

University of Oklahoma College of Law  
**University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons**

---

American Indian and Alaskan Native Documents in the Congressional Serial Set: 1817-1899

---

1-30-1879

Henry C. De Ahna

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.law.ou.edu/indianserialset>



Part of the [Indian and Aboriginal Law Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

H.R. Rep. No. 82, 45th Cong., 3rd Sess. (1879)

This House Report is brought to you for free and open access by University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in American Indian and Alaskan Native Documents in the Congressional Serial Set: 1817-1899 by an authorized administrator of University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [darinfox@ou.edu](mailto:darinfox@ou.edu).

HENRY C. DE AHNA.

JANUARY 30, 1879.—Recommitted to the Committee of Ways and Means and ordered to be printed.

Mr. PHELPS, from the Committee of Ways and Means, submitted the following

REPORT:

[To accompany bill S. 1592.]

*The Committee of Ways and Means, to whom was referred the petition of Henry C. De Ahna, late collector of customs for the district of Alaska, have had the same under consideration, and submit the following report:*

The petitioner was appointed on the 15th day of August, 1877, in the vacation of Congress, collector of customs for the district of Alaska, to fill an existing vacancy in the office. His commission bore that date, and was signed by the President of the United States, and countersigned by the Acting Secretary of the Treasury. By the Constitution of the United States, the President has the power to make such appointments, to continue until the expiration of the next session of the Senate. In this case the Senate, at its next session, failed to act upon the appointment, and consequently the incumbent's official term expired with that session on the 3d of December, 1877.

He hesitated about accepting the appointment on account of the great distance to travel, and the very great expense necessarily attending the journey with his family, and the possibility of his non-confirmation by the Senate; but he was advised by those in authority that he would be safe in going, and to leave as soon as practicable. He was governed by this advice, and made diligent and faithful efforts to reach his destination and enter upon the discharge of his official duties as soon as possible; but for difficulties and delays which he could not have foreseen, and for which he was in no manner responsible, he did not arrive at Sitka until the 21st of October, at which time his official term commenced.

The Territory of Alaska was unorganized, had no civil government, and no resident representative of the general government excepting the collector of customs; was mostly inhabited by wild Indians and Russian half-breeds, and no adequate defense had been provided for the protection of the lives and property of the few respectable white settlers, and no preparation for the establishment of schools, or opportunities for religious instruction.

Colonel De Ahna is a gentleman of learning and ability, and of considerable official experience. He was very active and faithful in the discharge of his duties in Alaska, and in obedience to instructions from the Treasury Department promptly transmitted to the Secretary, under date of November 4, a full and detailed report of the condition of affairs in that Territory, which contained very important and valuable

information respecting the inhabitants, the fisheries, and mineral and other resources of the Territory, and on other subjects. He also procured from his deputies at Sitka and Fort Wrangel reports of a similar character, which he transmitted to the department with his own; and had also taken measures to obtain teachers and missionaries for the education and religious enlightenment of the natives.

On the 5th of January, 1878, he received notice from the Secretary of the Treasury that the Senate had adjourned without acting upon his appointment, and that his official term expired on the 3d of December previously, at which time he had been in office but forty-two days.

He was without pecuniary means when appointed, and, upon his request, \$1,250 was advanced to him by the Secretary of the Treasury to enable him to make the journey and take possession of his office.

The annual salary of the collector is \$2,500, in addition to which there are fees amounting to about one thousand or twelve hundred dollars, but no allowance for traveling or other expenses.

At the time he received notice of his non-confirmation his family were at Victoria, in British Columbia, and on the point of sailing for Sitka in a steamer on which all his baggage and effects were placed. His necessary expenses in going to and from Sitka, and in taking his family to and from Victoria, a distance of 9,000 miles, were much more than the half year's salary advanced to him, to say nothing of the loss of time, other expenses and pecuniary loss, to which he was necessarily subjected.

When he reached San Francisco on his way homeward his means were entirely exhausted. He was obliged to sell his wife's jewelry to obtain subsistence for his family, and was finally driven to the humiliating necessity of asking charity from strangers and railroad passengers for his trip from San Francisco to Washington, where he arrived about the 20th of June, 1878, after an absence of nearly ten months; and his personal baggage and necessary clothing for his family are still held by an express company for the payment of the small sum of \$42, which he has been unable to discharge.

The committee are of opinion that his is a very extreme and exceptional case of official misfortune and distress, attributable to no fault of his, and one which strongly appeals to the justice of the government which he has faithfully served, and that under the circumstances he is entitled to reasonable compensation for the valuable official services which he rendered and for expenses incurred and losses sustained in traveling to and from the location of his office, and recommend concurrence by the House of Representatives in the passage of the Senate bill No. 1592 for his relief.

○