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Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury, transmitting, in response to resolution of the Senate of the 22d instant, a copy of the report of Henry C. De Ahna, formerly Collector of Customs at Sitka, Alaska, in regard to the resources, condition, and affairs of the Territory of Alaska.

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LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY,

TRANSMITTING,

In response to resolution of the Senate of the 22d instant, a copy of the report of Henry C. De Ahna, formerly collector of customs at Sitka, Alaska, in regard to the resources, condition, and affairs of the Territory of Alaska.

MAY 27, 1880.—Laid on the table and ordered to be printed.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT, *May 25, 1880.*

SIR: In compliance with the directions contained in the resolution adopted by the Senate on the 22d instant, I transmit herewith a copy of a report of Henry C. De Ahna, formerly collector of customs at Sitka, Alaska, dated Washington, D. C., November 4, 1877, which is the only report made by Mr. De Ahna while holding said office of collector, or since, in regard to the resources, condition, and affairs of the Territory of Alaska.

Very respectfully,

JOHN SHERMAN,
Secretary.

Hon. WILLIAM A. WHEELER,
President of the Senate.

SAN FRANCISCO, CAL., *November 4, 1877.*

SIR: I have the honor to report that on the 21st ultimo I arrived at Sitka, Alaska, and took possession of the office of collector. I found Mr. Harvey, special deputy collector, in charge, who informed me that he had resigned in the month of June of the present year, and that he was desirous of being relieved as soon as he would have finished the work of settling up accounts for the late collector, Mr. Berry. All the public property was turned over to me according to law, as will appear from the lists and inventories forwarded to the department from Sitka. Mr. Harvey will leave Sitka on or about the 16th instant, and will deposit all public funds with the sub-treasurer at San Francisco.

I have appointed, subject to your approval, as deputy collector, Mr. Francis, the son of the United States consul at Victoria, Vancouver Island. As there is nothing to collect at Sitka, nothing to do except to clear one ship a month (the steamer California), and as there will remain no funds at all in the collector's safe after the departure of Mr. Harvey,

my temporary absence will not prove detrimental in the least degree to the interests of the government.

As stated in my telegraph dispatch of the 3d instant, *I was forced* to return here for the reason of putting myself in communication with the department and to seek means to take my family to Sitka, provided that I would be successful in my endeavors to obtain from the government what is undoubtedly indispensable under the circumstances. I am not in a good state of health at this moment and have not been for a week past. I beg, therefore, that the department will kindly excuse deficiencies in style or clearness of expression, but I am trying to do the best I can in obedience to the instructions per telegraph, received in Portland on my way up the coast—"Write fully on affairs at Sitka, immediately after your arrival, and by return of steamer."

The state of things in Sitka is just as bad and disgraceful a state as can be imagined; there is no law or order of any kind, and no means to enforce either. In the town *every other* house is a clandestine distillery; and in the Indian village *every* habitation is one. The prohibition of liquor importation into Alaska has no other result, so far, but that of changing drunkards of the ordinary stamp, Indians as well as the whites and half-breeds, into actual raving maniacs. Their home-manufactured liquor (*ouchenué*) is almost equal to rank poison, and much worse in its effects than would be produced by the drinking of high wines direct and hot from the mouth of the still.

There is a population of 231 in the town, and *circa* 1,500 Indians in the adjoining village. The steamer California leaves between 100-115 barrels of molasses at Sitka every month. If they had no molasses, they would use potatoes, beans, sugar; lately the Indians have experimented even on saw-dust. With the exception of perhaps a dozen people, everybody is in the habit of getting drunk daily, and as the Indians are roaming at their leisure and pleasure all over the place night and day, the probabilities of some murderous outbreak, ending in a general massacre, are exceedingly great.

I have seen and spoken with every person capable of giving a sensible answer to questions asked. I have made the acquaintance of the Russian priest, and have passed a couple of hours in visiting the Indian village. I have counted something like one hundred canoes in front of the Indian cabins, of all sizes, holding from 6 to 45 people each.

The Chilcat tribe arrived *without* their wives and children, and I should say have increased the Indian population around Sitka from 1,500 to 1,800 souls.

There is no doubt whatever that on Sunday, 13th of October, one day previous to arrival of revenue cutter Wolcott, the Indians, by their act of tearing down fully four-fifths of the whole stockade, and of wantonly destroying the Russian grave yard, *intended* to provoke resistance on the part of the inhabitants.

They had from 60 to 70 bucks lying around in the bushes with rifles in hand, while the stockade was torn down by the others. The Chilcat chief was put in to the guard-house once by General Davis. Sitka Jack and wife were imprisoned by Major Campbell, and they are brooding revenge, and openly said so to many persons. If the Wolcott with her borrowed three guns had not arrived just then, the following day would have seen a general gutting of the stores of Whilford, Philippon, and others, and the Lord only knows what more would have followed, as a matter of course. I have not the least doubt regarding my statements conflicting with the rose-colored views of others.

The Indians behave themselves as long as there is a vessel present and no

longer. How, then, can "occasional visits" and cruising in those waters of Alaska once in a while by a man-of-war "afford all necessary protection?"

What is wanted is the *constant presence* of a well-armed and well-manned vessel, to be relieved from time to time, but under orders not to leave under any pretext whatever until relieved by another armed vessel. Further, the creation of some court of justice, at least the nomination of somebody, say the collector or deputy collector, as justice of the peace, with a couple of constables to serve under him.

The collector is overrun with complaints of all degrees of importance, and can exercise no authority whatever, but sinks down into a mere *figure-head*.

I inclose petition of inhabitants of Wrangel, *which applies equally well to the necessities* felt at Sitka. I also inclose report of Mr. Dennis, deputy collector, who is a man of sound good sense, capable, and honorable.

The horrid state of affairs at Sitka is due to the demoralization *introduced by our own troops*. The trembling inhabitants only desire the return of troops because of the constant apprehension they have to live under, regarding the Indians, who have it all their own way, who consider the actions of our government in Alaska as a virtual abandonment of the country, and claim it as their own rightful property. In spite of those fears the better class of the inhabitants of Sitka dread the reintroduction of troops into Alaska, and assert that it was due to their arbitrary and dissolute conduct that so many people have left Sitka, which, under the Russian régime was, as they say, a flourishing place, with good prospects for improving in the future. Of course I do not assume those opinions as my own, but merely relate what has been *unanimously* reported to me as facts. I think I may safely venture to express the opinion that, in consideration of the circumstance that troops at Sitka will have no means of locomotion, while the Indians have their canoes always ready, it ought to be our Navy and not the Army, to whose charge the holding and protecting of the Territory of Alaska should be confided.

The Lackawanna might be ordered up until relieved by some other vessel, the Juniata, for instance, that could very easily be fitted and commissioned for such service. A couple of steam launches with Gatling guns would enable that man-of-war to render much more effective service than a force of several hundred of infantry soldiers ever could.

Sitka, if the government would lay protecting hands on it, would prove well worthy of the effort. The mines, *I know, will prove not less productive than those of California and Nevada*.

Security and law is all that is needed to attract a great mining population. Even now hundreds of miners would prefer wintering in Sitka to going back to Victoria or San Francisco, were it not for the fears caused by the absence of all law and authority.

The country is a thousand fold more valuable than it is believed to be. Sitka has the advantage that miners can work there all the year through, while the British Columbia Cassiar mines only permit work during 4½ months. Fisheries around Sitka would prove an inexhaustible source of wealth to many. But nobody wants to go to a place where he can neither consider his life safe nor enjoy the benefits of law in commercial or any other transactions of business.

The state of affairs in Alaska certainly ought to be radically rectified at once, were it only to shame the sneeringly-expressed remarks of the people of British Columbia, who boast of the contrast shown in their own management of Indians, &c., in Vancouver Island and on their coasts and vast mainland possessions. One-third of Alaska, from lati-

tude 61° down to southern boundary, is just as good a country in regard to climate and productiveness as the northern states of Europe, not to mention even the mineral wealth or the fisheries. Why it should have been acquired by a great and powerful nation only to be abandoned to its savage inhabitants again is a question I shall not permit myself to discuss.

The Alaska Commercial Company, as a corporation, is a deadly incubus on that country; no doubt of it. This I shall not hesitate to say, or I would not come up to the standard of honor and truthfulness the President supposed me to be ready to act on when he appointed me collector for the Territory. *There is but one opinion among honorable men* as to the fact that a few shrewd and unscrupulous Israelites, in league with unscrupulous government employés, have been successful so far in preventing the United States Government from seeing the value of the possessions of Alaska, while they have been and are very successful in guiding a torrent of wealth into their own individual coffers. And Sitka had to be isolated; all ships for the North Pacific had to be cleared from San Francisco; in short, Alaska had to be made exclusively the happy hunting grounds for that powerful league of sharpers so exceedingly well represented in Washington City, as to make it almost impossible to hope for a change, if the President himself will not give some day his personal attention to the importance of the matter, and perhaps cause a commission of reliable men to come out to investigate and to report. In the mean while, as Sitka (supposing always that the government will take some action) evidently will become an important mining center in a very short time, I think that its very valuable buildings (government property) should be kept in good state of preservation, and funds should be appropriated for the purpose of repairing what has been damaged by time, by climate, and by depredation. The beautiful castle on the hill requires immediate repairs on roof and of the platform and railings all around it, including their log foundation, which is in a condition of a general tumble-down. A few thousand dollars judiciously expended now would save property worth several hundreds of thousands of dollars for the future use of the government. All buildings need looking after and more or less of repairs.

The government owns a deposit of some 950 tons of anthracite coal on a neighboring small island. The coal was carried there for the use of our Navy some seven or eight years ago, at a cost of about \$16,000, as I am told. For the last seven years the government has paid \$50 per month as a salary to a coal agent, but the coal is not protected even by an open shed, but lies there at the mercy of the weather and will be made useless before long. Revenue cutters cannot use it, as they have not enough draft to burn hard coal.

I have found 11 barrels of cannon powder and about 250 pounds of Dupont rifle powder in canisters in the log-house powder magazine *in the yard of the custom-house*. There is a fine chance for a fearful mishap in case of another fire like the one which destroyed the three sets of officers' quarters. Into that same magazine I was obliged to put those 50 stands of arms and fixed ammunition for safe deposit, as I could not find in all Sitka more than a dozen people who could be intrusted with a rifle, even if they were accustomed to using one, which they are not.

The Sitka Indians and the Chilcats are all excellent shots, well armed with Hudson Bay *rifles* (not muskets), and consequently it is apparent that the idea of defending oneself against a sudden rush of 400 to 500 warriors in the dead of night is too absurd to be contemplated. If the government should absolutely refuse to station armed vessels in front of

Sitka, as proposed by the undersigned, he would have no other alternative but to ask for a *temporary* presence of a good revenue cutter and for permission to employ labor for the purpose of putting the castle on the hill in a state of defense, which then could be held against any number of Indians by means of two Gatling guns, in addition to the small-arms received. A system of espionage among the tribes (which it is easy enough to establish, in view of the intimate squaw relations existing between the Indians in the village and the half-breeds in the town), and which would require some funds for regular employment of secret agents, would prevent all possibility of surprise; but where the collector should look for that dozen and a half men, capable of serving a piece of artillery and of firing off a rifle with effect, will still remain a matter of very difficult solution, except he were permitted to enlist men for that purpose and to form the nucleus of a small home guard, for which men could be found at Wrangel, which is growing up into a lively mining town.

The writer of this has no other desire but that of justifying the confidence the department has honored him with; he has no objection whatever to spending several years at Sitka, which will prove a very interesting place to reside in for a man desirous of making a name for himself, and which is so extremely beautiful in the aspect of its grand scenery that the by no means excessive discomfort of climate is almost fully compensated. But how to live in Sitka for several months without money, without furniture, is a problem nobody can solve very easily. Major Berry and his deputy, Harvey, claim the right to their full pay up to the day when I arrived at Sitka (21st ultimo). I have called on Major Berry, whom I have found in an almost hopeless condition of health, at Victoria. Of course I have expressed no objection to his opinion that he is entitled to what he claims, and I believe that the law agrees with him, so that, so far, my expenses since I left Washington have been just \$1,210, and the pay I can claim does as yet not exceed a half month, say \$105.

An effort ought to be made to induce some one of the missionary societies to send teachers to Sitka; there ought to be two, at least, a man teacher and a lady teacher. At Wrangel the Indians are *getting civilized* through the effects of a school. If the department could communicate with the commission of education it might lead to the desired result of giving the inhabitants of Sitka those benefits all Americans are enjoying, viz, means of education and mental improvement. First fear, afterwards the influences of education and religious instruction, and the Sitka and Chilcat tribes will not long remain behind those around Wrangel. As things are now, Indians and creoles alike are growing up like the beasts in the field.

The revenue-cutter commander, Captain Selden, in answer to my question, informed me that his instructions were to use his own discretion regarding his stay at Sitka; that he intended to remain long enough "to see the thing out," referring to the expected departure of the Chilcat tribe of Indians; that he had no doubt whatever that all the cry of danger *from Indians* was caused by those interested in the mail-contract extension, in the hope to see their profits increased by the transportation of troops, quartermaster stores, &c. I was fully inclined to believe his opinion well founded until I had seen and spoken myself with everybody, and had a talk with the Indian chiefs, who did not fail to repeatedly ask questions as to the probable arrival of vessels after the departure of the Wolcott; when this departure would take place; what force the next one would have on board—all this with repeated assertions as to their own good intentions

and as to their innocence and utter want of malice in having broken down that stockade just because it was of no use and they needed fire-wood. Captain Selden seemed to be impressed with the sincerity of their sayings, and he got somewhat angry with Mr. Hatten, a merchant of long standing at Sitka, who told him that it had become evident to him and everybody long ago that the revenue officers did not like to remain at Sitka, but that he thought an American town was entitled to *some sort* of protection, and to the introduction of some kind of law and order. As matters are, all men in business at Sitka are trying their very best to get away from the place; and the difficulty of realizing anything on their stock or real estate property alone prevents absconding on the part of the inhabitants generally.

The mines are the only hope for Sitka, and *those hopes will prove more than well founded* if the introduction of law will encourage capital to seek investment at Sitka.

I have the honor to remain, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
COL. HENRY C. DE AHNA,
U. S. Collector.

Hon. JOHN SHERMAN,
Secretary of the Treasury, &c., Washington, D. C.

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