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St. Paul and St. George, Alaska. Letter from Frank N. Wicker to Hon. Robert C. Schenck, with copy of report made to the Solicitor of the Treasury relative of the Islands of St. Paul and St. George, Alaska

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ST. PAUL AND ST. GEORGE, ALASKA.

LETTER

FROM

FRANK N. WICKER

TO

HON. ROBERT C. SCHENCK,

WITH

*Copy of report made to the Solicitor of the Treasury relative to the Islands
of St. Paul and St. George, Alaska.*

DECEMBER 14, 1869.—Referred to the Committee of Ways and Means and ordered to be
printed.

OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL AGENT TREASURY DEPARTMENT,
Sitka, Alaska, November 4, 1869.

SIR: I have the honor herewith to transmit copy of my report to the
Hon. Solicitor of the Treasury, on the Islands of St. Paul and St. George,
in this Territory.

Having recently returned from a visit to that highly interesting sec-
tion of our country, and in view of the fact that the mail steamer leaves
here to-day, I have been compelled to omit many interesting facts con-
nected with said islands.

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

FRANK N. WICKER,

Special Agent Treasury Department, in charge of Alaska.

HON. CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE OF WAYS AND MEANS,
House of Representatives of the United States, Washington, D. C.

OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL AGENT TREASURY DEPARTMENT,
Sitka, Alaska, November 4, 1869.

SIR: In compliance with your request that I would furnish such
general information relative to the seal fisheries on the Islands of St.
Paul and St. George as would assist the government in determining
some policy to be adopted that would best protect the fur-bearing

animals resorting to said islands, and at the same time secure to the government the largest revenue, I have the honor to submit the following facts in relation to the islands, and the outline of two bills, either one of which would, I think, if accepted, meet the end desired. The island of St. Paul, the largest and most important, contains eight seal rookeries although the entire coast line of the island (about eighteen miles long) is covered to some extent with these valuable animals.

These rookeries are located in such manner that the island could be divided in three divisions, each about equal in extent and importance.

The island contains about two hundred inhabitants, Aleutians, who subsist entirely on seal meat; and such other articles of food and clothing as their requirements demand are procured from traders on the island in exchange for the fur-seal skins, for which they are allowed forty cents each.

One hundred and twenty-five thousand male seals can be killed annually, during the season, without detriment; the natives only being employed in the killing.

Although the present law, which prohibits the killing, (act of Congress approved July 27, 1868,) is ostensibly in force, it is notoriously silent in regard to the disposition of such skins as may have been taken from animals killed in violation of the law. From a personal inspection of the island during the month of September, I am convinced that over one hundred thousand fur-seals have been killed this season, and the skins sold to traders; and as the killing season continues until about the first day of December, operations will undoubtedly be carried on until the close of the season. And the only benefit derived by the government is the privilege of paying officials to remain on the islands.

St. George Island, lying about thirty miles to the south of St. Paul, in the Behring Sea, is much smaller and of less importance. Forty thousand animals could be killed on this island without injury to the government. The facts in relation to St. Paul are equally and proportionately true of St. George.

I would recommend the passage of a bill authorizing the Secretary of the Treasury to employ the natives residing on the islands in killing the fur-seals and curing the skins, paying them therefor good liberal prices in goods, which shall be sent to the islands and disposed of at fixed rates; that all traders and others not employed by the government be removed from the islands, and that for any buildings or other improvements put upon the islands by private parties, there shall be appraisers appointed to assess the value of such improvements, and the amount so assessed shall be paid by the government to the parties having valid claim to the same. That all skins collected shall be stored on the island in store-houses provided for that purpose, and there remain until the following season, when they shall be shipped to San Francisco or some other central point, and then be disposed of at public sale to the highest bidder, and the proceeds of such sale, after deducting all expenses incurred, shall be deposited to the credit of the United States.

The inspectors to be appointed under the provisions of this bill to receive liberal salaries, and give bonds for the faithful performance of such duties as shall be assigned them. This, with careful and judicious management, would, in addition to the payment of all expenses, return the government a revenue of over five hundred thousand dollars annually.

The habits and peculiarities of the fur-seals are such that any deviation from the old established customs adopted by the Russians would have

a tendency to drive them away from their rookeries; consequently the necessity of surrounding this mine of wealth with the strong arm of government, but at the same time does away with private monopolies which are always obnoxious to the people.

In case this proposition should fail to elicit the attention of Congress I would most respectfully submit the following, viz:

That the Secretary of the Treasury shall be authorized to lease the islands for a period of not less than twenty years to the highest bidder, provided six months notice shall have been given, in order that capitalists may have an opportunity of gaining such information relative to the value of the islands as will assist them in bidding for the same; all bids to be accompanied with a bond of sufficient amount to protect the government in case the regulations and restrictions imposed under the said lease should not be complied with. Bonds for treble the amount should be exacted for the year in which the said lease expires.

One hundred and twenty-five thousand seals may be killed on the island of St. Paul and forty thousand on the island of St. George, provided that no female seal or pup under one year old shall be killed, and that in no instance shall guns or fire-arms be employed.

In addition to the forfeiture of all skins, the bonds shall be liable for any infraction or deviation from such regulations as may be prescribed by the Secretary of the Treasury. The islands should be leased separately to the highest responsible bidders, and in addition to the annual rental fee a tax should be levied and collected on each skin taken under such lease.

Aleutians from the adjacent islands or mainland should not be employed in killing the fur-seal unless under special permit from the Secretary of the Treasury.

Respectfully submitted.

FRANK N. WICKER,

Special Agent Treasury Department, in charge of Alaska.

Hon. E. C. BANFIELD,

Solicitor of the Treasury, Washington, D. C.