory and of the United States, we all can easily foresee what will happen in that case. You will ask me, however, for guaranties that the hopes I encourage will not be postponed. I give them.

Within the period of my own recollection, I have seen twenty new States added to the eighteen which before that time constituted the American Union, and I now see, besides Alaska, ten Territories in a forward condition of preparation for entering into the same great political family. I have seen in my own time not only the first electric telegraph, but even the first railroad and the first steamboat invented by man. And even on this present voyage of mine, I have fallen in

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with the first steamboat, still afloat, that thirty-five years ago lighted her fires on the Pacific ocean. These, citizens of Sitka, are the guaranties, not only that Alaska has a future, but that that future has already begun. I know that you want two things just now, when European monopoly is broken down and United States free trade is being introduced within the Territory: These are, military protection while your number is so inferior to that of the Indians around you, and you need also a territorial civil government. Congress has already supplied the first of these wants adequately and effectually. I doubt not that it will

supply the other want during the coming winter. It must do this, because our political system rejects alike anarchy and executive absolutism. Nor do I doubt that the political society to be constituted here, first as a Territory, and ultimately as a State or many States, will prove a worthy constituency of the Republic. To doubt that it will be intelligent, virtuous, prosperous, and enterprising, is to doubt the experience of Scotland, Denmark, Sweden, Holland, and Belgium, and of New England and New York. Nor do I doubt that it will be forever true in its republican instincts and loyal to the American Union, for the inhabitants will be both mountaineers and sea-faring men. I am not among those who apprehend infidelity to liberty and the Union in any quarter hereafter, but I am sure that if constancy and loyalty are to fail anywhere, the failure will not be in the States which approach nearest to the north pole.

Fellow-citizens, accept once more my thanks, from the heart of my heart, for kindnesses which can never be forgotten, and suffer me to leave you with a sincere and earnest farewell.

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<mailto:ASL.Historical@eed.state.ak>.

IMAGE AND FULL TEXT

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