

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

3-18-1884

Construction of a steam vessel of the Revenue Marine and steam launch for special service in Alaskan waters

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



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

Recommended Citation

H.R. Rep. No. 802, 48th Cong., 1st Sess. (1884)

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 Law-LibraryDigitalCommons@ou.edu.

CONSTRUCTION OF A STEAM VESSEL OF THE REVENUE
MARINE AND STEAM LAUNCH FOR SPECIAL SERVICE
IN ALASKAN WATERS.

MARCH 18, 1884.—Referred to the Committee on Appropriations and ordered to be printed.

Mr. PETERS, from the Committee on Commerce, submitted the following

REPORT:

[To accompany bill H. R. 2601.]

The Committee on Commerce beg leave to report to the House the accompanying bill, "appropriating certain moneys for the construction of a steam vessel of the Revenue Marine and steam launch for special service in Alaskan waters," with a favorable recommendation, and ask its reference to the Committee on Appropriations.

The attached data and letters are presented as the reasons for our favorable action:

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,
Washington, D. C., January 16, 1884.

SIR: I have the honor to transmit herewith a copy of a letter from Capt. M. A. Healy, commander of the revenue steamer *Corwin*, upon the subject of making provision for a new revenue steamer for duty in Alaskan waters.

Captain Healy presents urgent reasons for providing the vessel recommended, prominent among which are the following:

1. The insufficiency of the present vessel, the steamer *Corwin*, in coal-carrying capacity for the long distances comprised in the cruising grounds, it appearing that with the bunkers full of coal, and a deck load in sacks, she is able to make the runs direct from point to point only, and is frequently compelled to omit a part of her work to return to the coal depot for fuel.

2. The need of more commodious quarters for officers and men than the present vessel affords, the relief work in Alaska frequently requiring that the vessel bring away the people of stranded or ice-crushed whalers or other shipwrecked persons. The letter shows that within the last four years more than 150 distressed mariners have been brought away from the Arctic by the revenue vessel.

3. The necessity for a greater spread of canvas than is possible on the *Corwin*, to render the vessel able, independent of her steam machinery, to weather the tempestuous seas of that region; for in these remote waters, were the machinery to break down, repairs would be impossible. It appears by the letter that the distance from San Francisco to Ounalaska (the only coaling station in the Alaskan region) is 2,100 miles; that thence to Attou, the westernmost island of the Aleutian chain, is 850 miles, making a distance of 1,700 miles to go and return; that from Ounalaska to Saint Michael's is 900 miles, and from Saint Michael's to Point Barrow, the most northerly part of Alaska, is 1,500 miles. Although the vessel cruises as much as practicable under canvas in order to save coal, it is necessary to depend entirely on coal in her movements amongst numerous islands, fields of ice, and treacherous currents of the northern waters.

The fact that no vessels of the Revenue Marine have ever met with serious accident in this rigorous Arctic cruising is attributed to the good judgment and excellent professional skill possessed by their commanders; but with the vessels now available for this work, it is hardly to be expected that such immunity from accident will continue.

The Treasury Department, with the revenue vessels, is required to look after a variety of Government interests in this vast territorial possession of the country, em-

bracing the extensive seal fisheries, from which a large revenue is derived, and other valuable fur-bearing interests, the only means of subsistence to the natives; the protection of our northwestern whaling fleet; the maintenance of peace and good order amongst the natives; the extension of mail facilities to the people resident there; besides the prevention of smuggling, and the suppression of illicit trade in breech-loading arms and rum prohibited by law.

In truth, whatever Government exists over more than nine-tenths of this great territory is enforced by the Treasury Department through the annual visitations of the Revenue Marine vessels.

The growing importance of this country will demand better facilities in the future than have been available in the past. This subject has been twice brought to the attention of Congress in the Finance Report (see page 34, 1881, and page 59, 1883). I deem the matter of such urgency as to impel me to recommend that the sum of \$175,000 be immediately appropriated for the construction of a new steamer to perform the duties indicated above. This sum is believed the proper amount to furnish a vessel of suitable dimensions for the work required.

A reason which makes immediate provision for this vessel more imperative is the present condition of the *Corwin*, as indicated by the reports made upon that vessel. With such considerable repairs as will be put upon her the current season, it is deemed that she will not be able to make a cruise, after the one of 1884, without general and extensive repairs to the hull, and new boilers.

At such time the Department would have no vessel to detail for this important service should Congress fail to provide for the new one.

Very respectfully,

CHAS. J. FOLGER,
Secretary.

Hon. JOHN G. CARLISLE,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

U. S. REVENUE MARINE,
REVENUE STEAMER CORWIN,
San Francisco, November 23, 1883.

SIR: In submitting specifications for repairs to the revenue steamer *Corwin*, I would respectfully state that they are made as nearly specific as practicable. The repairs asked for will put the vessel in as good a condition for the coming season as she can be made without going to a great expense.

I would here most respectfully yet earnestly add my recommendation to those of many previous commanders, that a larger vessel be constructed for service in Alaskan waters. That the *Corwin* is entirely too small a vessel for the services required of her on her annual cruises north has been repeatedly represented to the Department, yet she is the best adapted of all the vessels in the service for the work.

The *Corwin* measures but 227 tons burden, stowing only 65 tons of coal in her bunkers, and to enable her to reach the first coaling station, which is 2,100 miles from San Francisco, she is obliged to carry a deck load of coal of 35 or 40 tons, leaving not a foot of clear deck space. This, together with six months' provisions for her crew and other outfits, puts the vessel so low in the water as to render all idea of comfort, either fore or aft, an absurdity, and the vessel in anything but a safe sea-going trim from the time she leaves San Francisco until her return. She may be said to be literally under water, being so deeply laden that in ordinary weather she throws spray from stem to stern; and when it is taken into consideration that rain falls in those latitudes about twenty-five days in each month, and that high winds prevail the greater portion of the time, the dangers and discomforts in a vessel of the *Corwin's* dimensions can be imagined, not to mention the dangers with which she is threatened when beset by the ice. I believe the *Corwin* to have as good a record as any other Government vessel afloat, and built as strong as wood and iron can make her, but being overtaxed, as she annually is, I must attribute her escape from serious mishaps or loss to a special protection of Providence.

It must be obvious to the Department that the utility of a vessel carrying the limited amount of coal the *Corwin* does must be seriously hampered when it is considered that Unalaska is the only coaling station in Alaskan waters, and that is 2,100 miles from San Francisco, 1,100 miles from Sitka, 600 miles from Kodiak, 850 miles from Atton, 900 miles from Saint Michael's, and 1,500 miles from Point Barrow. All of these points bear in different directions from Unalaska, and to go and return, as we are obliged to do for the purpose of coaling, makes the distance to be traversed double those given above; it must be seen that after making the points named, there is but little margin left on coal to cruise about the thousand and one islands and settlements that intervene.

Moreover, the *Corwin* has not sufficient accommodations for the officers assigned to

her, one being obliged to swing in a cot during a cruise. We are often called upon to take distressed seamen on board. A very small addition to our crew so crowds the men's quarters as to make both rescued and rescuers very uncomfortable. During the past four years the *Corwin* has brought down from the north upwards of one hundred and fifty distressed seamen and miners. The severity of the weather and dangers to navigation in the northern latitudes may be imagined when I inform the Department that there are about forty-five vessels of all kinds cruising in the Arctic every summer, and there is an average of four wrecks a year. Three have been lost this year, and a like number were wrecked last year. That a vessel is indispensable in Alaskan waters, both for the enforcement of laws and to assist distressed shipping, cannot be disputed, and I feel assured that the Department, understanding the difficulties and dangers of the station, will provide a suitable vessel.

For the safety and comfort of those placed on this service, and the better performance of duty, I would most respectfully ask that a vessel be built sufficiently large to stow a reasonable amount of coal, to give the officers and crew more comfortable quarters, and to spread a much larger area of canvas. I would also urge the necessity of having the vessel completed, if Congress makes the required appropriation, in time for duty in the spring of 1885, as the *Corwin* will hardly be in condition to make a cruise in the Arctic that year.

I am, very respectfully,

M. A. HEALY,

Captain, United States Revenue Marine.

Hon. CHARLES J. FOLGER,
Secretary of the Treasury,
Washington, D. C.

MEMORANDA.

(1.) Alaska contains more than 500,000 square miles of area, and a coast line estimated at 20,000 miles, including the islands.

(2.) It has valuable seal fisheries, which yield the Government a yearly revenue of \$317,500, and many fur-bearing animals which furnish a valuable industry to traders.

(3.) It has fine forests of excellent timber, and immense coal fields, and is reported rich in the precious metals.

(4.) It has valuable salmon and cod fisheries.

(5.) It has a population of 20,000 to 30,000, principally native Indians inhabiting the islands and shores, who are engaged mostly in fishing and trading in furs. But many white men are now seeking its shores for the development of mining and other interests.

(6.) This vast region has no protection or form of government, save such as is afforded by the annual cruising of a revenue cutter in its waters, under the authority of Congress.

This revenue cutter protects the seal fisheries from marauding expeditions carried on in vessels from San Francisco and the Hawaiian Islands. It protects from destruction the sea-otter, which is the principal source of subsistence of the natives, by preventing the killing of this animal by unauthorized methods, and thereby prevents the Indians from falling upon the Government for support. It suppresses lawlessness and debauchery among the people, and enforces the law prohibiting traffic in rum and breech-loading firearms. It looks after the interests of the Government generally, in that far-off region, and prevents the organization of smuggling expeditions or other unlawful schemes, being the only visible evidence to those people that the Territory is properly under our flag. The commanders of the cutter, besides, make surveys and soundings upon the coasts, observations upon tides, currents, and winds, upon the productions and resources of the country, and upon the character, conditions, and occupations of the people. In short, they have obtained almost all the information given to the public concerning this great Territorial possession of our country since its acquisition.

The revenue steamer *Corwin*, now engaged principally in the Alaskan work of the Revenue Marine, and the only one available for the purpose, was not originally built or designed for such service. She is too small, being of only 227 tons measurement, and 144 feet long. She is provided with coal-carrying capacity for only 65 tons of coal, whereas she should carry 125 tons. She has space for three months' provisions, but is obliged to carry from six to nine months' supply. She must, therefore, place the extra provisions and coal on her decks, thus greatly impairing her sea-going qualities and endangering the lives of her officers and crew. Her quarters are insufficient for the extra officers and crew required for her long and arduous cruising, causing serious discomfort to all on board during these voyages. She is not constructed with reference to encountering the heavy fields of ice with which she annually meets. She has no room to carry the shipwrecked and distressed mariners whom she rescues and brings away every year.

Added to all this appears the important fact that the *Corwin*, ill-adapted as she is, must be withdrawn at the end of her next cruise and placed in the dock for extensive repairs, and the important work in Alaska be left undone unless Congress shall make provision for a vessel at its present session.

Justice to the Revenue Marine Service, which has performed for years a most important and laborious work in this most northerly of our possessions, requires that it should be well equipped for the performance of the duties imposed upon it.

The Secretary of the Treasury has strongly recommended this appropriation both in his Annual Reports for 1881 and 1883 (pp. — and —), and in a special letter accompanying the report of Capt. M. A. Healy, the present commander of the *Corwin*.

In view of the foregoing the Committee on Commerce agree in recommending that bill No. 2601 be referred to the Committee on Appropriations with instructions to include the necessary amount for the proposed vessel in the sundry civil bill.

○