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Petition of citizens of California, praying a grant of occupancy of certain lands in Alaska, to be paid for at a time to be fixed, to be used and occupied by what shall be known as the "Alaska Ship-Building and Lumber Company," for the purpose of ship-building, &c.

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PETITION
OF
CITIZENS OF CALIFORNIA,

PRAYING

A grant of occupancy of certain lands in Alaska, to be paid for at a time to be fixed, to be used and occupied by what shall be known as the "Alaska Ship-Building and Lumber Company," for the purpose of ship-building, &c.

DECEMBER 21, 1874.—Referred to the Committee on Public Lands and ordered to be printed.

To the Congress of the United States in Senate and assembly convened :

Your petitioners most respectfully present to your honorable body the following, viz: Alaska was purchased by the United States in 1865. At that time this Territory was supposed to have little value except for its proximity to our other possessions on the Pacific, and the possible danger that it come under the control of a nation less friendly than Russia to us and our extension in that direction, should it be deemed a national necessity at a later period.

It is true, it was known that the outlying Aleutian Isles had some value for furs, (and that since important concessions have been granted to a commercial company engaged in the fur-trade,) and that its shores and inlets abounded in fish; but otherwise it was regarded as comparatively valueless.

Its climate is unfriendly to white population; the larger portion of the year it is deluged with rains and enveloped in fogs. Though the temperature is much milder than in the same latitudes on the Atlantic, it is so far advanced into the arctic region that for several of the winter-months outdoor labor would be much embarrassed.

Explorations of the interior of the Territory have been so limited that very little can be said of a definite nature of it; but, so much is known of the general character of its climate, it is reasonably safe to conclude that for agricultural or pastoral pursuits it has little to invite settlements for either.

The tribes of Indians inhabiting its shores and streams are esteemed the most warlike of any on the continent, and very little disposed to cultivate friendly relations with the whites who have visited them.

At considerable expense an exploring party has been sent, during the past season, to examine the shores of the mainland and some of the islands, to ascertain if good material for ship-building could be obtained and in quantities to justify an effort to re-establish an industry which has so long languished in the United States that an American ship is too rarely seen, either in our own or foreign ports. This exploration

has revealed the existence of considerable bodies of timber, which are regarded as particularly well adapted to the construction of ships.

The question to be considered is, can capital be induced to go into such a country and engage in this important industry of ship-building? Two things are indispensably requisite to it, and are—

1st. That the Government shall establish a military post within a convenient and protecting distance of where the ship-building enterprise is located, to protect laborers against the hostilities of the savages; and,

2d. That a portion of the Territory, within a radius of, say, 25 miles, shall be set apart to a corporation formed under the laws of California, to be called the Alaska Ship-Building and Lumber Company, its successors and assigns, of where the ship-yard is established; or of an area equal to that, exclusive of all ocean navigable waters, to be selected by said corporation, authorizing it to make use of the timber thereon, and to purchase the whole or any portion of said area, at any time within the next ten years, by the payment to the Government of one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre; and also granting the further right to said corporation to take any other timber-land outside of said reservation, by paying to the Government the same as aforesaid, the right to cut the timber dating from the time the said corporation notifies the Government of its purpose to take and use the land as aforesaid, and tenders payment therefor; provided, and upon the express conditions, that said company shall, within two years of the date of such grant by Congress and the establishment of a military post, establish a ship-yard and build at least one ship of not less than 1,200 tons burden, and shall thereafter maintain said ship-yard and continue the vigorous prosecution of ship-building.

On the presentations herein made, and the conditions herein named, your petitioners humbly pray that your honorable body will take this matter into serious consideration, and pass a bill embracing provisions which will secure to your petitioners the objects of the foregoing petition.

H. B. TICHENOR.
WM. T. COLEMAN.
WM. BURLING.
CALVIN PAIGE.
JOHN PARROTT.
MATTHEW TURNER.
THOS. H. SELBY.
W. F. BABCOCK.
H. D. BACON.