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**Fur seal fisheries of Alaska. Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury in answer to a resolution of the House, transmitting a report of the special agent of Alaska upon the fur seal fisheries of that territory**

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FUR SEAL FISHERIES OF ALASKA.

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LETTER

FROM THE

SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY

IN ANSWER TO

*A resolution of the House, transmitting a report of the special agent of Alaska upon the fur seal fisheries of that Territory.*

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FEBRUARY 14, 1870.—Referred to the Committee on Commerce and ordered to be printed.

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TREASURY DEPARTMENT,  
February 11, 1870.

SIR: I have the honor, in answer to the resolution (without date) of the honorable the House of Representatives, which is as follows, viz: "On motion of Mr. Banks, *Resolved*, That the Secretary of the Treasury be requested to transmit to this house, if not inconsistent with the public interest, copies of any report of Frank N. Wicker, special agent of the Treasury, not transmitted upon the fur seal fisheries of the Territory of Alaska," to transmit herewith copies of two reports, dated October 25, 1869, and November 4, 1869, respectively, received by this department from Mr. Wicker in relation to the subject mentioned in the said resolution.

I am, very respectfully,

GEO. S. BOUTWELL,  
*Secretary of the Treasury.*

Hon. J. G. BLAINE,  
*Speaker of House of Representatives.*

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SITKA, ALASKA, October 25, 1869.

SIR: I have the honor to report my return from a cruise to the north and west, touching at various points, including the all-important island of St. Paul, where I made a thorough and searching examination of the different salt or storehouses for the purpose of ascertaining the number of seal skins taken during the season of 1869.

Before making examination I was informed by Lieutenant W. B. Barnes, United States revenue service, in charge of the island, that he had permitted the killing of 30,000 seals by the natives, (as a means of subsistence,) and for which those traders who are allowed to remain on

the island pay forty cents each per skin, either in money or goods, and fifty cents per day to each native employed in salting the skins, or other employment as required.

Examination proved, however, that the animals had been killed without reference to the permission given by the treasury agent or the act of Congress approved July 27, 1869, prohibiting the killing.

Instead of there being but two storehouses on the island, (as I was informed by the officials,) containing about 30,000 skins, I found four houses, containing over 60,000, as per inclosed schedule, marked C.

The natives furthermore informed me that these storehouses had all contained more skins than were at present stored there, but that they had been removed by parties having authority to land, and that the skins so removed were taken from animals killed this year.

The natives are engaged two, three, and sometimes four days in a week, and each native kills from fifty to one hundred animals per day.

Although no direct obstacle was thrown in my way in gaining the desired information, I discovered a general disposition on the part of the officials (Lieutenant James L. Mast, Second United States Artillery, especially) to cover up matters, and failing in that to use threats. See inclosed communication, marked B.

I also inclose copy of manifest of cargo which was permitted to land on the island. See inclosure A.

Although no direct proof could be obtained at the island, I am convinced that large numbers of seal skins are shipped on board of whalers and sent direct to the Sandwich Islands. Intimations were given that parties effected a landing and stole the skins out of the storehouses.

I would most respectfully ask what disposition or regulations to enforce relative to the skins at present on the island, as a steamer was expected to arrive at the island soon for the purpose of removing the said skins to San Francisco.

On account of the lateness of the season, and prevailing storms, it was deemed impossible to effect a landing at Saint George's Island, but it is safe to assume that the reports relative to affairs at Saint Paul are equally true of Saint George, in proportion to the size and its resources.

From the most reliable information I have been able to gain, about 3,000 sea otter skins have been taken by different parties, or rather purchased from the natives throughout the Territory.

It is an utter impossibility to prevent the natives from killing these animals.

The entire coast line of the Territory north of the Aleutian Islands is without an official, consequently large quantities of liquor are landed at Fort St. Michaels, in Norton Sound, and at Kotzebue Sound, in the Arctic Ocean.

I would most respectfully recommend the appointment of two good inspectors for the places named, with instructions to proceed to those points immediately upon the breaking up of the ice in the spring.

Unalaska affords the largest and most secure harbor in the Territory, besides being on the direct line or course of vessels bound north. All vessels touch at this point, while but very few stop at Sitka, which is several hundred miles out of the regular course.

I would, therefore, recommend that Unalaska be made a regular port of entry.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

**FRANK N. WICKER,**  
*Special Agent.*

HON. GEORGE S. BOUTWELL,  
*Secretary of the Treasury.*

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

SIR: In compliance with verbal instructions received from the Hon. E. C. Banfield, solicitor of the treasury, that I would furnish such general information relative to the "seal fisheries" on the islands of Saint Paul and Saint 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 ends 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 into 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-seal have been killed this season, and the skins sold to traders; and as the killing season continues until about the 1st 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.

Saint George Island, lying about thirty miles to the south of Saint 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 Saint Paul are equally and proportionately true of Saint 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-seal 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 islands 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 be there 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 may 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 custom 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 should be made apparent to all. This method not only insures a handsome revenue to the 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 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 main land 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. GEO. S. BOUTWELL,

*Secretary of the Treasury, Washington, D. C.*

A.—Manifest of part of cargo shipped by Hutchinson, Kohl & Co., on board the steamer Alexander, whereof Erskine is master, for St. Paul, July, 1869.

20 kegs dry goods and clothing.	3 kegs shot.
6 cases fancy goods.	11 kgs. crockery and glassware.
1 case hats and caps.	2 cases cigars.
17 cases boots and shoes.	1 case rifles.
1,024 pkgs. groceries & provisions.	1 bale harness.
12 cases hardware.	5 coils rope.
6 coils lead.	6 bales hay.
3 vices.	20 cases wine.

6 casks ale and porter.	1 barrel chalk.
1 case bitters.	2 rolls matting.
2 sleds.	5 cases medicines.
1 cart.	2 boxes pipes.
12 grindstones.	8, 310 feet lumber.
15 cases coal oil.	14 cases (350 pounds) powder.
5 packages wooden ware.	30 tons salt.

True copy :

F. N. WICKER,  
*Special Agent Treasury Department.*

B.

HEADQUARTERS DETACHED UNITED STATES TROOPS,  
ST. PAUL AND ST. GEORGE ISLANDS,  
*St. Paul Island, A. T., October 9, 1869.*

SIR: Having received unofficial information that the so-called Kadiak natives of this island have entered a complaint against the firm of Williams & Haven for the violation of their (W. & H.) contract with them, in so far as not giving them (natives) the necessary means of transportation for departure from the island after the expiration of their contract, have the honor to state that said report is false and without foundation, and that I was informed at time of said contract (verbally) being made, and that they acquiesced and took the money—one hundred dollars—as a fee for their remaining another year, willingly, and that I approved of same. I am placed here to see that the natives are kindly treated, and in future do not wish nor will I allow of any more tampering with them.

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

JAMES L. MAST,

*First Lieut. Second U. S. Art'y, Com'g St. Paul and St. George Islands.*

COL. WICKER,

*Special Agent Treasury Department.*

C.—Measurements of seal skins as packed up in the various salt or store houses on the island of St. Paul, October 9 and 10, 1869.

Location of store-house.	No. of piles.	Length.		Height.		Width.		Cubic feet.
		Feet.	Inches.	Feet.	Inches.	Feet.	Inches.	
At the settlement.....	1	20	.....	11	.....	7	.....	1,340
	1	15	.....	7	.....	5	6	577.6
	1	15	6	4	.....	5	6	341
	1	10	.....	1	3	3	.....	37.6
At or near the settlement.....	1	7	.....	1	8	3	8	42.9
	1	5	.....	5	8	3	.....	85
	1	5	9	3	8	2	.....	42.2
	1	4	.....	2	6	2	.....	20
	1	9	.....	3	.....	3	6	94.0
	1	8	.....	3	4	3	.....	80
Southwest bay.....	1	5	6	1	.....	6	.....	33
	1	14	.....	7	.....	4	.....	392
	1	6	.....	2	6	3	9	56.3
	1	5	.....	5	9	3	2	91
Northeast point.....	1	15	3	5	.....	5	.....	375
	1	15	3	7	.....	10	.....	1,067.6
	1	32	8	4	.....	6	.....	784
Total.....	17	192	8	75	4	76	1	5,659.2

One small pile, containing by actual count 355 skins, measured 37 cubic feet 6 inches, was taken as a standard to determine total number of skins on the island. This standard with one-sixth added for pressure gives total number of skins as 62,539.