

PERRY COLLINS'S ELECTRONIC RIM AROUND THE PACIFIC:
THE RUSSIAN-AMERICAN TELEGRAPH, 1865 TO 1867.

by

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ABSTRACT

In my thesis, I explain the historical and geographical significance of the failed Russian-American Telegraph Expedition of 1865 to 1867. I explain how American Manifest Destiny facilitated the confident proposal of this stupendous scheme to connect America to Europe telegraphically by Bering Strait. The telegraph men sent to British Columbia, Russian America and eastern Siberia struggled in horrendous conditions. In British Columbia the work improved communications, brought new work practices and stimulated discovery of northern corridors of power. In Russian America, the disastrous work resulted in masculinised, ethnocentric and boosted images of the landscape, and facilitated America's 1867 purchase of Alaska. In Siberia the American men suffered greatly, but, by contextualising the 'primitive barbarism' of Siberian environments and people, portrayed themselves as heroes. Furthermore, surveyor George Kennan wrote and lectured in America on his Siberian travels, using them to frame his influential opinions on Russian expansion and Siberian exile. I conclude that the scheme facilitated the northward encroachment of modernity, dislocating Native lifeworlds.

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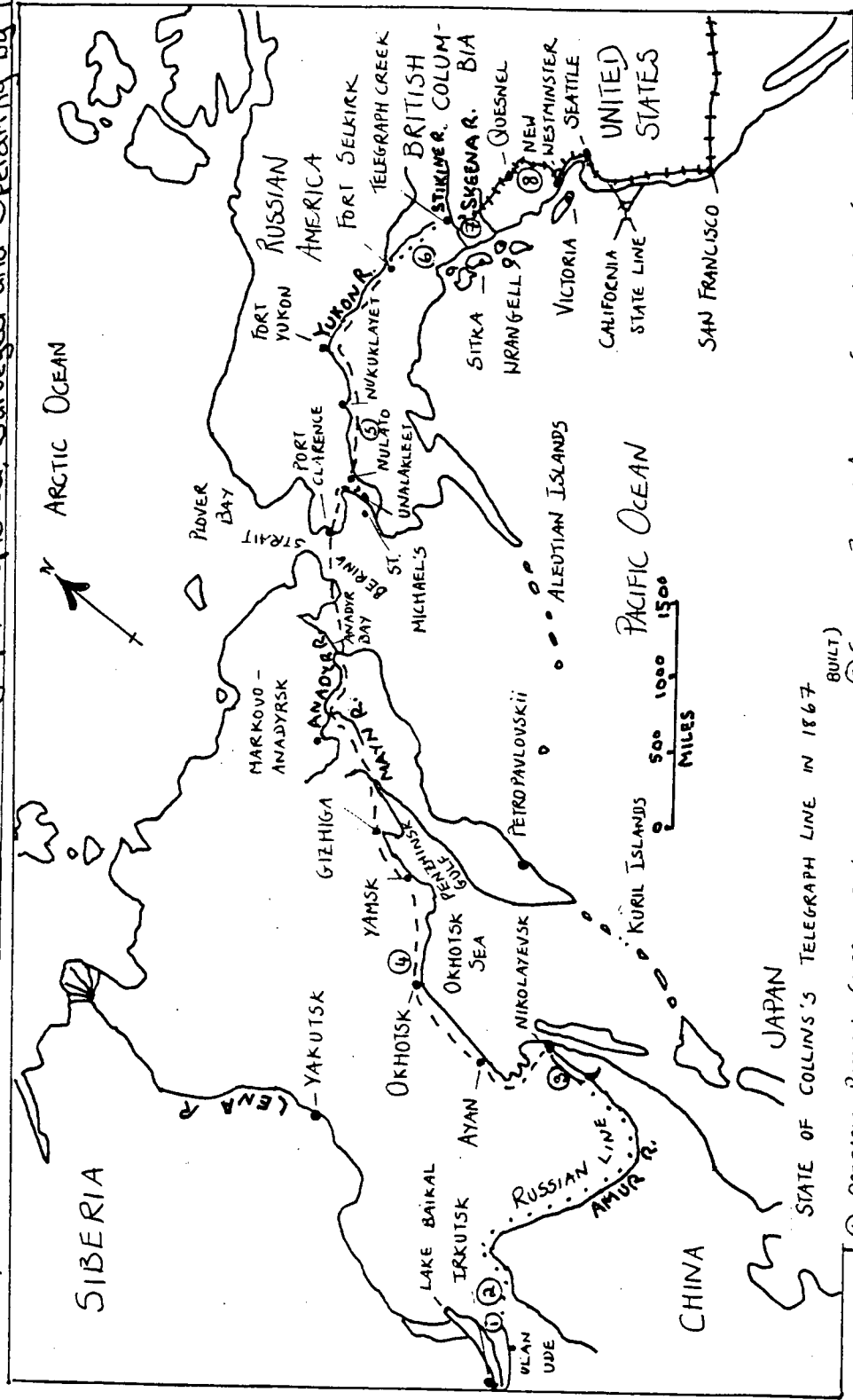
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Map 1: The Russian-American Telegraph Explored, Surveyed and Operating by 1867



- STATE OF COLLINS'S TELEGRAPH LINE IN 1867
- ① OPERABLE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT LINE
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Introduction

D.W. Meinig devotes just two lines of his 1200 page *The Shaping of America* to a proposed telegraph line between America and Europe by way of Bering Strait (fig. 1).¹ From 1865 to 1867, hundreds of American and European men were sent to British North America, Russian America and eastern Siberia. The successful laying of the Atlantic cable in 1866 led to the scheme's abandonment in 1867. Because the telegraph failed, this ambitious project has largely been forgotten by modern historians. Newspaper columns and magazines have, on occasion, published stories of this heroic failure with "both a modern touch and a romantic flavour," but little is known of the Russian-American Telegraph.² My objective in this thesis is to tell the project's story using the copious books, diaries and letters available, and suggest how the Telegraph Expedition helped superimpose modern geographies on the north.

I introduce my thesis by considering the background, organisation and failure of the Russian-American Telegraph Expedition. In Chapter 2, I investigate the importance of the Russian-American Telegraph to the United States. The project not only expressed but contributed to a national mission of Manifest Destiny. Using extraordinary statements made by directors, managers and entrepreneurs in the *Statement of the Progress of the Russian-American Telegraph*, a document produced for Western Union shareholders, I describe the telegraph's identified role as a peaceful tool of economic and social expansion.³ Project boosters proposed that it would diffuse values of American commerce, Christianity, civilisation and democracy, while profiting Western Union Company financiers. They also believed that telegraphic technology proved America's

¹ D. W. Meinig, *Continental America, 1800 to 1867*, Vol. 2 of *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 543.

² Corday Mackay, "The Collins Overland Telegraph," *British Columbia Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 3, 1946, p. 213.

³ *Statement of the Origin, Organization, and Progress of the Russian-American Telegraph, Western Union Extension, Collins Overland Line* (Rochester: Western Union Telegraph Company, 1866).

superiority over other societies, evidence that the United States was truly favoured with God's grace.

Chapter 3 examines the telegraph in British Columbia. Since the colony was the only place where the overland line operated properly, it insinuated itself into the landscape, facilitating the diffusion of law, capital, Christian faith and modern culture into the new colony. Above all, it helped imperialists penetrate and appropriate Native worlds, modernising, transforming, and re-creating British Columbia. As the first major American corporate presence in British Columbia, the telegraph brought new visions of management, labour, efficiency and discipline to the colony. Finally, surveys conducted by Ed. Conway, J.T. Rothrock, Horace Coffin and Franklin Pope helped "open up the interior of British Columbia."⁴ The Skeena, Stikine, Nass, Bulkley Valley and parts of the northern interior were 'discovered,' 'mapped,' and 'christened,' enabling future colonisation.

The experiences of telegraph surveyors further north, especially those associated with the Smithsonian Institute, brought images of Alaska (Russian America) to the United States. This is my focus in chapter 4. Despite the failure to lay a telegraph line, stories told by the telegraph men incorporated the north within American images of economic exploitation, scientific investigation and masculinist adventure. These images encouraged American Secretary of State, William Seward, a staunch supporter of the Russian-American telegraph, to purchase the territory in March 1867.

Chapter 5 looks at the surveyors' adventures in Siberia. The name 'Sibir,' writes author Farley Mowat, "means the sleeping land," conjuring up images of wilderness, tundra, snow, and reindeer.⁵ For the American telegraph men sent there, the land was anything but sleeping; working in cold, barren, 'uncivilised' tundra agonised and demoralised the men. However, post-

⁴ Gerard Chapman, "Searching for the Telegraph in British Columbia: 1865-66," *The Beaver*, June/July, 1986, p. 47.

⁵ Farley Mowat, *Sibir: My Discovery of Siberia* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970), p.25.

expedition travelogues by Richard Bush, Thomas Knox, and George Kennan contributed to American orientalist literatures.⁶ Kennan's surveying experiences were especially important: he became an 'expert' on Siberia, its indigenous peoples, and the Russian Empire. Through remarkably effective lectures, books and journal articles, Kennan influenced, for a time, America's appreciation of Russian expansion as a tool for civilising native Siberians. He later refuted these ideas, instead arguing that the dominant mechanism of expansion - the Siberian exile system - was cruel and barbaric.

I conclude that the telegraph scheme, while failing to connect Europe to America telegraphically, shaped new imaginations of the north. The project's significance lay not only in American notions of the telegraph as a civilising tool, but in the 'proto'-civilising activities of the telegraph men. Their experiences facilitated and legitimised the encroachment of modern societies into 'empty' lands. They were not empty, of course, but the homes of Native peoples, and new geographies, created in part by the telegraph men, entailed the dislocation of Native livelihoods.

⁶ Richard Bush, *Reindeer, Dogs and Snowshoes: A Journal of Siberian Travel and Explorations Made in the Years 1865, 1866, and 1867* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1871); Thomas W. Knox, *Overland Through Asia: Pictures of Siberian, Chinese, and Tartar Life. Travels and Adventures in Kamtchatka, Siberia, China, Mongolia, Chinese Tartary, and European Russia, with Full Accounts of Siberian Exiles, Their Treatment, Condition, and Mode of Life, a Description of the Amoor River, and the Siberian Shores of the Frozen Ocean* (Hartford: American Publishing Co., 1870); George Kennan, *Tent Life in Siberia and Adventures among the Koraks and Other Tribes in Kamchatka and Northern Asia* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1870).

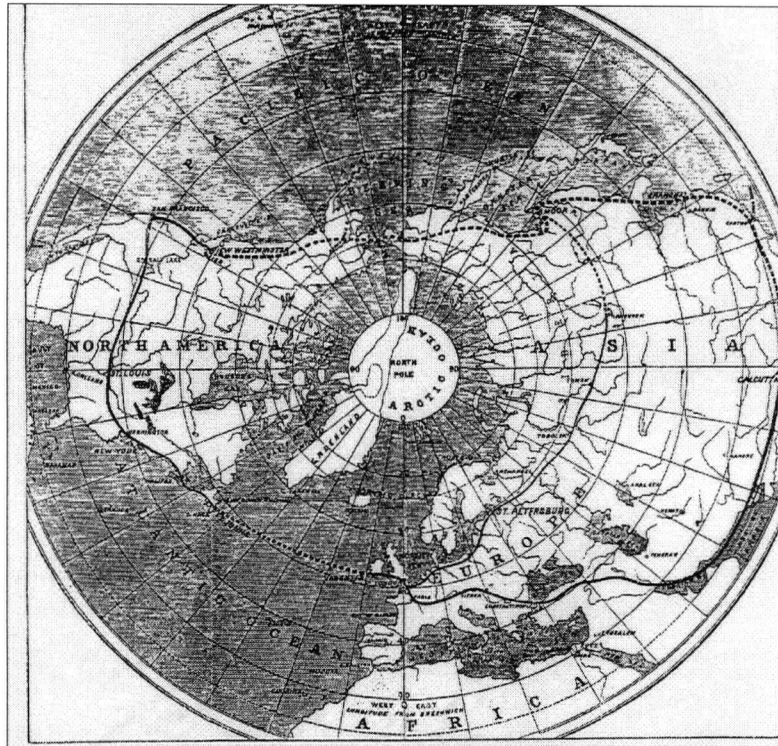


Fig 1: Proposed route of the Russian-American Telegraph, as illustrated in *Harpers Magazine*, August 12, 1865.



Fig 2: Perry McDonough Collins



Fig 3: 'Colonel' Charles Bulkley

Chapter 1 - Go West to the Amur: The Russian-American Telegraph Expedition, 1865 to 1867.

On April 12, 1856, Perry McDonough Collins (fig. 2), America's new commercial agent for the Amur region of the eastern Russian Empire, left Washington for St. Petersburg. The River Amur was an important routeway between the Asian interior and the Pacific, marking the boundary between Russia and China. As such, it presented a powerful stimulus to trade. Collins became aware of such opportunities when travelling from St. Petersburg to Nikolayevsk, an imperial town located where the Amur meets the Tartar Strait. His admiration for the 'civilising' expansionism of Russia accompanied a belief in the ability of his own nation to bring this "sixth continent to the domain of civilization:"¹

At Nicolaivsky must concentrate the whole trade of the sea-coast of Siberia, with the incidental trade with Kamchatka, America, Japan, China, and such other coasts, territories, and islands as may hereafter be annexed to its [Russian] government. The northern overland route will be abandoned as soon as steam and post stations can be established on the river, and the whole trade of Siberia must fall into its lap. Somewhere on this coast, near or upon the Amoor, must be the St. Petersburg of the Pacific.²

Returning to Washington in 1858, Collins proposed "linking American commercial expansion in the Pacific to Russian expansion along the Amur."³ That same year, he returned to St. Petersburg to speak with the American ambassador to Russia, Francis W. Pickens. Pickens predicted that American commercial trade with China and Russia by way of the Amur would give

¹ Perry McDonough Collins, *A Voyage Down the Amoor: With a Land Journey through Siberia, and Incidental Notices of Manchuria, Kamschatka, and Japan* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1860), p.199. This book was republished, with an appendix espousing the aims of the telegraph project and a map of the proposed line, as *Overland Explorations in Siberia, Northern Asia, and the Great Amoor River Country* (New York:n.p., 1864).

² Collins to Secretary of State, Lewis Cass, March 6, 1858, Washington, House Ex. Doc. 98, 35th Cong., 1st session, as quoted in Rosemary Neering, *Continental Dash: The Russian-American Telegraph* (Ganges, B.C.: Horsdal and Schubart), p. 17.

³ Neering, *Continental Dash*, p.18.

the United States control of the "world and all the power that has ever belonged to the nation that holds its position."⁴ As a result, Collins proposed an ambitious trans-Siberian railroad and steamer service to open the region to Russian and American trade. Later, judging this too impractical, he thought of another ambitious scheme: "in traversing the whole extent of Northern Europe and Asia, the idea was strongly forced upon my mind that.... a telegraph communication could be constructed.... uniting Europe with America."⁵

Here, apparently, was an alternative to the failed Atlantic Cable between America and Europe. At Cyrus Field's third attempt in 1858, the Atlantic-going "loving girdle around the earth" failed within a month.⁶ It seemed that a long submarine cable could never be effective.

Collins's idea aroused interest from Hiram Sibley, the owner of the Western Union Telegraph Company and a rival of Cyrus Field. In 1862 Sibley wrote to Collins about the viability of an overland cable to the Bering Strait:

If the Russian government will meet us at Behring's Strait and give us the right of way, etc., through their territory on the Pacific, we will complete the line in two years and probably in one. The work is not more difficult than we have already accomplished over the Rocky Mountains and plains to California.... No work costing so little money was ever accomplished by man that will be so important in its results. The benefit resulting to the world will pay the entire cost of the line every year after completion while the world continues to be inhabited by civilized man.⁷

The year before, Sibley's California State Telegraph Company, a subsidiary of Western Union, laid a transcontinental line from the eastern United States to San Francisco. This

⁴ Collins to Cass, March 6, 1858, as quoted in Neering, *Continental Dash*, p. 19. This statement resembles ideas later espoused by the geographer, Sir Halford Mackinder, about the geopolitical significance of the Eurasian continental 'heartland,' which he located between the Ural Mountains and the Mongolian Steppes. See Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," *Geographical Journal*, 23, pp. 421-437.

⁵ Collins to Cass, Sept. 20, 1859, as quoted in Charles Vevier, "The Collins Overland Line and American Continentalism," *Alaska and Its History*, ed. Morgan Sherwood (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967), p. 241. This article originally appeared in the *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 28, No. 3, Aug. 1959.

⁶ Neering, *Continental Dash*, p. 7.

⁷ Hiram Sibley to Collins, Oct. 16, 1861, as quoted in the *Statement of the Origin, Organization, and Progress of the Russian-American Telegraph*, p. 37.

developing city provided an ideal focus for the proposed intercontinental telegraph, but Collins still needed to survey a route through North America. The United States Government denied him financial assistance in 1862 because of Civil War obligations.⁸ Collins, however, pursued his scheme in 1863 as American vice-consul in St. Petersburg. The American ambassador to Russia, Simon Cameron, had already informed the Russians that the United States government would subsidize the projected line.⁹ In May 1863, the Russian Imperial Government notified Collins of its support for his idea: if Collins's company established telegraphic communication between North America and the Amur in five years, it would have exclusive privileges over the route for thirty-three years. Furthermore, the Russian Government would extend its own lines to Nikolayevsk and provide rebates for messages transmitted to and from the United States along Russian lines.¹⁰

Collins left for London to meet with the British Government about a line through British Columbia. After talks with Prime Minister Lord Palmerston, and Colonial Secretary, Lord Newcastle, Collins was granted rights of construction in British Columbia subject to the approval of the British Columbian Legislature. Lord Newcastle wrote:

The project is one of the greatest interest and importance - and whilst England for her own sake ought to give it every encouragement, every care should be taken not to lose the great advantage which nature has given her. She holds in British Columbia the key to the position - the one indispensable link in telegraphic communication between the new and old world until it is found practicable to lay, and maintain efficient, a cable under the Atlantic.¹¹

⁸ The 'Collins Memorial' was presented to Senate on Feb. 17, 1862, by Milton Latham on behalf of the Committee on Military Affairs, as quoted in *Statement*, pp. 54-57.

⁹ See Vevier, p. 219.

¹⁰ Melnikoff to Collins, May 23, 1863, 'The Right of Way and Aid for a Telegraph from the Amoor River in Asiatic Russia to British Columbia,' as quoted in *Statement*, pp. 54-57.

¹¹ Newcastle to Collins, Nov. 30, 1863, as quoted in John S. Galbraith, "Perry McDonough Collins at the Colonial Office," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. xvii, Jul.-Oct., 1953, p. 212.

Newcastle considered a British presence in western North America as significant to its world empire, but British Columbia's geopolitical isolation put it under threat from the continentalist aspirations of the United States. Paradoxically, Collins's telegraph would facilitate British communications with her Pacific colony over American lines.¹²

In British Columbia, Collins had little difficulty in obtaining the support of the Legislature. In 1864 he was given exclusive control of telegraphy in British Columbia for ten years, amended and formalised in the International Telegraph Ordinance of February 1, 1865.¹³

Collins's successes in Russia, Britain and British Columbia provided him with the political arrangements for line construction outside the United States. This work accomplished, Collins sold his exclusive privileges to Sibley's Western Union Telegraph Company in March 1864 for \$100,000. He also received ten per cent of the stock of the Western Union Extension Company, a new associate company of Western Union's created to construct the Russian-American line. This company generated capital by selling shares of one hundred dollars each, to be paid in installments. Predictions that no more than twenty percent of the assessment would be needed only made these stocks more valuable and only five per cent was called for on issue: "Within two months the shares that had cost their owners only five dollars to date were selling for \$60."¹⁴

Supported by American Secretary of State, William Seward, and Milton Latham, Senator of California, on July 1, 1864, Abraham Lincoln signed "an Act to encourage and facilitate

¹² See Stewart Robb, "The Collins' Overland or Russian Extension Telegraph Project," *M.A. Thesis*, Simon Fraser University, 1969, pp. 15-16. Robb discusses the 1864 Watkin Proposal to lobby British support for a telegraph between Canada and B.C. across the Hudson's Bay Company's Territories. This line required extensive Government subsidy and the successful laying of an Atlantic cable. Collins's plan, despite its American financing, was considered less expensive and more viable.

¹³ 'Amended International Telegraph Ordinance,' *Statement*, pp. 106-114.

¹⁴ See the report of directors of the Western Union Extension Company, March 16, 1864, prepared for stockholders of Western Union on March 24, 1864, as quoted in *Statement*, pp. 5-10. Neering, *Continental Dash*, p. 25, who cites Robert Luther Thompson, *wiring a Continent: The History of the Telegraph Industry in the United States, 1832-1866* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947).

telegraphic communication between the Eastern and Western Hemispheres."¹⁵ This granted a permanent right-of-way from San Francisco to British Columbia and provided an American Navy vessel for the project's service.

In these ways, the general route of the line was negotiated and, with potential monopoly profits, the future looked bright. It was even proposed to tie China, India, Central and South America to the network.¹⁶ The anticipated profits, enthused the Company directors, were immense:

One thousand messages a day cannot be an overestimate for the telegraphic correspondence of the whole commercial world - to say nothing of Governments, the public press or social dispatches of both hemispheres.

This would give twenty-five thousand dollars a day, seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars a month, or nine millions of dollars a year. But reduce this estimate to five hundred messages a day, and we shall still have a revenue of four and a half millions of dollars. Reduce this again one-half, on a basis of two hundred and fifty messages a day, and we have two and a quarter millions of dollars.

The support and maintenance of the line is to be deducted from this, which we think will not exceed fifty per-cent of the receipts upon the lowest sum named.¹⁷

Responsibility for constructing the line was given to Colonel Charles Bulkley (fig. 3), a former Superintendent of Military Telegraphs. Drawing on his military background, he divided the organization into "working divisions" and "engineer corps," the former to survey the route and the latter to construct the line. Each unit had a "foreman" to enforce the Company's 'ten commandments,' which, for example, gave strict instructions for dealing with indigenous people along the route:

¹⁵ 38th Cong., 1st Sess. - Public Act No. 171 (signed, Abraham Lincoln), July 1, 1864, as quoted in *Statement*, pp. 60-61.

¹⁶ See, for example, 'Organization of the Expedition for the Construction of the Western Union Extension, Collins Overland Telegraph,' as quoted in *Statement*, p. 16, and proposals to government officials in China and South America, *Statement*, pp. 130-142.

¹⁷ 'Organization of the Expedition,' *Statement*, p. 16.

5.) Camp guard will be kept on duty at night and if necessary during the day, and will be responsible for property stolen from camp. Indians or others not engaged in work will not be permitted to loiter about the camps....

6.) The natives will be treated with the utmost kindness and consideration, and as far as possible employed in the work - receiving instructions that will enable them to perform the duties of watching and repairing the line. Their interest in the work will be best secured by understanding that the success, good condition and permanence of the line will result in continual profit to them....

7.) All trading with the natives is expressly forbidden....

10.) Spiritous intoxicating liquors will not be allowed in camp, nor under any circumstances, furnished to the natives.... All work will be suspended upon Sunday.¹⁸

Bulkley ordered expedition members to wear a military-style uniform. Each rank was differentiated by its insignia, Bulkley's being "of dark blue velvet and display[ing] a silver globe with silver flashes of lightning darting to each end, symbolizing the uniting of the globe."¹⁹

Military discipline, thought Bulkley, would be most appropriate to their work:

My organization is military in its character, requiring officers and men both in the land and marine service to wear uniforms, without cost to the Company; and our system of accounts is similar to the Quartermaster's Department of the Army. With the local inhabitants and Indians I find such an organization desirable, and one which can be controlled much more satisfactorily than any other.²⁰

Bulkley placed his marine service under the command of Charles Scammon, formerly of the United States Revenue Service. It included two steamships, the *George S. Wright* and the

¹⁸ 'General Rules of Organization and Government of the Collins Overland Telegraph,' as quoted in *Statement*, pp. 78-79.

¹⁹ Neering, *Continental Dash*, p. 27.

²⁰ Bulkley's Report to the Executive Committee of the Western Union Extension Company, Victoria, July 15, 1865, as quoted in p. 45 in *Bulkley Papers*, one copy kept at Special Collections Library Division, University of British Columbia.

Nightingale, several barques, schooners and river boats, and two vessels donated by the United States and Russian governments.

The land service was divided into three divisions: British Columbia, Russian America and Siberia commanded respectively by Franklin Pope, Robert Kennicott and a Russian nobleman, Serge Abasa. Captain Ed. Conway would lead the "Engineers" in constructing the line.²¹ The men also included Smithsonian Institute scientists, who were to work on the line and also study the 'unknown' north. "The Scientific Corps" was attracted by "professional opportunity in lieu of fabulous pay," had its own flag, a scallop outlined on a blue cross, and the French-Canadian nickname 'Carcajous' (wolverines) to symbolise their cunning.²²

Encouraged by news of Field's third failure to lay the Atlantic cable in 1865, Bulkley's divisions worked to survey a route and Conway's engineers started construction in British Columbia. Hiram Sibley had previously told Cyrus Field: "I would give \$50,000 to know if you are ever going to succeed. I hope you will; but I would like to know for certain before we spend any more in Russia."²³ W.H. Russell, the historian of Field's 1865 expedition, noted that a pin had been inserted into the Atlantic cable: "No man who saw it could doubt that the wire had been driven in by a skillful hand." One commentator posed the question: "Was someone aboard the Great Eastern?"²⁴ If so, was it a Western Union spy?

On July 26, 1866, the Atlantic cable finally succeeded. With an earlier cable relocated, two cables now connected America to Europe. The Western Union continued its northern operations, perhaps hoping that the Atlantic cable would fail, but by the autumn of 1866, Western Union announced that holders of extension company stock could exchange it for parent company

²¹ While historians have assumed that Conway's first name was Edward, Edmund, or Edwin, Conway never specified it.

²² Morgan Sherwood, *Exploration of Alaska; 1865 to 1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 18.

²³ Thompson, pp. 433-435, as quoted in Vevier, p. 226.

²⁴ Neering, *Continental Dash*, p. 122.

bonds, thus passing on the costs of failure to Western Union shareholders.²⁵ Finally on March 9, 1867, Western Union directors announced the abandonment of the Russian-American telegraph and recalled the men.

²⁵ Thompson, pp. 433-435, as quoted in Vevier, p. 226.

Chapter 2 - The United States, Manifest Destiny and Telegraphs.

Belief in Manifest Destiny was implicit in American life from the time of the Puritans. Their new world, they believed, would herald a Godly utopia from which sinners would be excluded. Non-Americans, whether heathen 'Indians' or sinful Europeans, were to be kept out or eliminated. From Puritan societies of the seventeenth century to Christian democracies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Manifest Destiny added a powerful dimension to an emerging American identity.

The belief of many Americans in the divine right of American expansion legitimised the annexations of Texas in 1845, California and Oregon in 1846, and New Mexico and the Southwest in 1848. Anders Stephanson, in a recent critique of Manifest Destiny, writes: "'America' ...had been allowed to see the light and was bound to show the way for the historically retrograde. There was a duty to develop and spread to full potential under the blessings of the most perfect principles imaginable."¹ Military force, if necessary, was a tool of moral 'improvement.'

The phrase 'Manifest Destiny' therefore entered American continentalist rhetoric. As Frederick Merk, a student of such ideologies, suggests:

It meant expansion, prearranged by Heaven, over an area not clearly defined.... It was.... more an opportunity for neighbouring peoples to reach self-realization.... Any hurried admission to the temple of freedom would be unwise.... But a duty lay on the people of the United States to admit all qualified applicants freely. The doors to the temple must be wide open to peoples who were panting for freedom.²

¹ Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), p. xii.

² Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), pp. 24-25.

As a cultural tradition of America's "imagined community," Manifest Destiny "created a sense of national place and direction in a variety of historical settings, as a concept of anticipation and movement."³ It therefore informed *cultures* of expansion, a relationship evident in Secretary of State William Seward's speech at Saint Paul in 1860:

I seem to myself to stand here on this eminence as the traveler who climbs the dome of St. Peter's in Rome. There through the opening of that dome, he seems to himself to be in almost direct and immediate communication with the Almighty Power that directs and controls the actions and the wills of men.... Standing here and looking far off into the northwest, I see the Russian as he busily occupies himself in establishing seaports and towns and fortifications, on the verge of this continent, as the outposts of St. Petersburg, and I can say.... 'they will yet become the outposts of my own country - monuments of the civilization of the United States in the Northwest' So I look off on Prince Rupert's Land and Canada, and see there an ingenious, enterprising and ambitious people, occupied with bridging rivers and constructing canals, railroads and telegraphs.... and I am able to say, 'It is very well, you are building excellent states to be hereafter admitted into the American Union'.... Providence set apart this continent for the work, and as I think, set apart and designated this particular locality [the north west] for the place whence shall go forth continually the ever-renewing spirit which shall bring the people of all other portions of the continent up to a continual advance in the establishment of the system.⁴

Seward aligned himself with "the ever-renewing spirit" of the "Almighty Power" spreading across the continent. Only as part of the American Union could Russian outposts, Prince Rupert's Land and Canada become "monuments of civilisation" at one with God. Military means, for Seward, would not achieve this utopian assimilation; rather frontier spirit and the capitalist agenda would enable America to consolidate her continental grip.

³ Stephanson, p. xiv. The notion of 'imagined communities' has been discussed by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1983). Anderson suggests that 'nation-ness' must be understood as a cultural artefact within specific historical contexts.

⁴ Quoted in Norman Graebner, *Manifest Destiny* (New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1968), pp. 332-334.



Fig 4: John Gast's *American Progress*, 1872.

This ideology is represented pictorially in John Gast's 1872 *American Progress* (fig. 4).⁵ To the west lies disordered nature in a wild, dark and savage state. From the east comes civilised nature in the form of *Natura naturata*: "No longer to be feared or sexually assaulted, she floats angelically through the air in flowing white robes, emblazoned with the star of empire. She carries telegraph wires in her left hand, symbols of the highest level of communication - language borne.... from above."⁶ She brings the city, law and government; barbaric nature is tamed by American expansion.

As such, telegraph wires were tools of American civilisation and expansion, an agenda revealed in the Russian-American Telegraph. The project's rhetoric was rife with imperial innuendo. Moreover, the telegraph was an intercontinental project; its destiny lay in the Pacific and in Asia as well as America. Despite internal concerns caused by the American Civil War, attention focused on America's power abroad. Western Union's President Hiram Sibley wrote to Perry Collins: "let us.... say that the United States is not only able to suppress rebellion at home but able also to extend her great commercial and scientific power over the earth."⁷ In 1862 Milton Latham, representing Collins's request for Government financing, spoke of the telegraph's role in worldwide Americanisation:

We hold the ball of the earth in our hand, and wind upon it a network of living and thinking wire, till the whole is held together and bound with the same wishes, projects, and interests.... The whole of Asia would be practically annexed to Europe and, through the line we propose, to America, being to us as a political and commercial nation a subject of great and growing magnitude.

Such an enterprise as this telegraph from San Francisco to Asiatic Russia will only strengthen our power as a great commercial nation, and evidence to the world that we surrender nothing to the circumstances of the hour, but go steadily, hopefully, and bravely forward in the path of duty; that while there are so many thousands actively engaged in the

⁵ See Carolyn Merchant, "Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative," in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), p.148.

⁶ Merchant, pp. 147-148.

⁷ Sibley to Collins, Oct. 16, 1861, *Statement*, p. 37.

strife and hazard of war, there are yet many more thousands equally active and zealous in the arts of peace.⁸

The rhetoric surrounding the overland telegraph combined modern American missionary zeal with a desire for economic power. The consequences would be a new form of communication between Americans and Asians over electronic wires, communication that reduced Asians to mere producers and consumers - objects of the American capitalist imagination. As William Seward suggested:

Setting aside the temporary disturbance of war, the merchant, or the manufacturer, the miller, the farmer, the miner, or the fisherman of Halifax, Quebec, Portland, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Charleston, New Orleans, Galveston, Montreal, Buffalo, Pittsburg, Chicago, St. Louis, Memphis, St. Paul, Little Rock, Denver, Salt Lake City, Carson City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sacramento, Portland, with the aid of an intercontinental telegraph would be in daily and, in case of need, in hourly correspondence with producers and consumers on the Amoor, where the fur trade of Asia is gathered up; with Sovinsk, the depot for the overland traffic between Russia and Japan and the mineral treasures of Nerchinsk; with Kiachta, the center of the international commerce of Russia and China; with Irkoutsk, Moscow, St. Petersburg; with all the cities of Western Europe, including Constantinople; with the cities of Alexandria, Cairo and Suez; and with every other town, city or hamlet, on either continent, now in telegraphic communication with the several marts of trade which have been enumerated.⁹

Capitalism and the telegraph would connect the places of the Earth into an American-led civilised whole. Inspired by Western technology, such a trend could only be for the Asian good. As Collins put it:

The commerce of the world will find its path across this [Asian] continent, awakened into life by a new power; for the telegraph is to precede all, rapidly and cheaply extended we press it forward as the swift-running courier. First the adventurous merchant seeks the channel opened by this messenger; then the stately ship, soon to make way for

⁸ Latham, on behalf of the Committee of Military Affairs, to Senate, Feb. 17, 1862, *Statement*, p. 38.

⁹ Seward to Chandler, Dept. of State, May 14, 1864, *Statement*, pp. 48-49.

the more rapid steamer; finally the iron way joins the circle, and girds the world with steam and electric.¹⁰

According to Seward, others expected America to undertake this progressive mission of enlightenment. In the depths of the Russian empire, civilisation would be restored to what Seward imagined to be the origin of the American 'race:'

Russia actually invites us to put forth our national energy from every point within our borders where industry of any kind dwells, and especially from our northwestern and western States, and apply that energy in the great work of renewing and restoring the long languishing civilization of the regions where our race first impressed its dominion upon the globe appointed for its residence....

Nor is it any more practicable to assign limits in the increase of national influence, which must necessarily result from the new facilities we should acquire in that manner for extending throughout the world American ideas and principles of public and private economy, politics, morals, philosophy, and religion.¹¹

Collins, meanwhile, wrote of the benefits of Russian eastward expansion, a "visible empire" extending to Bering Strait. In many ways, Russian eastward momentum paralleled America's westward expansion.¹² In eastern Asia though, expanding powers conflicted. Collins believed that American involvement through its "economy, politics, morals, philosophy, and religion" was necessary, but also that the less-destined nation of Russia need exert its influence. He wrote to Russian Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, Ivan Tolstoy:

I thought and still think that Russia owes it to herself, to her position, and also to the cause of civilization that she should stretch forth the force of her visible hand over and along the track of the telegraph where heretofore, she had not exercised by visible force her actual dominion.

¹⁰ Collins to New York Traveler's Club, "Overland Telegraphic Communication via Bering Strait and across Asiatic Russia to Europe," Dec. 1865, *Statement*, p. 165.

¹¹ Seward to Chandler, *Statement*, pp. 50-51.

¹² For the most prominent writing on American westward expansion, see Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in F. J. Turner, ed., *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920).

Your Excellency is well aware that on the Asiatic side from Behring Strait until the settlements of Penjinsk are reached, Russia does not exercise dominion: the natives there are as free and as independent of Russia as the natives of Patagonia.¹³

Indeed, the worldwide telegraph network might eventually reach Patagonia, because Western Union proposed building a line south from California through Central and South America.¹⁴ The interests of commercial and social Americanisation would diffuse south as well as west. Consequently, wrote historian Charles Vevier, the telegraph:

Smacked much of the America that went into it - the entrepreneur intent on exploiting a communications system and government aid to private enterprise that was held to be vital in the national interest. More important, the project illustrated the influential presence of a geopolitical outlook - American continentalism.¹⁵

What is more, continentalism would be practiced on an international stage. Technology was, in effect, an apostle of Americanisation, just as political annexation had been in the 1840s. Moreover, technological 'progress' proved America's Manifest Destiny. In a speech made to the Travelers Club of New York in 1865, Collins spoke of the relationship between technological development and historical progress:

We needed all the teaching of all the past ages to become worthy of the electric telegraph - letters, paper, printing, education - free thought, free speech, free press, free government, all combined required the telegraph - and it came. Feeble at first - uncontrollable. First a spark only; then weights raised and released; dials moved, bells rung, gases decomposed, chemical constituents changed.¹⁶

¹³ Collins to Tolstoy, n.d. in McNicol Collection, Douglas Library, University of Queens, Kingston, and cited in Donald McNicol, "Pioneer Attempt to Establish Telegraphic Communication Between America and Europe," *Telegraph and Telephone Age*, July 1, 1926, p.292.

¹⁴ 'Organization of the Expedition,' *Statement*, p.15.

¹⁵ Vevier, p.209.

¹⁶ Collins to Traveler's Club, *Statement*, p. 147.

Western society, America at the forefront, was destined to unlock the power of electricity and exploit the invention of the telegraph. With their 'progressive' characteristics enabled by scientific 'advancement,' Americans could differentiate themselves from others, laying claim to a host of social and spiritual privileges. After all, Collins asked, "May we not claim to have discovered that which the early philosophers and sages sought so industriously, and contend that electricity is the emanation of spirit, or the essence of the soul of the world ?" Referring to the Bible, the cornerstone of the American nation, he noted that Job "had a pretty clear perception of the value and power of electricity:"¹⁷

But where shall wisdom be found ? And where is the place of understanding ?
 The depth saith, it is not in me; and the sea saith, it is not with me
 God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof
 For he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven;
 To make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure,
 When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightening of the thunder;
 Then did he see it, and declare it; he prepared it yea, and searched it out.¹⁸

Such was Collins's immense confidence in his technological project. With God's support, technological progress would enhance telegraphic communications indefinitely. "Magnetic repeaters" would remove the need for hand-operated telegraphic signals in Russian America and Siberia and outpost telegraph stations would only be required for line repairs. With a single manipulation at New York, a message would, Collins claimed, be received in London "in less than a second of time."¹⁹ He noted that electricity could travel 112,680 miles per second along

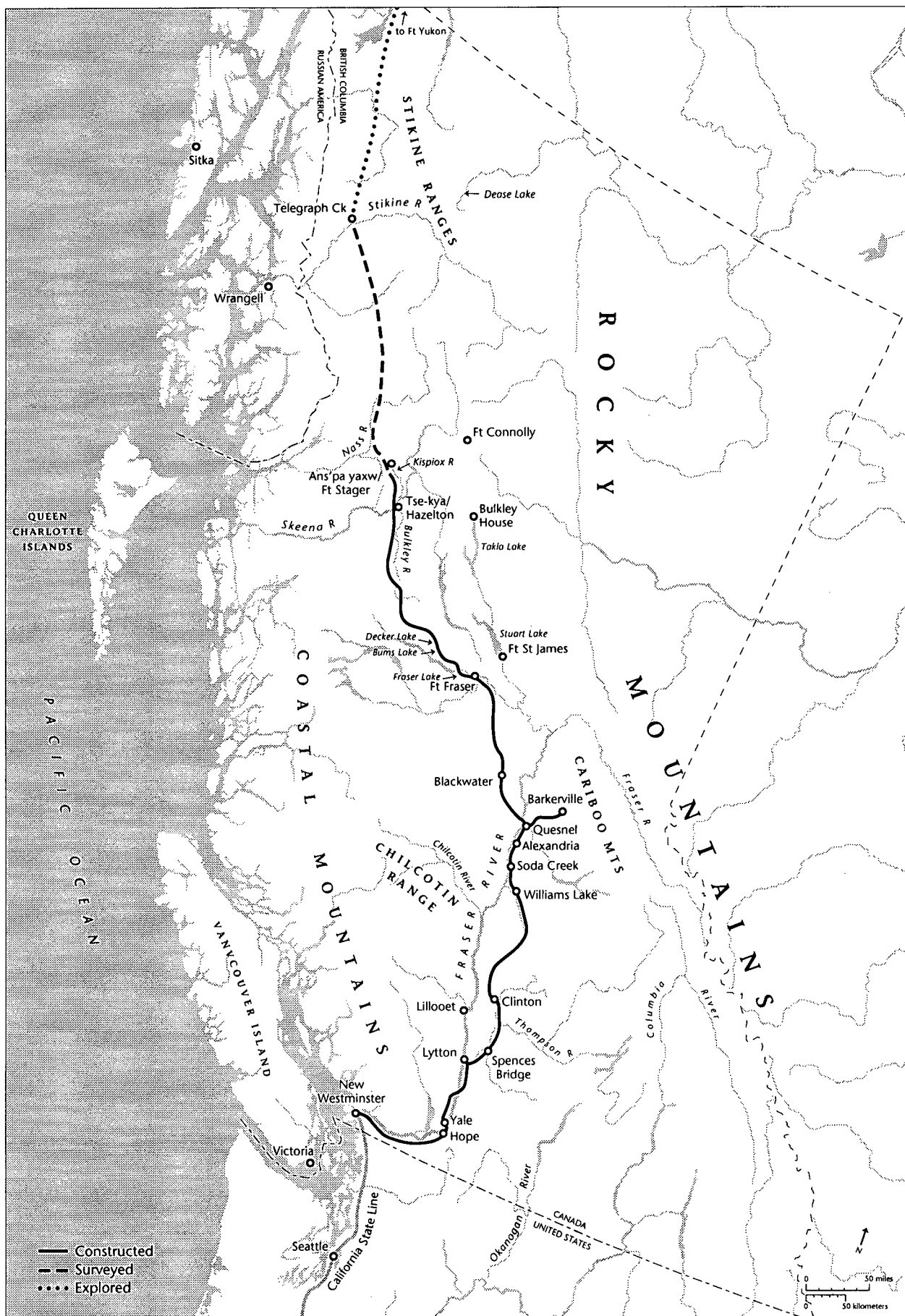
¹⁷ Collins to Traveler's Club, *Statement*, p. 146.

¹⁸ Collins to Traveler's Club, *Statement*, p. 146.

¹⁹ Collins to Traveler's Club, *Statement*, p. 154.

copper wire. The ability to unlock this power could only improve the intercontinental telegraph, and contribute to America's worldwide power.

In the Western Union Extension Company's *Statement of the Origin, Organization and Progress of the Russian-American Telegraph*, published in 1866, rhetoric of Manifest Destiny was prominent. This rhetoric of mission, while Collins and others fervently believed in it, helped promote the project. At this stage more funds might be called from the shareholders. By appealing to American confidence in identity and ideology, the managers justified the project's moral importance while anticipating vast profits. The *Statement* admirably illustrates the vision that surrounded the Russian-American telegraph, a bold vision that was more imperial than continental, and, derived from America's unique historic experience, as much cultural as economic. This powerful vision would significantly affect the lives of many people within America and beyond.



Map 2. Progress of the telegraph line in British Columbia by 1867.

Chapter 3 - Building Beautiful British Columbia

3.1. The Seven Year Colony.

In 1865 the colony of British Columbia was only seven years old. From a European perspective, its antecedents lay in a profitable fur trade conducted by the Hudson's Bay Company from the early nineteenth century. This trade entailed a somewhat symbiotic relationship with Native peoples in the territory Simon Fraser named New Caledonia. In 1858 the unstable equilibrium of the fur trade was transformed by the Fraser Canyon gold rush and the arrival of European, American and Chinese miners, who "were in no way dependent on the Indians and.... therefore not only had no desire to accommodate to Indian demands, but also no compunction about disrupting their traditional way of life."¹

These immigrants, mainly men from the Californian gold-fields, worried Governor Douglas of Vancouver Island. They were not the settlers he desired. He petitioned the British Government to declare New Caledonia a Crown Colony, and by an act of the British Parliament on August 2, 1858, mainland British North America became the colony of British Columbia. New systems of authority, transposed from Britain, were put in place. Taxes were to be paid to gold commissioners, and British civil and commercial law improved order in the gold-fields, which by 1860 had extended north to the Cariboo.

Such events involved a fundamental geographical transformation, which necessarily entailed contact and conflict between settlers and Native peoples. Historical geographer Cole Harris suggests: "the contact process is not a short, one-way street but a complex interaction."² In

¹ Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, Second Ed. (Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 1992), p. xxviii.

² Cole Harris, "Fraser Canyon Encountered," *B.C. Studies*, Summer, 1992, p. 3.

the early years, this included Native resistance, such as N'Lakapamux attacks on miners in the Fraser Canyon in 1858 and Chilcotin attacks on a road party on the Homathko River in 1864.

Even so, European geographies, enforced by legal and military power, were superimposed upon Native worlds. This new society took a distinct geographical form. New Westminster and Victoria aspired to metropolitan dominance. As administrative and trading centres, they mediated between the modern world and the colony. In the hinterlands small towns arose, such as Yale, Lytton, Quesnel and Barkerville, to serve predominantly male mining populations.³ Connecting these local geographies with distant imperial cores were new communication and transportation links, what Daniel Headrick terms "tentacles of progress."⁴ These connections enabled the law and order of a colonial elite in an emerging metropolitan core to penetrate well into the periphery. Police, soldiers and officials could move and communicate; capitalists could acquire knowledge of resources, manufactures and trade; and settlers could know and appropriate Native places as their own.

William Cronon has shown in *Nature's Metropolis* how the railroad "tentacle" influenced the transformation of the nineteenth century American Middle West. Railroad networks, stimulated by cultures of capitalism, facilitated American continental expansion, replacing Native landscapes with what Cronon calls "second nature:"

The railroad left almost nothing untouched: that was its magic. To those whose lives it touched, it seemed at once so ordinary and so extraordinary - so second nature - that the landscape became unimaginable without it. The railroad would replace the waterways of first nature with the myriad complexities of its own geography, thereby becoming the unnatural instrument of a supposedly 'natural' destiny. It would rapidly emerge as the chief link connecting Chicago with the

³ Averill Groeneveld-Meijer describes the gendered nature of mining communities in her U.B.C. M.A. Thesis, "Manning the Fraser Canyon Gold Rush."

⁴ Daniel Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). Headrick argues that infrastructures, such as railways, roads and telegraphs, helped relocate European technologies in non-European contexts, but not European cultures. See also Daniel Headrick, *Telecommunications and International Politics, 1851 to 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

towns and rural lands around it, so the city came finally to seem like an artificial spider suspended at the center of a great steel web.⁵

Chicago, as the railroad hub, was now an important "breaking point" between the Middle West and the eastern American heartland.⁶ Furthermore, new connective infrastructures facilitated an economic geography of the American Middle West, in which modern development tended towards points of connection and major routeways.

Similar "tentacles" affected the transformation of British Columbia. One such "tentacle" - almost the only one in the early years - was the Cariboo Wagon Road. In 1861 Governor Douglas called for the construction of an eighteen foot wagon road through the Canyon to the goldfields. By 1863, Yale - the most inland site that steamers could reach on the lower Fraser - was connected by road to Lytton, Clinton, Williams Lake, and Soda Creek. By 1865, Fort Alexandria, Quesnel and Barkerville in the Cariboo were accessible. The Fraser Canyon was no longer very hazardous to non-Native travellers, nor was an alternative route inland via Seton Lake and Lillooet attractive. Food prices in the interior were greatly reduced, as food could more easily be transported to the gold-fields. Butter at Williams Lake had sold at two dollars a pound in 1862; in 1863 its price was one dollar and twenty-five cents.⁷ Costs of living decreased, making British Columbia more attractive for settlers, who took up what had been Native land. Stagecoach and freight companies formed. Some roadhouses became incipient towns. Prior settlements such as Lytton, Quesnel, and Barkerville began to look a little more permanent. Geographies of inaccessibility were being replaced by geographies of colonial opportunity.

In British Columbia the telegraph line, like the wagon road before it and the railway after, performed similar functions. First, by electronically connecting the southern British Columbian core to the interior periphery, the metropolitan aspirations of New Westminster and

⁵ William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), pp. 73-74.

⁶ Cronon, p. 83.

⁷ Art Downs, *Wagon Road North* (Surrey, B.C.: Heritage House, 1993), p. 25.

Victoria were facilitated as they became centres for gathering and diffusing knowledge. Second, techniques of production carried out by engineers and managers brought a new modern corporatism to B.C. that became increasingly common. Finally, telegraph surveys empowered White knowledge of the interior, encouraging new patterns of settlement and social transformation, particularly in the Skeena and Bulkley valleys along a route approximating modern highway 16. Facilitating White settlement and bringing American and European norms to British Columbia, the telegraph contributed to colonial processes of subduing and displacing traditional Native societies and of modernising and transforming British Columbia.

3.2. A Desire for Wire.

In 1864 the new Colonial Governor, Frederick Seymour, was optimistic about the impacts that the Russian-American Telegraph would bring to British Columbia. After all, he thought, the colony needed a new impetus of economic growth to restore pride to its unimpressive capital, New Westminster:

I had not seen, even in the West Indies, so melancholy a picture of disappointed hopes.... Thousands of trees had been felled to make way for the great city expected to rise on the magnificent site selected for it. But the blight had early come.... The largest hotel was to let, decay appeared on all sides.... Westminster appeared, to use the miners' expression, played out.⁸

In January 1865, in the opening session of the British Columbia Legislature, he stated that "the subject of telegraphic communication is the only one to which I can refer with altogether unmixed satisfaction.... Any project that offered more efficient and rapid communication with the

⁸ Seymour to Edward Cardwell, as quoted in Barry Mather, *New Westminster, The Royal City* (New Westminster: J.M. Dent, 1958), pp. 78-79.

areas from which the colony's wealth was drawn was assured the support of the colonist." It would "double the effectiveness" of colonial police and law forces, and rejuvenate the fledgling colony.⁹

Ed. Conway (fig. 5), the Chief Engineer of the Expedition, arrived in British Columbia in November 1864 to take charge of construction. Conway had been a telegrapher with the Grand Trunk Railway in Montreal in 1861, but with references praising his proficiency, efficiency, perseverance and temperate habits, he had moved south to work under Charles Bulkley in the American Military Telegraph Corps.¹⁰ Bulkley, of course, secured Conway's appointment on the Russian-American Telegraph project.

At Victoria on Vancouver Island, Conway announced to the *British Colonist* that with his overland telegraph, "an electric belt will encircle the globe."¹¹ Returning to the mainland, Conway started negotiating with the authorities, requesting that the Company be permitted to bring in its construction material and supplies duty free. The Legislature, Conway reported to Bulkley, refused fearing that "the privilege might be abused," injuring the colony's revenue.¹² In March 1865, Conway reiterated his case to Seymour: "In consideration of the benefit that the Government and the public will derive from these roads or trails.... it is but reasonable that the supplies for the construction of our line be admitted free."¹³

⁹ *British Columbian*, New Westminster, Jan. 14, 1865, p. 3.

¹⁰ Ed. Conway, *Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1861 to 1866*, Provincial Archives of B.C., Victoria, JI c76.2. Conway always wrote his first name as Ed., never Edward, Edmund or Edwin.

¹¹ *British Colonist*, Dec. 8, 1864, p. 2.

¹² Conway to Bulkley, New Westminster, Feb. 24, 1865 in Conway's *Letterbook, 1865 to 1867*, PABC, JI c76.1, p. 8. Any following quotes by Conway, unless otherwise indicated, are from his *Letterbook*.

¹³ Conway to Seymour, New West., Mar. 15, 1865, p. 20.



Fig 5: Ed Conway (centre), James Butler (left) and Officers of the British North American Party

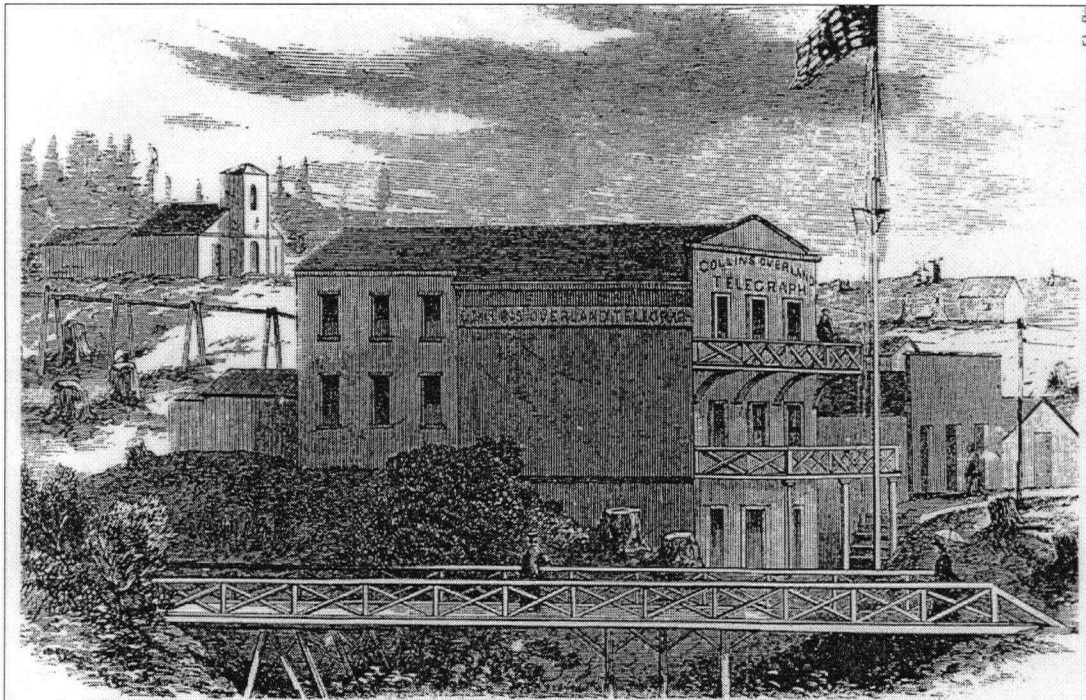
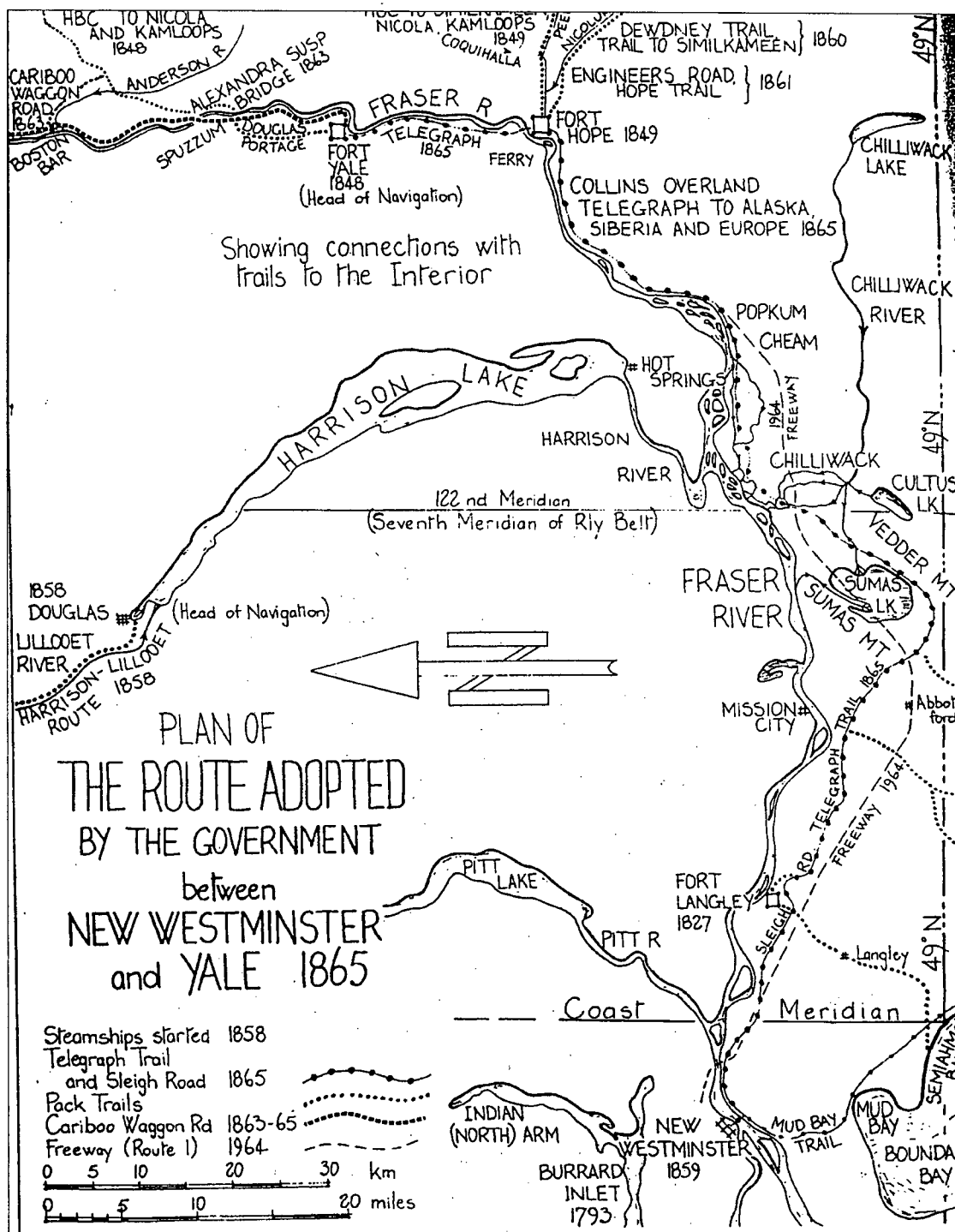


Fig 6: The Collins Overland Telegraph Office in New Westminster, *Harpers Magazine*, August 12, 1865.



Map 3: The 1865 'Sleigh Road' and Telegraph Route Between New Westminster and Yale
 (Bob Harris, 1983)

A compromise was reached. The only materials admitted free were wire and telegraph insulators, but the Government agreed to fund a new road from New Westminster to Yale. This concession, laid out in the International Telegraph Ordinance, would complete the wagon road's connection to the coast and provide an ideal route for the telegraph:

The Government shall reserve a continuous strip, or free space 20 feet wide by 30 feet high on one side of the said road for the entire length. The Government shall cut down all rotten timber by the side of the road that appears liable to fall anywhere across the line of the said telegraph between New Westminster and Yale. The cutting of the timber and brush shall be at least 30 feet in height from the ground and wide enough to allow of the freeest passage and use of the telegraph line without obstruction by boughs, branches or timbers.¹⁴

In June, Conway and James Turnbull, a military surveyor and draftsman from Colonel Richard Moody's Columbia Detachment of Royal Engineers, examined both banks of the Fraser to Yale. They decided that a "sleigh road" would follow the south side of the river to Hope where it would cross to the other bank (map 3). The Western Union Extension Company would pay one third of the actual cost up to a ceiling of eight thousand dollars. Turnbull estimated the total cost to be \$24,000.¹⁵

Meanwhile, the editor of the *British Columbian*, John Robson, spoke on behalf of most of New Westminster's non-Native population when he wrote of the "coming connection with the rest of the civilized world."¹⁶ He hoped that it might ensure New Westminster's growth at the expense of Victoria:

¹⁴ Conway to Bulkley, New West., Mar. 18, p. 24; "An Ordinance to encourage the construction of a Telegraph, connecting the Telegraphs of British Columbia with the Telegraph Lines of Russia, the United States and other countries, and for other countries," Ord. No. 5, 1865, passed by Council, Jan. 26, assented Feb. 21, as quoted in Kathleen Fitzgerald, "Colins Overland Telegeaph," *Canada West: The Pioneer Years*, Vol. 9, No. 4, Winter, 1979, p. 47.

¹⁵ Bob Harris, "The Route Adopted by the Government between New Westminster and Yale, 1865," *British Columbia Historical News*, Winter, 1983, p. 9.

¹⁶ Neering, *Continental Dash*, p. 41.

Those of us who came here six years ago to plant a city where then stood an unbroken forest of gigantic firs, proudly waving their towering tops as if in defiance of the puny efforts of man to conquer them, will hardly be able to recognize to the full extent the new era bursting upon us. A Government of our own, direct steam communication, direct trade with the great marts and electric connection with the civilized world, each following the other in such quick succession, are considerations calculated to bewilder the mind. And yet it is all real tangible fact. In less than a year New Westminster, traduced and deceived by a jealous neighbor [Victoria], will be the centre of all these great systems - these civilizers, which must speedily make her worthy to be the capital of an important colony, and the great centre of commerce on the British Pacific.¹⁷

Robson supported the proposed road to Yale, noting that "the advantage may be reciprocated by having the two schemes conjointly promoted." He preferred a route north of the Fraser, which, he claimed, could be more easily protected in case of "trouble with our neighbours (quod avertat Deus)."¹⁸ He conveniently forgot that these same neighbours owned the line. In another editorial, he praised the ingenuity of the American 'enemy:'

If the world is indebted to American ingenuity and skill for the electro-magnetic telegraph, we are indebted to American enterprise for its early application in British Columbia.... Without an effort on our part, without the expenditure of a single dollar of the colonial revenue, we enjoy what would have cost many thousands were it not for the enterprise of our neighbours.¹⁹

¹⁷ *British Columbian*, Feb. 25, 1865, p. 2.

¹⁸ *British Columbian*, Mar. 25, 1865, p. 2.

¹⁹ *British Columbian*, Apr. 22, 1865, p. 2.

3.3. An Engineer's Dream.... and Nightmare.

By March 1865, Conway had located his administrative headquarters in Lytton Square above the river wharves in New Westminster (fig. 6). At Seymour's request, he built a small telegraph between the Telegraph Company's office and the Governor's mansion. Governor Seymour, Conway reported, wanted to telegraph the Governor of Newfoundland.²⁰ He had his chance on April 18 when crews of a Western Union subsidiary, the California State Telegraph Company, connected New Westminster to the Pacific line, San Francisco and points east.

The line to Russia commenced at two places: eastward from New Westminster to Yale following the sleigh road, and north from Yale along the existing wagon road. Conway directed Chief Foreman Daniel Libby, in charge of the engineers at Yale, to make sure that the employees agreed to the 'ten commandments' sanctioned by the Company, to be careful with Company property, and not to draw excessive food rations from Quartermaster Burrage: "I wish the men to have enough but we cannot allow waste."²¹ Conway also told the Yale men to interact carefully with Natives:

The natives will be treated well, and your men must not impose upon them under any consideration. All agreements you make with white men or natives, you will live up to the letter.

You must also bear in mind that the men must not be idle when under pay.

I wish it distinctly understood that we must leave a favorable impression with the Natives and have them understand that the line will benefit them, if at the same time that we do not dread them.²²

²⁰ Conway to Bulkley, New West., Mar. 10, 1865, p. 18.

²¹ "Collins Overland Telegraph General Rules of Organization and Government," *Statement*, pp. 77-79; Conway to Libby, New West., Apr. 25, 1865, p. 31.

²² Conway to Libby, pp. 32-33.

Conway, after journeying to Yale in April, confidently proclaimed to Bulkley that "there are no obstacles.... that cannot be overcome, and I can promise the Company a good line to Yale in a very short time."²³ By May, work north of Yale was under way, its methodical construction described by Cariboo historian Mark Wade:

A perfect system was adopted to ensure rapidity. One set of men went ahead of the others to mark and measure the line driving pegs to indicate where the poles were to be erected. Others followed and felled trees of the proper size for the poles; after them came another gang whose duty it was to trim and peel the poles and then came the teamsters with horses and chains to haul the poles to the places marked for them. Next in order came the labourers to dig the holes for the poles and even this gang was divided into two parts, the first beginning the hole while the other part finished it ready for the pole. Another lot erected the poles, still others followed whose sole duty it was to fasten on the brackets and they in turn were succeeded by men who put wire on the insulators and last of all came the linemen who strung the wire.²⁴

Early in 1865, management hoped for swift success. Strict authority, Conway thought, improved productivity. By giving men specific tasks and concise instructions, and assuming they worked willingly, a good telegraph should ensue. Charles Morison, a Company employee from 1866, wrote that Conway "was a most genial man but expected any instructions he gave to be implicitly carried out."²⁵ Such a philosophy of management, as Conway discovered, might not suit British Columbia.

During 1865 Conway continually telegraphed Bulkley about his progress, problems and instructions. Some messages were written in code, particularly those about the British Columbian

²³ Conway to Bulkley, New West., Apr. 28, 1865, p. 45.

²⁴ Mark Wade, *The Cariboo Road* (Victoria: The Haunted Bookshop, 1979), p. 240. This book was edited from an undated manuscript (c. 1920s). It is unclear where Wade found his information. At the time of writing, contemporary ideologies of job specialisation perhaps influenced Wade's vision of the construction process.

²⁵ Charles Morison, *Reminiscences of British Columbia*, PABC, Add. MSS 424, p. 23.

Government.²⁶ Bulkley rarely answered, hardly surprising as he was busy preparing the Russian American and Siberian expeditions. Conway, though, was unhappy with the lack of direction.

Trying to organise an efficient workforce, Conway told Quartermaster Robert Burrage to check that Libby did not keep his men "idle." Aware of the advantages of employing "Chinamen," Conway asked Burrage whether there were "many idle in that vicinity ?" At the same time, he warned Burrage about his paperwork: "Your requisition for supplies should come as a requisition separate from [the] report."²⁷ To Foreman Libby, Conway wrote of the need for discipline: "I place confidence in you.... Be careful and do not have useless men, or grumbles about you."²⁸ Libby should be strong, respected and efficient, like Conway himself.

In May he told Bulkley of a "grand potlach," involving "Indians from all parts of the interior."²⁹ This was not just idle curiosity as Conway was considering employing Native labourers. He asked George Blenkinsop, a surveyor in Yale, to hire "twenty (20) Indians at \$15 per month for packing poles and general work" to work above and below Yale.³⁰ White labourers were costly and difficult to find, especially with the gold excitement at Big Bend in the Cariboo. Conway was therefore satisfied when, in mid-May, he alerted J.W. Pitfield, his agent in New Westminster, to "be prepared for 35 men below Hope" making Conway's total force 85 men.³¹

Conway, meanwhile, expressed concern to Bulkley about inadequate Company food rations as "men can and do eat a much larger quantity when hard at work in this northern latitude."³² Conway soon after found seven thousand unreceipted "rations." He blamed Burrage: "Is it necessary that I should have to inform you the amount you have on hand!" Burrage, he

²⁶ For an example, see Conway, p. 37, where he refers to 'Bella,' 'Gertha,' 'Julia,' 'Maggie,' and 'Eliza.'

²⁷ Conway to Rob Burrage, New West, Apr. 29, 1865, p. 56.

²⁸ Conway to Libby, New West., May 9, 1865, pp. 71-72.

²⁹ Conway to Bulkley, New West., May 10, 1865, p. 74.

³⁰ Conway to George Blenkinsop, New West., May 10, 1865, p. 77.

³¹ Conway to Pitfield, New West., May 12, 1865, p. 83.

³² Conway to Bulkley, New West., May 29, 1865, p. 101.

added, was flouting Company policies of alcoholic temperance: "Liquor I will neither allow to be furnished nor will the Company do so."³³

Libby would not escape Conway's criticism. Conway claimed that Libby should have been more direct when dismissing a disobedient employee. After another man called Maguire was caught playing cards, Conway told Libby to "set firm determination and [let] justice be your motto and do your duty without the slightest partiality on any mans account.... I know no friends except the one that performs his best."³⁴ Disciplined management, Conway considered, had to be Libby's priority over "friends."

To Bulkley, Conway wrote angrily of the lack of telegraph insulators. He also wanted to know how far apart stations should be between New Westminster and Quesnelmouth and whether to agree to the Government's wish for a line to the Cariboo.³⁵ This would mean extra work, but Conway believed that such a line would pay.³⁶ Only an engineer, Conway did not want extra diplomatic and managerial duties. In the meantime, he wrote to George Wallace, editor of the *Cariboo Sentinel*, that a Cariboo Line was "probable."³⁷

For a time he worried about the progress of the Government road builders. He needed to know when the road would be complete to Yale, before deciding whether it was more efficient to move his men above or below Yale. He also requested that the Government "repair all damages that may be done to the telegraph during the construction of the road. If this cannot be guaranteed it will be impossible for me to construct a line.... until the road is completed."³⁸

When Bulkley finally sent instructions, Conway notified Libby on June 30 that the line would leave the Fraser at Fort Alexandria, thereby avoiding Barkerville. Quite pleased, he praised

³³ Conway to Rob Burrage, New West., May 30, 1865, p. 104.

³⁴ Conway to Libby, New West., June 6, 1865, pp. 114-115.

³⁵ Conway to Bulkley, New West., June 7, 1865, pp. 118-119.

³⁶ Conway to Bulkley, New West., June 8, 1865, p. 120.

³⁷ Conway to Wallace, New West., June 18, 1865, p. 142.

³⁸ Conway to Walter Moberly, New West., June 19, 1865, pp. 143-144.

Libby's management: "Should your economy prove equal to your rapid progress it will afford me great pleasure to report same to Colonel Bulkley and I feel confident your promotion will be equal to what you deserve."³⁹

Meanwhile, he dismissed Burrage for "extravagance and poor management," replacing him with his brother Charles Burrage.⁴⁰ Bizarrely, he later recommended the extravagant Rob Burrage to Bulkley's deputy, James Gamble: "I beg to state that you left this Company's Service of your own accord - I take pleasure in recommending you.... as a reliable trustworthy man, and a fair operator."⁴¹

Conway's actions are puzzling, but he was more and more perturbed by what he considered hard and unproductive work. After accusing Libby of overworking his teams and Bulkley of "not taking precautions" when the Bank of British Columbia refused to discount Conway's draft, his patience snapped.⁴² He alerted Gamble to his dissatisfaction: "I can assure you that my position at present is anything but pleasant and that I will not again allow myself to be placed in such a delicate position through the fault of others."⁴³

³⁹ Conway to Libby, New West., June 30, 1865, p. 157.

⁴⁰ Conway to R. Burrage, New West., July 8, 1865, p. 163.

⁴¹ Conway to R. Burrage, New West., July 15, 1865, p. 186.

⁴² Conway to Libby, New West., July 26, 1865, p. 170; Conway to Gamble, New West., July 29, 1865, p. 172.

⁴³ Conway to Gamble, New West., Aug. 16, 1865, p. 189.

3.4. Explorations in British Columbia in 1865.

By this time, an exploration party led by Major Franklin Pope of Stockbridge, Massachusetts, had left to seek a route connecting the Fraser to Fort Yukon in Russian America. Pope was accompanied, among others, by J.T. Rothrock, Henry Bannister and Henry Elliott of the Smithsonian Institution, the astronomer Edward Scoville, and Robert Birnie and George Blenkinsop, both former Hudson's Bay Company employees.⁴⁴ His party also included two men from Stockbridge, his brother, Ralph Pope, and Stephen Field, who proposed "to get ahead of his uncle [Cyrus] in building a successful telegraph to Europe."⁴⁵ Travelling from New Westminster through the Fraser Canyon to Fort Alexandria, Pope expected to continue on to Fort St. James, Stuart and Babine Lakes, Dease Lake, onto the Pelly River and finally to Fort Yukon.⁴⁶

Eventually reaching Takla Lake north-east of Babine Lake, they were still several hundred miles short of Fort Yukon. Nevertheless, they had travelled far, passing through places largely unknown to Whites, including the Chilcotin region where Natives had attacked Alfred Waddington's road-building party in 1864, an act that had outraged the inhabitants of New Westminster and Victoria. They were guided by a Native that Pope called Kel-sun, "who blazed the trees as he passed. Then came the axemen, who widened the trail through standing and fallen timber, and built bridges across swamps and streams." The men also utilised the knowledge of a Nechako woman, "Too-gum-a-hen," who mapped "the entire country between Fraser Lake and Bella Coola." The maps that Pope had used appeared inaccurate, showing "streams flowing the wrong way and reaching the sea at the wrong place."⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Letter from J. T. Rothrock to E. O. S. Scolefield, Jan 11, 1913, pp. 2-3, PABC, J.I. R74.

⁴⁵ Gerard Chapman, "Exploring for the Telegraph in British Columbia," *The Beaver*, June/July, 1986, pp. 39-47. Chapman examines Pope's letters to the *Berkshire Courier*. This excerpt was originally in *Berkshire Courier*, June 15, 1865, based on a letter sent by 'Caribon,' who was likely Ralph Pope. A more thorough working of Pope's letters is found in Gerard Chapman's draft of excerpts from the *Berkshire Courier*, PABC, NW 384.1 B513.

⁴⁶ *Berkshire Courier*, July 27, 1865, based on a letter by Franklin Pope letter, June 10, New Westminster.

⁴⁷ All quotes from *The Telegrapher*, Oct. 16, 1865, as quoted in Neering, p. 53. The correspondent, signing himself 'Electron,' was probably Franklin Pope given the report's similarity to a letter sent by Pope to his brother Henry.

Pope was reliant on Native knowledge of the land; without it, he might suffer a similar fate to that of his colleague James Butler, who had mysteriously disappeared. In fact, Butler fell out of a tree while trying to find his way to camp and broke his leg, but Pope, for a time, did not know of this. Pope was extremely scared, if only because his men depended on Native assistance and goodwill. During the recent Chilcotin conflict, Native resistance had proved fatal for Waddington's road-building party. This compromised the supposed power relations between Whites and Natives. Pope therefore needed to instill in Natives, respect for his work. One time, near Fort Fraser, he did this by demonstrating a working telegraph to a Chief:

Major Pope.... arranged a revolver at the farther end of the line in such a manner that it could be fired from the opposite end by closing the circuit. Everything being in readiness, Major Pope requested the chief to place his finger upon the key, which was followed by an instantaneous report of the pistol at the extremity of the wire. This performance excited the utmost wonder and admiration.⁴⁸

Such a demonstration, intimidated Pope, ensured Native cooperation. The object of demonstration might, however, have been Pope's revolver. The men brought weapons that Natives probably feared. White men, particularly miners, had brought such weapons to use against Natives; they had also brought disease and had abused Native women. While Pope felt insecure in Native country, the Natives felt threatened by Pope's men with their guns, reputations and strange wire gadgets.

An advance party under J.T. Rothrock constructed 'Bulkley House,' their winter base at the northern end of Takla Lake (fig. 7). Pope returned to Alexandria to fetch supplies. Conway was unimpressed with Pope's effort: "Owing to the failure of Pope's exploring expeditions I am compelled to stop my work and commence explorations myself."⁴⁹ Joining Pope on his voyage

⁴⁸ *The Telegrapher*, Oct. 16, 1865.

⁴⁹ Conway to Gamble, New West., July 16, 1865, p. 185.

north, they arrived at Bulkley House, but severe weather prevented any further advance, except to nearby Fort Connolly (fig. 8). Conway later reported to Bulkley his thoughts on northern British Columbia and possible overland supply routes; and his opinions on the Native peoples:

The Carrier Indians occupy the country between Quesnel and Lake Tremble.... It is probable that [they do] not exceed 400; they are very peaceable and I think cowardly. The Babine Indians occupy the country in vicinity of Babine Lake, and the Upper Skeena River. They number about 1000, and from all accounts are a precious lot of scoundrels, and require to be dealt with carefully. The chiefs have the reputation of being very friendly. My party anticipated having trouble with these Indians, but everything went off nicely, and they left on exceedingly good terms with the natives. The Siccane Indians occupy the country in the vicinity of Peace River and Connolly's Lake. This tribe will not number more than 50 all told. They are very friendly and peaceable. The Otuap Indians occupy the country west of Connolly's Lake, said to be a large tribe, about 50 of them remain at Fort Connolly. They are rather a fine looking lot of Indians. I cannot say much for them, except that they used us well, and that they appear to have more courage than the Indians south of them. The Nehanne Indians occupy the country north of Fort Connolly, said to be a large tribe, but very little is known of them, and they occasionally trade at the Fort and were expected there this year. They are represented as a very honest and upright tribe, and very independent.⁵⁰

Constructing and maintaining a telegraph line in the interior, as Pope well knew, required considerable knowledge of Native populations and their attitudes to Whites. Conway concluded: "Indians throughout the country are not at all disposed to be unfriendly."⁵¹ It is odd that Conway was quite complimentary about interior Natives. After the 1864 Chilcotin attack on Waddington's road party, white British Columbians felt insecure in what was still Native territory. Less surprising was Conway's ethnocentric opinion that "no dependence whatsoever can be placed upon Indian labor. They will work when.... out of food, but prefer being idle."⁵²

At Bulkley House on Takla Lake, Pope appeared to be enjoying himself:

⁵⁰ Conway to Bulkley, Dec 30, 1865, pp. 254-266 and Bulkley Papers, pp. 21-27 and 33-35; this excerpt from *Bulkley Papers*, p. 24.

⁵¹ Conway to Bulkley, *Bulkley Papers*, pp. 24-25.

⁵² Conway to Bulkley, *ibid.*

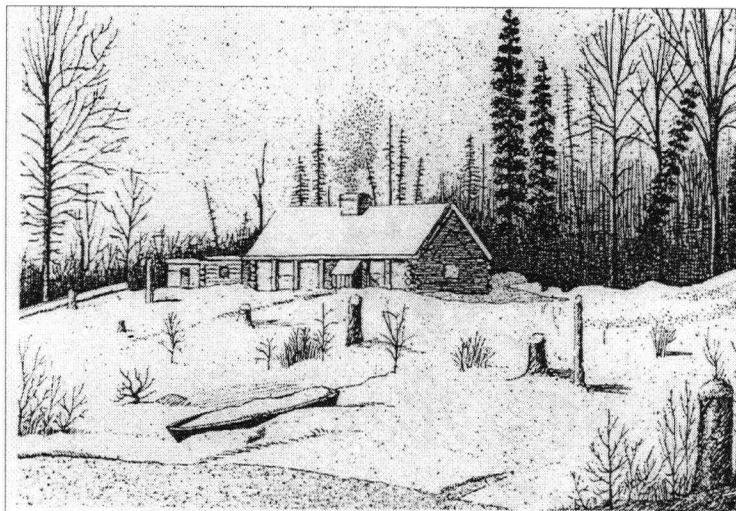


Fig 7: Bulkley House on Takla Lake, by Franklin Pope.



Fig 8: The Expedition to Fort Connolly, by Franklin Pope



Fig 9: Pope's men around the Camp-Fire, by Franklin Pope.

I can assure you that there's many a hotel in the Eastern States not so well kept as Bulkley House. I have a cook who takes care of the house, chops the wood, and runs the establishment. We have plenty of good bread, bacon, beans and dried salmon; tea, coffee, chocolate and sugar; also dried apples and rice once or twice a week.... We get a good many ducks and partridges, and some fresh fish once in a while. Fresh woodchucks are excellent, and we have them often.⁵³

An account of their Christmas, published in the *British Columbian*, became a pioneer fable. On Christmas Eve the men successfully hunted a "noble fat beaver, some rabbits, a splendid bag of mountain grouse and ptarmigan;" on Christmas morning they enjoyed hilarious shooting matches and foot races with some Native visitors: the main event was a women's five hundred yard race over unbroken two-foot-deep snow between a twelve, eighty-five and a twenty year old.⁵⁴ After this and without their Native companions, the men settled down for a marvellous Christmas feast:

Grouse pie, roast beaver, apple, bread sauce, plum pudding, cheese and mince pies.... good health with coffee and pipes.... Speeches and toasts.... England and England's Queen; United States and president; the governor of British Columbia.... Speeches diluted with bad coffee soon got slow.... Christmas carols were read, that had been written for the occasion.... proving that Charles Dickens had better look to his laurels. Those were followed by songs, patriotic, sentimental and operatic.⁵⁵

Despite such leisure, the article's author hoped that "knowledge of our small band exploring through this tough country in the cause of science, and for the benefit of the world in general.... will be acceptable to our friends."⁵⁶ Such an image was attractive to readers of the *British Columbian*; an account of men revelling on the frontier was much more alluring than

⁵³ *The Telegrapher*, Vol. 2, p. 74; *Berkshire Courier*, Mar. 8, 1866, based on Pope's letter, Nov. 7, 1865, sent by "some stray Indian going through the wilderness," who was "pretty sure to deliver them safely for he knows he will get a liberal 'potlach' of tobacco;" as quoted in Neering, *Continental Dash*, pp. 58-59.

⁵⁴ *British Columbian*, Apr. 11, 1866, based on a letter signed 'Q.M.' (likely Quartermaster Scovell) and dated Dec. 26, 1865, as quoted in Neering, *Continental Dash*, pp. 59-60 and Corday Mackay Atkinson, "Northern Christmas," *Pioneer Days in British Columbia*, Vol. 3, ed. Art Downs (Surrey, B.C.: Heritage House, 1977), pp. 136-139.

⁵⁵ Mackay Atkinson, p. 139.

⁵⁶ Mackay Atkinson, p. 139.

earlier reports about the Chilcotin attack. The fable gave the northern interior a 'whiter' identity, portraying opportunity, fun and adventure rather than 'Indian menace.'

In the summer of 1865, Conway had dispatched merchant seaman Captain Horace Coffin to lead an expedition to explore potential supply routes from the northwest coast. Arriving at the Skeena by mid-September in the steamer *Union*, Coffin sailed ninety miles up-river to the head of navigation, canoed another hundred miles, and landed supplies at Tse-kya, a Wet'su'wet'en village at the confluence of the Skeena (Xsan) and the Wa Dzun Kwuh. Coffin's men rechristened the Wa Dzun Kwuh 'Bulkley River' after their Colonel-in-Chief, again 'white'ning the north. After exploring eighty-five miles of the Nass, hazardous weather and stormy seas prevented their reaching the Stikine. Coffin dispatched Native messengers with reports to Conway and Pope in the interior, but they never arrived. Nevertheless, Conway reported proudly to Bulkley that Coffin's voyage, including steamer rental, wages for the captain and crew, and sundries, cost only \$2,860.⁵⁷ So concluded the explorations for 1865.

3.5. Punishment in Siberia is a Paradise in Comparison to this Place.

Ed. Conway might have been expected to have had a happy Christmas. The *Milton Badger* finally arrived at New Westminster in mid-June with two hundred tons of materials. By August 17, New Westminster was telegraphically connected to Hope; a celebratory message from Lytton merchant J. Landvoight directed that champagne be sent to Conway.⁵⁸ On August 26 the first telegraph message arrived at New Westminster from Yale, ordering champagne for Conway's agent, J. W. Pitfield.⁵⁹ By September 2, Conway notified Gamble that telegraph

⁵⁷ Conway to Bulkley, Dec. 30, 1865, p. 264.

⁵⁸ *British Columbian*, Aug. 19, 1865, p. 3, citing telegraph from Landvoight to Grelley, Aug. 18, 1865.

⁵⁹ *British Columbian*, Aug. 29, 1865, p. 3.

communication was open to Soda Creek, twenty miles north of Fort Alexandria.⁶⁰ That same evening, Conway hosted Colonial Secretary Arthur Birch and the commissioner of land and works, Joseph Trutch, for dinner.⁶¹ By September 14 the line was working to Quesnel, some 450 miles from New Westminster; the *British Columbian* reported "great enthusiasm prevailing."⁶²

Managing the line's construction through the daunting Fraser Canyon to Quesnel had been quite an accomplishment. Furthermore, Conway, after his journey to Takla Lake, now knew something of the northern interior, deciding to send supplies inland by the Skeena, thereby saving the expense of overland transport. Sensing success came with too much work and stress, too little support and too few rewards, the unhappy Conway resigned on December 10. He outlined his reasons:

I am not authorized to pay sufficient salaries to secure good assistants, nor can I secure a good man to take charge of a construction party. Pope's Explorations have failed. He has not explored far enough north to make the route for line positive - It will take two months to settle my accounts as I have not had a day to spare since I commenced.⁶³

In another less formal letter to Bulkley, he wrote:

It is utterly impossible for me to explore and construct, organize and manage a line in my rear. I have no foreman fit to take charge of a party. I have no Operators to work the line,.... my duties are more than I can perform and more that I dare undertake. I cannot hold my position and see things go wrong. My affairs are too scattered to see to it myself, and I have no one that I can depend except Mr. Pitfield who is discontented with his salary, his numerous duties and the responsibility - He wishes to leave and I have no one to replace him. I cannot get good men here, nor do I think can get them to stay in such a Country as this, when they can do better elsewhere. I have little peace of mind and no patience whatever when things do not go to suit me - Have a family at home partly dependent on me. It is impossible to save anything at my present

⁶⁰ Conway to Wade, Soda Creek, Sep. 2, 1865, p. 204.

⁶¹ Conway to Stager, Soda Creek, Sep. 2, 1865, p. 205.

⁶² *The British Columbian*, Sept 16, 1865, p. 3.

⁶³ Conway to Bulkley, New West., Dec. 10, 1865, p. 223.

salary. I have spent a large portion of it (indirectly) getting those Legislative Grants....

I think you would be astonished to see the line I have constructed in such a short space of time, and through such a country....

Am greatly disappointed at your not stopping here. Expected you would winter here. Your absence is felt and your advice and orders needed.⁶⁴

Conway considered that neither hard work nor managerial support had been forthcoming. The physical and human realities of British Columbia, so different from his former places of work in Montreal and the United States, provided an unexpected challenge. Company directors did not appreciate his problems and their inability to send supplies on schedule upset Conway's timetable of work. It is to Conway's credit that over 450 miles of line were built in 1865, and that surveys were carried out in the interior and along the northwest coast. Perhaps Bulkley realised this, for he persuaded Conway to remain in his job. Back at New Westminster in January, Conway soon received substantial back pay. In May Conway apologised to Bulkley, explaining his earlier anguish:

I sincerely hope you will forgive all the work I have put you to. You are aware my stock of patience was never very extensive, it has all been driven out of me in this infernal mining country, where one encounters nothing but heavy timber,.... mills, broken miners,.... lug operators, English aristocrats, loafers and swindlers, all of which tends to drive a man crazy. Punishment in Siberia is a Paradise in comparison to this place.⁶⁵

During 1866 Conway sent far fewer letters and telegrams to his men and to Bulkley. He appeared more relaxed, but his problems continued. In April he complained that men paid over winter were leaving Company service as work recommenced.⁶⁶ Conway also fell out with Pitfield, his faithful agent at New Westminster. On May 1 he announced that Pitfield was "no longer

⁶⁴ Conway to Bulkley, New West., Dec 10, 1865, pp. 225-227.

⁶⁵ Conway to Bulkley, Quesnelmouth, May 1, 1866, pp. 303-304.

⁶⁶ Conway to Bulkley, New West., Apr. 7, 1866, p. 298.

Agent for my Division."⁶⁷ Pitfield was presumably reinstated, because Conway continued to telegraph him throughout 1866.

In May Conway returned to Quesnel with a new foreman, Steve Decker, and a new paymaster, Mr. Bellinge. Also present was a magistrate, Thomas Elwyn, paid jointly by Western Union and the British Columbian Government to implement British justice further north and legally assist the Company.⁶⁸ If Natives protested on Queen Victoria's land, the Company could resort to British law to legitimise their presence.

However, hiring manual labour remained difficult; not enough white men would work for Company wages, particularly with the Big Bend gold excitement in full swing. Conway wrote:

[At Quesnel, I] succeeded, after great difficulty, in getting together 25 white men, with whom, and sixty animals, I commenced work on the 16th of May. Fearing that I would not be able to hire men for the boating parties at Quesnel, I determined to engage Stikine and other Indians from the coast, at New Westminster, and take them up the Wagon Road.⁶⁹

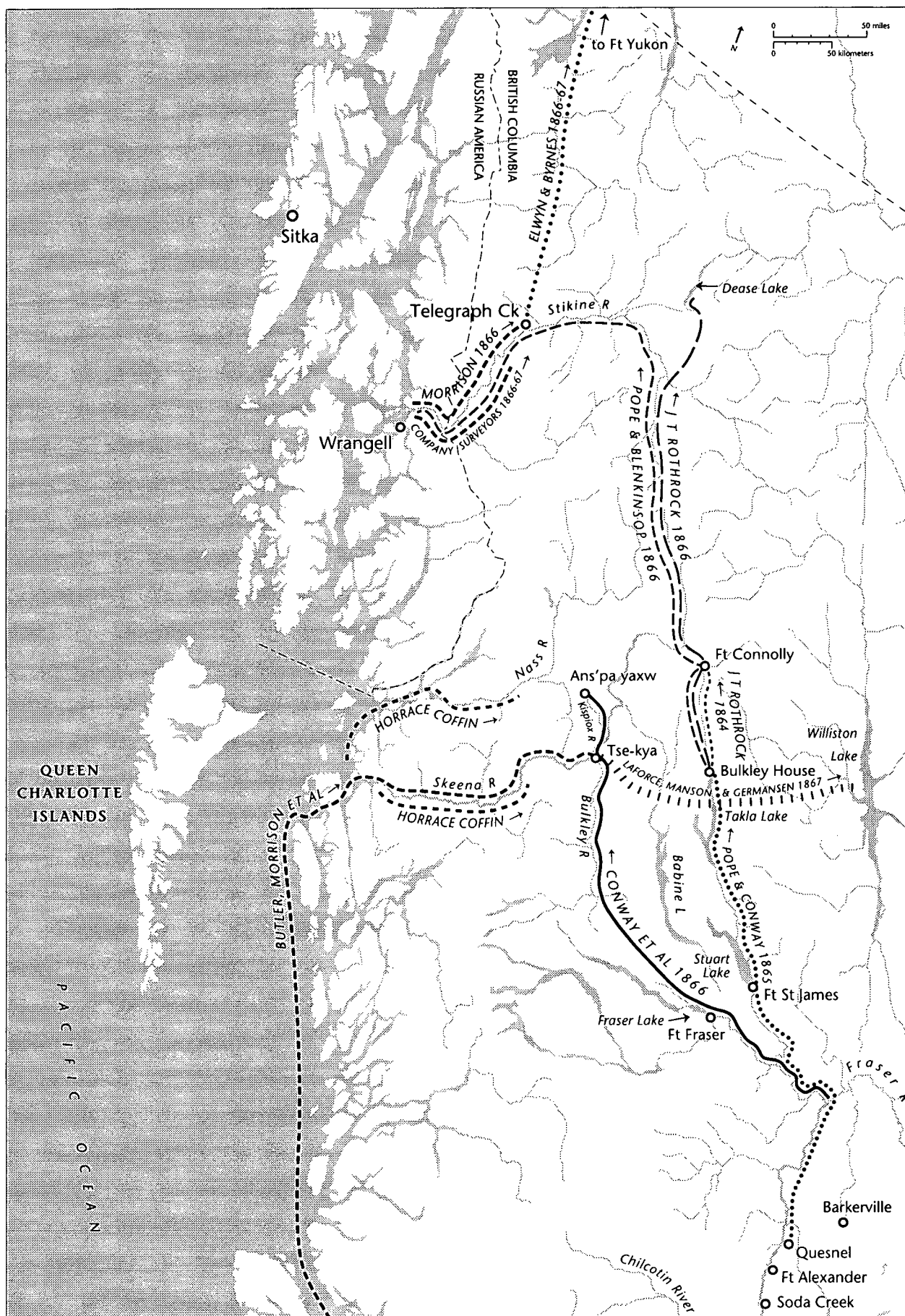
Conway lured Whites with ten days pay for signing on with the expedition. Including the afore-mentioned Natives and "the arrival of 25 Chinamen," he soon had "150 men; 86 in construction camp, 26 packers with 160 animals [and] 38 White men and Indians transporting supplies in bateaux between Quesnel and Fort Fraser."⁷⁰ Whether American, European, Chinese or Native, the workmen were all subject to the demands of corporate America.

⁶⁷ Conway to Pitfield, Quesnelmouth, May 1, 1866, p. 304.

⁶⁸ Conway to Arthur Birch, New West., Mar. 17, 1886, p. 287.

⁶⁹ Conway to Bulkley, San Francisco, Feb. 19, 1867, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 159.

⁷⁰ Conway to Bulkley, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 159.



Map 4. Telegraph explorations in British Columbia, 1865 to 1867.



Fig 10: Officers in the Interior

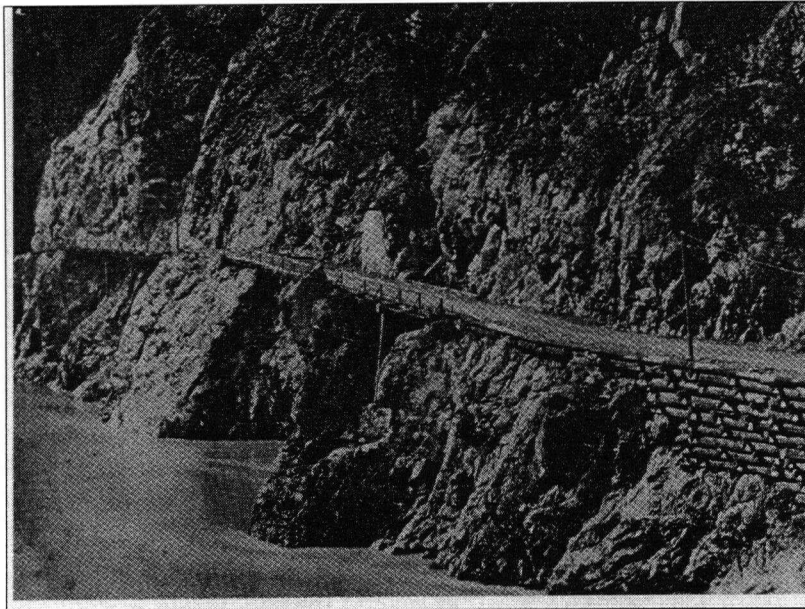


Fig 10: The Telegraph Line on the Cariboo Road

3.6. Explorations in 1866 and 1867.

Relying on Rothrock's, Pope's and his own observations, Conway chose not to construct the line along Takla Lake. Following the precise surveys of Michael Byrnes (after whom Burns Lake is named) conducted in May and June, Conway decided to go instead by Bulkley Valley to its junction with the Skeena. The route would head north along the Kispiox River, overland to the Nass and then to the Stikine. Rothrock and Pope had also been busy exploring. In March Rothrock travelled to Connolly's Lake, Lake Thutage and the Suskut River. Writing with hindsight in 1913, Rothrock thought he had reached the Cassiar Mountains, seventy miles south east of Dease Lake, but without map or compass he considered himself lost.⁷¹

A month earlier, Pope and George Blenkinsop left Bulkley House with "two Indians to assist in cutting firewood and carrying the provisions" for the "unknown wilderness" of the Stikine River, "hitherto.... a terra incognita even to the adventurous explorers and fur traders of the Hudson Bay Company."⁷²

More than a month later, they reached the head of the Stikine having exhausted their provisions while "accomplish[ing] but one hundred and fifty miles." Pope wrote that "we two excluding the Indians who, of course, wanted to return.... unanimously decided to 'go ahead.'" They continued, but on April 15 were taken in by a Native family with a very different lifestyle to that at Bulkley House: "We slept in the wigwam mixed up indiscriminately with the whole family - men, women, children, babes and 'cultus' dogs - seventeen humans and an indefinite number of curs, packed into a space of about fifteen feet square !"⁷³

⁷¹ Rothrock, p. 14.

⁷² Chapman, p. 45; *The Telegrapher*, Vol. 2, Aug. 15, 1866

⁷³ Chapman, p. 45.

Descending the river, they arrived at the Stikine Canyon where they clambered down ice along the canyon walls and up and down cliffs, using ropes to haul their dogs and baggage. Reaching Buck's Bar, site of an uneventful gold rush in 1862, they encountered "two other telegraph explorers dispatched from the 'lowere country'" to survey between the Stikine and Lake Babine.⁷⁴ Constructing a boat, Pope's men took three days to travel the 160 miles to the coast. There they found the Hudson's Bay Company vessel *Otter*, which took them to Victoria, presumably without their Native companions. Pope reported that their route was suitable for the speedy construction of a telegraph line. He should then have left with the Company for Kamchatka, but opted to return to Massachusetts.⁷⁵

At the same time, James Butler's party, including one Charles Morison, conveyed supplies up the Skeena to 'Mission Point,' ready for Conway's arrival from the south. Morison noted that on leaving New Westminster, "many of us, the writer included, did not even know where the Skeena River was."⁷⁶ They were taken along the coast by Captain Coffin in the new sternwheel steamer, *Mumford*. According to Morison, the *Mumford* was of little use on the Skeena: "Unsuited to western waters,.... her engines were good and powerful and the boiler splendid but her hull was impossible."⁷⁷ This was one of several expedition ships inadequately designed for manoeuvring through northern waters. Butler's party therefore canoed supplies up the Skeena, employing several Fort Simpson Natives, who, Morison recalled, soon deserted:

⁷⁴ Neering, p. 128. For details on Buck's Bar, see G. Large, *The Skeena: River of Destiny* (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1957).

⁷⁵ Chapman, p. 46; Chapman's draft of *Berkshire Courier* quotes George Kirby Holmes's "Tribute to the Springfield Pope Boys," Jan. 21, 1880. Pope, it seems, changed his mind on hearing of the laying of the Atlantic cable.

⁷⁶ Morison, p. 16.

⁷⁷ Morison, p. 19.

Their leading man, awed by the stupendous piece of work undertaken by the white men and thinking that the whole concern was the private property of Captain Butler, got it into his wise head that no single man could have enough money to pay all the help hired, so that when the work was completed, they, the Redmen could come out minus their wages and so persuaded them to decamp before they were ruined for life.⁷⁸

Butler found alternative workers at Metlakatla, a Tsimshian mission station led by the Anglican missionary William Duncan. Duncan let Butler employ several Tsimshian with the promise of cash at the end of the season. Well aware of the effects of alcohol and usually cautious about exposing his Native subjects to European influences, Duncan may have been attracted to Company policies of temperance and convinced of the scheme's moral legitimacy. Morison was well satisfied with Metlakatlan efforts under "Head-man Paul Legaic." He wrote: "These people together with a few Kitselas natives worked faithfully throughout the season in conjunction with our thirty-five White men."⁷⁹

Butler, however, criticised the Tsimshian Clah, an "underhanded, double-dealing rogue" who "happened to pass like an evil cloud."⁸⁰ Missionary Duncan, himself a disciplinarian, criticised Butler's strict management of the Metlakatlans: "Captain Butler mistakes the Indians altogether. He plans and commands as if he was among a number of soldiers."⁸¹

Ascending the Skeena, Butler had to pass through Kitselas Canyon, where a "Chief" threatened that his people "would throw rocks" on the telegraph men. The Kitselas Natives, concluded Morison, thought Butler's party was "a great fur trading company" that intended to

⁷⁸ Morison, p. 18.

⁷⁹ Morison, p. 18.

⁸⁰ Peter Murray, *The Devil and Mr. Duncan* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1985), p. 105. This was the same Clah that had taught William Duncan the Tsimshian language after Duncan arrived at Fort Simpson in 1857.

⁸¹ Journal of William Duncan, Aug. 3, 1866, as quoted in Jean Usher, *William Duncan of Metlakatla* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1974), p. 90.

"spoil their trade with the up-river Indians." In response, Butler exhibited his party's Colt repeating rifles, sharp combines and revolvers, while professing friendship to a Kitselas messenger. Whether the Natives were frightened or encouraged by Butler's deeds, they surrounded the canyon, "but instead of smashing us they tackled on to our tow-lines and drew us through the Canyon in triumph."⁸²

Morison was then put in charge of 25 Native freight canoes manned by Tsimshian labourers. Left alone at Mission Point while his colleagues fetched more supplies from Fort Simpson, "one hundred Hagwilgaits" came down "to look at the White boy." Of his many visitors, there was "only one woman amongst them, the old Chief's wife, their other women kept strictly away."⁸³ Stories of White exploitation of Native women probably preceded Morison. Butler, however, punished any telegraph men who "misbehaved" in Native villages. After Natives protested the conduct of one man, Butler discharged the accused but later reinstated him. Morison indicated nothing of the man's crime or the nature of the Native protest; Butler's punishment was perhaps a symbolic gesture to appease the Natives. Even so, Morison recorded that "after this incident, the men would simply do anything for Captain Butler."⁸⁴

Ascending the Bulkley River, Butler's men met Conway's "105 white men, 200 pack animals, numerous China cooks, all the baggage, a band of beef cattle and numerous Indians."⁸⁵ The Natives, including "Haidas, Tsimpseans, Bella Bellas, Bella Coolas, etc," were 'managed' in a more disciplined fashion than the Whites and Chinese:

⁸² Morison, p. 19.

⁸³ Morison, pp. 20-21.

⁸⁴ Morison, p. 21.

⁸⁵ Morison, p. 22.

These Indians, about twenty in number, went right through from Quesnel to Skeena River and were invaluable in certain kinds of work. They had an entirely separate camp from the white men, their own cook and last not least, their own boss. Wm McNeil, son of Chief Factor McNeil, H.[B]. Co, who knew thoroughly well how to handle them. All orders for the natives were given to McNeil and he saw them executed. He kept very much to himself but handled his men wonderfully well. With them his word was law, no strikes with them - if there was any striking to be done, McNeil did it himself; the Indians liked him and would do anything. He too has crossed the Great divide.⁸⁶

The line constructed to Kispiox, the men still had to bridge the Skeena river. A structure constructed by the Wet'su'wet'en was deemed unstable by foreman Steve Decker. He wanted to build a new bridge, but a Wet'su'wet'en medicine man objected:

The medicine man thinking very rightly that the advent of the white men amongst his people would destroy his power over them, told them that if the telegraph wire crossed the Skeena no more salmon would ascend that river and that all birds and animals crossing under or over the wire would instantly die.⁸⁷

With presents of tobacco, Charles Burrage explained the revenue that the Kispiox would derive with the telegraph. Eventually an agreement was reached, enabling Decker to reinforce their bridge (fig. 12) and causing the Natives to "turn on their wise man and chase him out of the Village."⁸⁸ Fearing retribution, Company firepower rather than Burrage's mention of economic incentives probably facilitated Wet'su'wet'en cooperation.

Reminiscing in the 1920s, Morison revealed his content with the telegraph work: "Ah! happy crowd we were, plenty of work, plenty to eat, not a car, no liquor, no city dissipation to

⁸⁶ Morison, p. 24.

⁸⁷ Morison, p. 24.

⁸⁸ Morison, p. 25.

mar our beauty. The writer often sighs for those old times." He had relative freedom, no money worries and perhaps felt more powerful than in 'civilisation.' His work on the Skeena soon finished when Conway, listening to news over the telegraph, announced: "Boys, the Atlantic Cable has been successfully laid.... I expect our work is now over."⁸⁹ The men had constructed about 375 miles of line to Kispiox, and 450 miles of road along what is now called Telegraph Trail, heading north to Nass River and beyond. Of this they were proud; Conway reported to Bulkley that they "constructed, in every respect, a first class line."⁹⁰

For the Wet'su'wet'en of Tse-kya, the emotions were very different; times had not been good. In 1862 the village suffered an outbreak of small pox. One commentator estimates that only one hundred villagers remained by 1866.⁹¹ The telegraph men brought new dangers including guns, strange gadgets and a confident belief in their civilising mission. Convinced that they brought modern progress, and perhaps spiritual salvation to the Wet'su'wet'en, the telegraph men criticised and colonised Native lifeworlds. They also perceived that Native blame on the Whites for the failure of the salmon run merely indicated their child-like ignorance. Such ethnocentrism legitimised colonial imposition. It was therefore Decker's considered right to reinforce the bridge over the Skeena, to construct a telegraph line through Native land, and to build a telegraph station at 'Fort Stager,' the White name for the place that the Wet'su'wet'en called Kispiox and the Gitksan called Ans'pa yaxw. Tse-kya was also renamed Hagwilget, and later became Hazelton.

The Gitksan and Wet'su'wet'en peoples feared the telegraph men's ability to systematically colonise their world. John Brown, a Wet'su'wet'en Native in the 1920s and clearly

⁸⁹ Morison, pp. 24-25.

⁹⁰ Conway to Bulkley, pp. 303-304.

⁹¹ Maureen Cassidy, *The Gathering Place: A History of the Wet'suwet'en Village of Tse-kya* (Hagwilget Band Council: Hagwilget, 1987), p. 22.

unhappy with contemporary colonial authority, wrote of his ancestors' fears:

Our people heard the news that matask mtu'ls, 'the talking wire' was coming, was on its way, was not far off. They were concerned. All that could be learnt about it was that it would tell many things, reveal treasured secrets. Someone said 'Any man wanting to know all about another man would find it easy; all he had to do was to touch the wire; and the wire would leave nothing concealed....

Many of the people were troubled; when they heard of the approach of this new monster.... the very thought that everybody could hear what was said in public was, in truth, enough to worry the people.⁹²

Brown does not specify who was hearing, but presumably referred to Whites who used this "monster" to eradicate traditional Native freedoms. The villagers would surely have happily seen the telegraph men depart with their Tsimshian assistants, a historic enemy of the Gitksan. Perhaps Native rivalries were played out unbeknown to Conway's men.⁹³

The telegraph party returned to the coast where most were paid off. However, Morison and a colleague were sent to supervise Company supplies at Wrangell in Russian America, near the mouth of the Stikine. The Tsimshian Chief, Paul Legaic, transported them in fresh canoes obtained at Metlakatla, where, according to Morison, William Duncan just "stared at them."⁹⁴

At Wrangell, Morison was sent up the Stikine to Buck's Bar, which the telegraph men had renamed Telegraph Creek with its function as a Company supply post.⁹⁵ That summer seven men had been sent with supplies up the Stikine, establishing a small post they called Shakesville, before moving their headquarters up-river to Telegraph Creek. For the rest of winter Morison remained at Wrangell for a monthly wage of one hundred and fifty dollars and board. Morison

⁹² John Brown, Marius Barbeau Coll., Northwest Coast files, n.d., B-f 206.3, as quoted in Cassidy, p. 23.

⁹³ Maureen Cassidy, in *From Mountain to Mountain: A History of the Gitksan Village of Ans'pa yaxw* (Ans'pa yaxw: Ans'pa yaxw School Society, 1984), tells of a Tsimshian chief, Ligyeeex, who, 160 years ago, led some war canoes to Ans'pa yaxw. Pretending to be a trader, Ligyeeex attacked the Gitksan villagers. Those who fled were attracted back by Ligyeeex's umbrella, a sight hitherto unseen, and then captured and sold to the Haida as slaves. This was probably not the same Paul Legaic who worked with the telegraph men, but was, perhaps, an earlier chief.

⁹⁴ Morison, p. 26.

⁹⁵ See Edward Hoagland, *Notes From the Century Before: A Journal From British Columbia* (New York: Random House, 1969), pp. 3-5.

considered that if work continued, he "should be Johnny on the spot."⁹⁶ Thomas Elwyn, the stipendiary magistrate, arrived briefly with fifteen men before surveying between the upper Stikine and the Yukon. In 1868, after the Hudson's Bay Company ship *Otter* brought news of the operation's cancellation, Morison returned to New Westminster.

So ended the work in British Columbia. Conway became a Western Union superintendent in Utah, but in 1876 returned to the "infernal country" of British Columbia to rebuild the line from Victoria to Seattle. He died of a lung hemorrhage at Victoria in 1878. Morison became a Hudson's Bay Company agent at Fort Simpson, and later an accountant and merchant. In 1933 he died at Metlakatla in his beloved northern British Columbia.⁹⁷ Pope returned to Massachusetts to edit *The Telgrapher*. He studied electronics, patented a type-printing system useful for telegraphic communication, and was appointed an executive of Western Union. He died in 1895 after accidentally electrocuting himself "while experimenting with transformers."⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Morison, p. 30. At Wrangell, Morison noted and reported the illegal whisky-trading activities of the schooner *Gazelle*.

⁹⁷ Neering, *Continental Dash*, p. 213.

⁹⁸ Chapman, p. 47.

3.7. Northern Exposure.

Earlier, I contended that William Cronon's assertion that the railroad helped construct a "second nature" in the American Middle West is helpful in understanding how the telegraph affected British Columbia. Of course, British Columbia and the American Middle West are different places, but in both, "tentacles of progress" facilitated distinctive new geographies.

Unlike Cronon's railroads, the Collins line was neither a network nor permanent. The line worked irregularly and only to Quesnel, some 450 miles from New Westminster. Western Union continued to operate the "loss-making" line with a Government subsidy of \$4500, but never extended the line to Barkerville, the economic hub of the Cariboo.⁹⁹ Thomas Buie, a Justice of the Peace from Lytton, independently financed such a line in 1868.¹⁰⁰ The line north of Quesnel was manned, probably to protect Western Union equipment, but rarely used.¹⁰¹

In October 1869, Western Union offered "the Government of British Columbia an absolute gift of their telegraph line, offices, instruments and office machinery.... north to Quesnel."¹⁰² However, if Western Union's "loss-making" line from Portland to British Columbia was to remain open, the Government was to maintain its subsidy. The cash-strapped Government contributed \$4500 for the Portland line, but abandoned the line to Quesnel. The latter was reopened in May 1870, probably to assist British Columbia's claim to join Canada.¹⁰³ When British Columbia became part of Canada in February 1871, the Dominion Government took over the line.

⁹⁹ F. H. Lamb to Arthur Birch (Colonial Secretary), Mar. 1, 1869, PABC, Colonial Correspondence, F899a.3.

¹⁰⁰ Wade, p. 243.

¹⁰¹ For example, Jack McCutcheon remained at Fort Stager (Ans'pa yaxw) until 1869. See Cassidy, *From Mountain to Mountain*.

¹⁰² F. H. Lamb to Birch, Oct. 21, 1869, PABC, Col. Corr., F899a.3.

¹⁰³ Colonial Secretary to George Mumford, May 20, 1870, PABC, Col. Corr., F71 11.

Poor as it was, the telegraph facilitated the growth of communication hubs, such as New Westminster and Victoria (Western Union having laid a small underwater cable to the mainland on April 25, 1866), connecting British Columbia to the United States and the world beyond. As the British Consul at Victoria put it, the Western Union had "wired the tail of the British lion to the left wing of the American Eagle."¹⁰⁴ These connections enabled legal, political and military power to emanate from these metropolises and entwine the periphery within colonial British Columbia and the British empire. Such was the telegraph's importance that the Government willingly subsidised the Collins line until 1869, and the Portland line until confederation.

The telegraph also affected the cultural life of British Columbians. Especially notable was its impact on newspapers. From April 27, 1865, New Westminster's *British Columbian* began to print its "By Telegraph" column. This news, American-dominated at first, took up to two weeks to arrive from the Atlantic. However, by August 1, news arrived of the laying of the Atlantic cable and of events in Europe four days previous. Irregular at first, but with increasing consistency, the line from California brought American and European news to New Westminster faster and more frequently than ever before.

On October 18, 1865, the *British Columbian* published its first "By Collins Overland Telegraph" column, a "special dispatch" from Quesnel. The column's continuation, sporadic at best, depended on the line's operability. The Collins line was useful to Alexander Andersen's *Cariboo Sentinel* in Barkerville, which printed its "First Direct Telegraphic Despatch" on September 9, 1865. International news could more easily reach Barkerville, but given the line's inefficiency it might have arrived just as quickly by stagecoach or steamer. The telegraph did not revolutionise the Cariboo, but, with its connection to New Westminster and the British Empire, improved linkages.

¹⁰⁴ British Consul to *British Colonist*, Apr. 25, 1866, p. 1.

By and large, methods of constructing the telegraph were new in the colony: the hierarchical division of labour, Conway's methodical management, and emphasis on efficiency were increasingly typical of mid-19th Century modes of production. If the descriptions of Wade and Morison can be trusted, construction resembled a modern production line. Of course, hierarchical labour relations existed in Hudson's Bay Company operations, wagon road construction and many independent mining ventures. Nevertheless, the distant and disciplined control of labour's time and movements differentiated Western Union's labour management from that of the Hudson's Bay Company.

These differences were evident in the 'management' of Native peoples. For the Hudson's Bay Company, Native participation was essential, but strict control of their time and movements was not. Western Union, in contrast, constrained Native agency, reducing their identities to units of production. If Natives did not follow orders, they would be punished; if they fulfilled their job obligations, they received wages. In this respect, they were treated little differently to the Company's Chinese workers. With low wages and menial jobs (including packing, carrying and transporting telegraph goods), they were incorporated into an ethnic division of labour, disciplined by local managers and distant shareholders. This appropriation of their bodies was part of the colonisation of their worlds by Europeans and Americans. Such ideologies of work would later become common in northern fish canneries and in the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

Increasingly, the powerful imposition of modern notions of work, wages, and management would become incorporated into Native societies. Native peoples, particularly in the south of the colony, were having to accommodate to European patterns of work. As land was taken away and traditional self-sufficiency declined, Native peoples looked elsewhere to make a living. The telegraph provided a brief opportunity to work for a wage. This, I think, affected

some Native attitudes toward the new colonial order, and in their own communities indirectly affected traditional notions of family, money and work. For example, all Native telegraph workers were men, probably affecting Native women and children, who, to some extent, would have depended on the man's wage.

Given the future success of such corporate strategies, the struggles of Chief Engineer Ed. Conway are perhaps surprising. His disciplined vision of work, while effective in producing a five hundred mile telegraph line, resulted in great personal distress. Entrusted with managing telegraph construction, he frantically managed former fur traders, gold miners, Chinese and Natives, many of whom were more accustomed to living independently on the British Columbian 'frontier.'

Conway also helped survey the telegraph line. Herein was another impact of the telegraph. The Second Edition of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* indicates that "three institutions.... the census, the map, and the museum.... profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominion - the nature of the human beings it ruled, the geography of its domain, and the legitimacy of its ancestry."¹⁰⁵ In a sense, telegraph surveyors helped establish all such institutions. Maps by John Clayton White and D.F. Lewis identified a telegraph route north of the Skeena.¹⁰⁶ This route provided easy access to the northern interior; it was revived in 1898 for the telegraph line to the Yukon and Klondike goldfields.¹⁰⁷ The northern interior was imaginatively mapped by Pope, Conway, and Rothrock, while Coffin, Butler and Morison revealed to Europeans and Americans the navigability of the Skeena, Nass and Stikine. Increasingly, a White identity was superimposed on such places. Stories of Bulkley House, for

¹⁰⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Rev. Ed., pp. 163-164.

¹⁰⁶ See J. F. Lewis's "Route of telegraph line constructed and working," Jan. 1, 1866, PABC, Microfilms, CM A376; J. C. White's "American Division: route of Western union Telegraph Line - Quesnel Mouth to fishery north of Fort Stager," CM A340 and "...Yale to Quesnel Mouth," CM A372; and J. C. White, "Route of telegraph line constructed and working, October 2nd, 1866," CM A374. Originals at Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.

¹⁰⁷ See Guy Lawrence, *Forty Years on the Yukon Telegraph* (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1965).

example, gave the interior a new history, one in which the Native existence and past was peripheral. Such appropriations legitimised these newly-surveyed places in the 'wilderness' as routeways, as sites of opportunity for mining and fishing, and as places to be civilised.

For the Native peoples of the northern interior, these 'discoveries' were a double blow. Colonialists, after the telegraph work, knew that they could enter the north by an overland route through Bulkley Valley or by major rivers from the coast. New corridors of power assisted the entry of White government, capital, Christian missions and settlement into Native worlds, thereby dispossessing Natives of their homes, ideas, traditions, faiths and languages, processes already taking place due to the efforts of William Duncan and others. It was no coincidence that places such as Telegraph Creek on the Stikine, and Prince Rupert and Hazelton on the Skeena would become colonial foci, places where powerful Europeans and Americans could establish and consolidate their hold.

Such knowledge of northern landscapes was coupled with information on Native populations. Conway's 1865 report to the Western Union indicated his observations of the indigenous population and their 'uncivilised' state. This information was not only useful for estimating Native attitudes toward the telegraph work, but also for assisting colonial appropriation of Native worlds. With it, governments, capitalists, missionaries and the military could more ably form decisions about managing Native peoples. As such, Natives were not just numbers, but exhibits to be gazed upon and transformed by Whites; in effect to become part of a living "museum."

Without a doubt, the telegraph men were important agents in the colonial appropriation of the north, but their contribution must not be exaggerated. Geographer Bob Galois reminds us of the temporary nature of the Telegraph Expedition:

A few miners/prospectors traversed the area; the HBC operated a port (Ackwilgate), near the confluence of the Skeena and Bulkley, between 1866 and 1868; the Collins Overland Telegraph (COT) reached, briefly, as far as Kispiox; and missionaries had made passing overtures. Despite such developments, much of the Upper Skeena remained unknown to whites and lacked permanent white residents.¹⁰⁸

Nevertheless, with the telegraph men, "the effects of the new economy of southern British Columbia reached the Upper Skeena region."¹⁰⁹ Several telegraph men wintering there in 1866 remained; subsequently, "the mining area of Vital, Manson and Germansen Creeks in the Omineca District was opened up."¹¹⁰ Indeed, Vital creek was named after a French-Canadian expedition member, Vital Laforce.¹¹¹

3.8. Concluding Comments.

In summary, the telegraph constructors came and went, but the modern geography of British Columbia reveals their deeds. The telegraph helped metropolitan New Westminster and Victoria secure economic, political and cultural power. In the interior the work of the telegraph men is revealed in any contemporary road map. Where the telegraph was operational, economic, social and political development was facilitated. Immigrant activities therefore stretched between New Westminster and Quesnel, along what is now Highway 97. Surveyed routes north of Quesnel, despite being without a working telegraph, were also geographically significant. Gordon Elliott, a Quesnel historian, writes that with the gold excitement of Vital, Manson and Germansen Creeks in 1871, "eight hundred animals, mostly laden with provisions, had crossed the Fraser....

¹⁰⁸ Bob Galois, "The Burning of Kitsegukla," *B.C. Studies*, Summer, 1992, p. 64.

¹⁰⁹ Galois, p. 64.

¹¹⁰ Large, p. 27.

¹¹¹ A. G. Morice, *The History of the Northern Interior of British Columbia*, Repub. Ed. (Smithers, B.C.: Interior Stationary, 1978), p. 320.

and passed over the road built by G.B. Wright to the Blackwater country, but mapped originally by Edmund Conway."¹¹² The road remains there today.

In the Skeena and Bulkley Valleys, routes taken by Conway, Coffin and Butler eventually became Highway 16 between Vanderhoof and Prince Rupert. Indeed, Decker Lake and Burns Lake were named after engineer Steve Decker and surveyor Michael Byrnes.¹¹³ Information of the region's habitability and economic potential diffused south. As new immigrants came north, Native peoples were dislocated. With White settlement in Hazelton, Wet'su'wet'en and Gitksan peoples were marginalised and ultimately resettled within the bounds of reserves allocated by whites.

I am reminded of *Down the Road*, Rosemary Neering's fascinating travelogue around the small towns of B.C. On one occasion, she travelled through Kitselas Canyon on the Skeena, where Butler and Morison feared Native resistance in 1866:

River gave way to rail, and rail to road. The Kitselas natives moved away, to other homes and villages. The white village, with its hotel, church and houses, faded back into the bush. Now the canyon is not even a whistle stop on the rail line or marked by any sign on the road, and its mention brings puzzled frowns to the faces of the people I ask.¹¹⁴

For me, Morison and Butler were integral to the transformation that Neering describes. Their route became part of the passage of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway from Edmonton to Prince Rupert. New settlers, attracted by the reputed prospects of the Skeena, brought houses, churches and a way of life, while forcing Kitselas Natives elsewhere. As Prince Rupert, Hazelton and Smithers became regional centres, small immigrant communities such as Kitselas

¹¹² Gordon Elliott, *Quesnel: Commercial Centre of the Cariboo Gold Rush* (Quesnel: Cariboo Historical Society, 1959), p. 53.

¹¹³ James W. Phillips, *Alaska-Yukon Place Names* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973).

¹¹⁴ Rosemary Neering, *Down the Road: Journeys Through Small-town British Columbia* (Vancouver: Whitecap, 1991), p. 35.

disappeared; all Neering now finds are "three taciturn natives in an old pickup truck, licence plates expired, loading firewood and long barked poles."¹¹⁵

In other words, modern British Columbia is steeped in references to the Russian-American Telegraph. William Butler, travelling through British Columbia in 1873, saw signs of a disintegrated telegraph line, which, for him, symbolised nature's reclamation of civilisation:

Crossing the wide Nacharcole River, and continuing south for a few miles, we reached a broadly cut trail which bore curious traces of past civilisation. Old telegraph poles stood at intervals along the forest-cleared opening, and rusted wire hung in loose festoons down from their tops, or lay tangled amid the growing brushwood of the cleared space. A telegraph in the wilderness ! What did it mean ?¹¹⁶

Not all the wire went to waste. At Hazelton, some Natives made a new bridge out of it (fig. 13).¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Neering, *Down the Road*, p. 36.

¹¹⁶ William Butler, *The Wild North Land* (London: N.P., 1873), as quoted in G. P. V. and Helen Akrigg, *British Columbia Chronicle, 1847-71: Gold and Colonists* (Vancouver: Discovery Press, 1977), p. 329.

¹¹⁷ See Sperry 'Dutch' Cline, "The Bridges at Hagwilget," *Pioneer Days in British Columbia*, Vol. 2, ed. Art Downs (Surrey, B.C.: Heritage House, 1975), pp. 32-35.

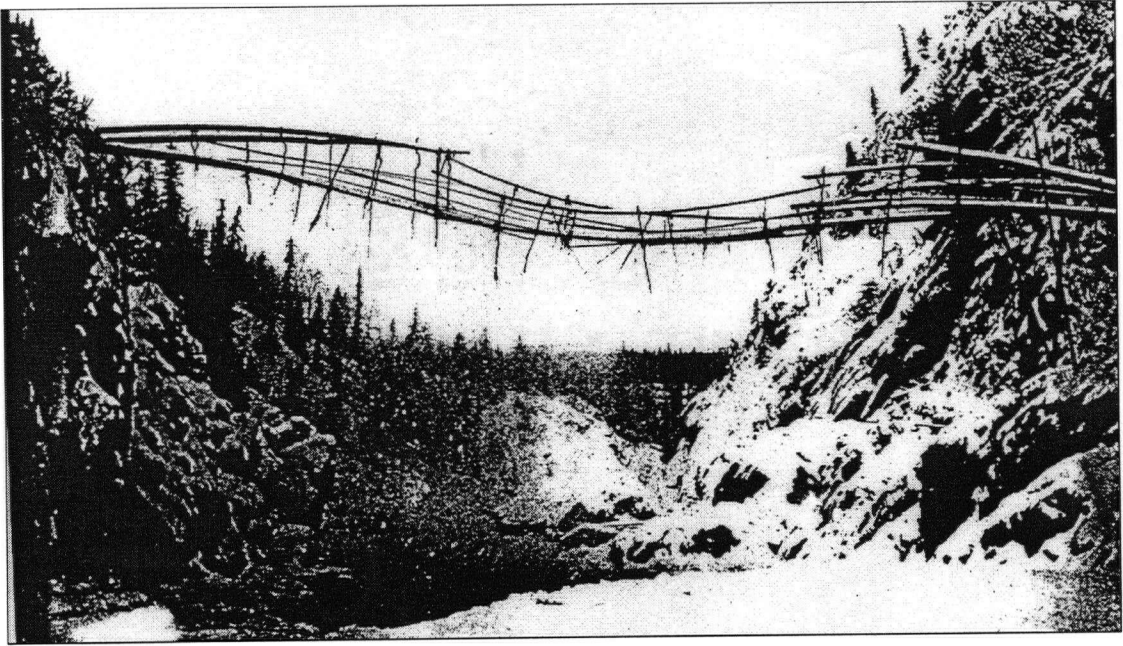


Fig 12: The Reinforced Native Bridge at Hagwilget

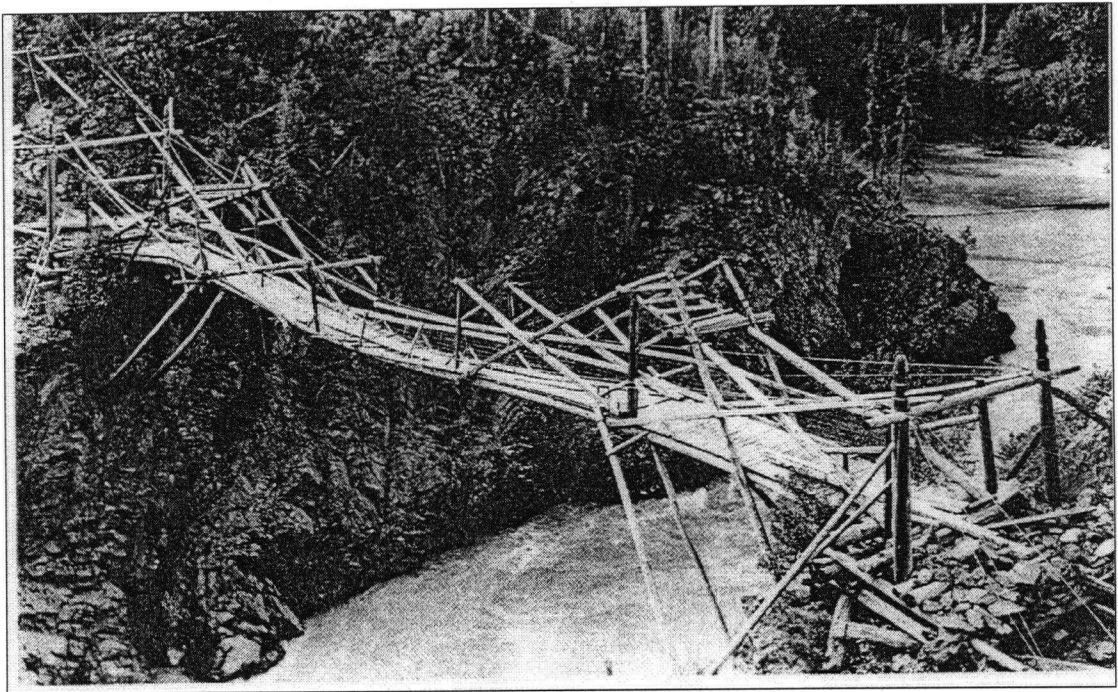
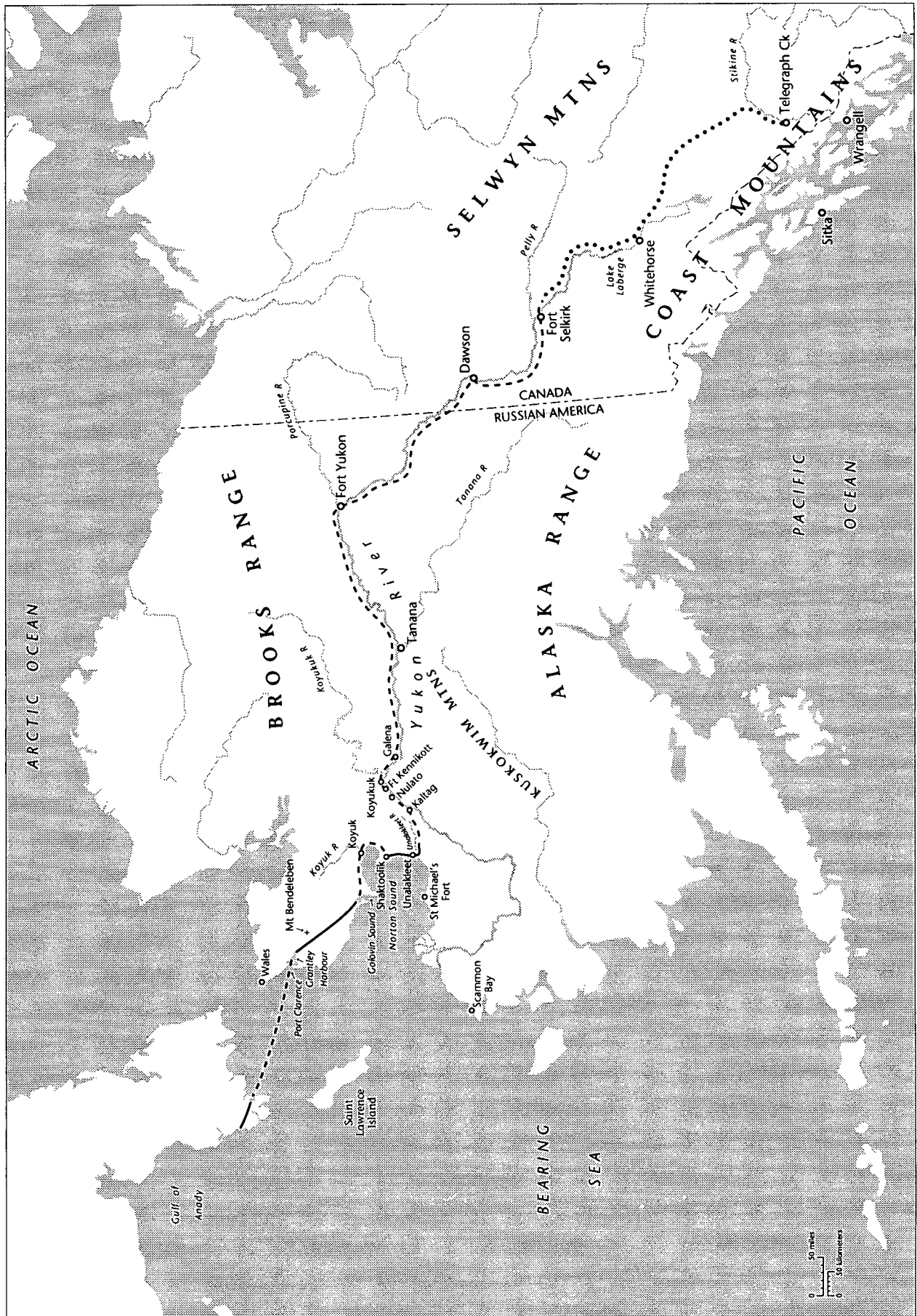


Fig 13: The Hagwilget Bridge Made of Telegraph Wire



Map 5. Progress of the telegraph line in Russian America by 1867.



Fig 14: Robert Kennicott, 'Major' of Explorations in Russian America

Chapter 4 - Building a Telegraph in the Frigid Zone: Russian America and the Yukon.

4.1. Natives, Europeans and an American.

Despite Russian claims of ownership, there had been little European involvement in Russian America by the 1860s. This was partly due to the vast expanses of mountains, icefields, glaciers, volcanoes, fjords and forest that made the interior virtually impenetrable. It was also a long way from European and American imperial cores. Imagined in Russia and America as cold and barren, it was deemed unsuitable for colonisation.

Russian America retained a predominantly aboriginal population: the Inuit lived in the far north around the Arctic slope and Herschel Island; the inland Tlingit lived near the southern lakes and Athapaskan peoples lived in the Yukon region; along the Panhandle were the coastal Tlingit; and the Aleuts predominated on the Aleutian Islands.¹ Trade linked the various peoples, but with the arrival of the Russians and the British, European trade was integrated into these indigenous systems.

By the mid-nineteenth Century, Russian settlement on the coast had considerably affected Tlingit and Aleut societies. Peter the Great ordered the first expedition of the north Pacific to discover a route from Pacific to the Arctic coast of Siberia. From 1723 to 1724, explorers led by Vitus Bering brought knowledge of valuable Aleutian sea otter furs to Russia. The Russian American Company was formed in 1796 to exploit these resources. It initiated Russian settlement of North America by forcing 'criminals' from European Russia into Company service and enslaving many Aleuts and Tlingit.

¹ Ken Coates and William Morrison, *Land of the Midnight Sun: A History of the Yukon* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1988), p. 9.

Russian settlements were small and scattered. English artist Frederick Whympers described Sitka on Baranoff Island, the Russian American capital with a population of several hundred, as "the only 'city' in the country."² Russian outposts, most of them fortified, were dotted along the coast, on the Aleutians and in the Panhandle, but did not extend far inland. Several hundred miles up the Yukon River, or Kwikhpak as the Russians called it, the British Hudson's Bay Company had built Fort Yukon at the river's junction with the Porcupine River, and Fort Selkirk on the Pelly River. Fort Yukon was especially profitable; its prime marten pelts fetched high prices in Europe. The Yukon fur trade entailed interaction, not always harmonious, with Natives. Traders at Fort Yukon feared Native attack and European diseases afflicted Native populations. During a scarlet fever epidemic in 1865, many Natives fled Fort Yukon, carrying the deadly germs to other Natives.³

Given Russian and British interest in the north, it is surprising that from the late 1850s the Americans were keen to purchase Russian America. Apart from American coastal traders, only one American seriously investigated the region. Robert Kennicott (fig. 14), a much-respected twenty-four year old scientist from New Orleans, was recruited in 1860 by Spencer Fullerton Baird of the Smithsonian Institute to research the zoology of the sub-Arctic. With the permission of Governor Simpson of the Hudson's Bay Company, Kennicott crossed the Mackenzie Valley to Fort Yukon. Assisted by several Hudson's Bay Company traders, many "suffering from intellectual starvation," he collected flora and fauna until 1862.⁴ His natural history collections, Native artifacts, and reports enhanced the Smithsonian Institute's knowledge of the north. Three years later, Kennicott would lead the next major American expedition to the far northwestern interior of the continent, this time to construct a section of the Russian-American Telegraph.

² Frederick Whympers, *Travel and Adventures in the Territory of Alaska* (London: John Murray, 1868), p. 73.

³ Coates and Morrison, pp. 29-31

⁴ Coates and Morrison, p. 34.

4.2. Great American Expectations....

In the Western Union Extension Company's *Statement* of 1866, the directors "confidently expected" the line to be "open and ready for the regular transmission of messages" by 1867 at the latest.⁵ The directors presumed that the most difficult part of the North American section was "a portion of British Columbia."⁶ In Russian America, the route planned by Collins and Bulkley would descend the Yukon River from Fort Yukon to the Pacific coast, then follow the coast to Grantley Harbour on Bering Strait. There it would connect with a 178 mile underwater cable laid across Bering Strait to Plover Bay in eastern Siberia.⁷ The only apparent problem with this section was the uncertainty whether the British-named Yukon River was the Russian-named Kwikhpak River. Nonetheless, work on the telegraph, carried out by determined young men, and in the rhetoric of the Western Union, sanctioned by God, would prevail. It would connect America to Europe, 'civilise' the places between, and endow the Western Union with considerable profits.

The men hired to work on the Russian-American section were convinced of the project's worth for their own reasons. At San Francisco in the spring and summer of 1865, a motley collection of male explorers eagerly awaited the section's departure. Robert Kennicott was appointed the Major of Explorations, and also leader of the Science Corps, responsible for collecting specimens, measuring climate and gathering ethnographic data for the Smithsonian Institute. Some of the Science Corps, such as J.T. Rothrock and Henry Elliott, had already left for northern British Columbia, but scientists Frank Ketchum, Charles Pease, Ferdinand Bischoff and

⁵ 'Organization for the Expedition,' *Statement*, p. 15.

⁶ John Cochrane representing the Committee on Commerce to the House of Representatives, Feb. 18, 1861, 36th Cong., 2d Sess., Report No. 82, "Survey of the Northern Waters, Coasts and Islands of the Pacific Ocean," as quoted in *Statement*, p. 25.

⁷ 'Organization for the Expedition,' *Statement*, p. 15.

Henry Bannister - the latter having just returned from British Columbia - were to work on the line in Russian America.⁸ They would also investigate the place's scientific riches, confidently expecting to obtain new 'scientific' knowledge invaluable for the advancement of their careers.

Also present were several young adventurers and opportunists. William Ennis, for example, "had served for five years as an American naval officer, then spent five months travelling overland from the east to the Pacific, arriving with neither friends nor money."⁹ In San Francisco he "enjoyed the world and his pleasures," but was attracted to the Russian-American Telegraph Expedition by the promise of adventure and a chance to see "the Esquimaux."¹⁰

Another man, George Adams (fig. 15), after a "pointless life of drinking, cards and billiards," responded to Kennicott's challenge that the chosen men would need guts and willpower by lighting a cigarette and applying it to his bare arm.¹¹ The expedition gave him new hope, an opportunity to restore his fallen pride and masculine dignity. Young, fit, enthusiastic and adventurous, Adams was typical of the men appointed to the expedition. As Frederick Whymper put it: "The men selected by Colonel Bulkley were nearly all young and hardly one beyond the prime of life."¹² Ennis wrote of his colleagues, who, proud of their selection for arctic adventure, paraded their masculinity in San Francisco:

Many other young men whom I chanced to meet in my walks through 'Frisco' dressed in full uniform of the Company and doubtless captivated many of those young ladies who have an eye for brilliant objects. All passed for Lieutenants and Captains on the Col's staff. Whether under their brilliant uniforms lurked the germs of a Napoleon or a Newton I was then unable to say, but subsequently discovered that there was more brass than brains encompassing their persons.¹³

⁸ James Alton James, *The First Scientific Exploration of Russian America and the Purchase of Alaska* (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1942), p. 19.

⁹ Neering, p. 34.

¹⁰ Harold Taggart, ed., "Journal of William H. Ennis - Part 1," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 1, March, 1954, p. 3.

¹¹ Neering, p.34; George R. Adams, *Life on the Yukon, 1865-1867*, ed., Richard Pierce (Kingston: The Limestone Press, 1982), p.20, Autobiographical Sketch.

¹² Whymper, p. 70.

¹³ Taggart, p.5.



Fig 15: George Adams



Fig 16: Bendeleben, Smith, Chappell, Ennis, Adams and Denison.

Fig 17: William Healey Dall, Aged 21



Fig 18: Mike Lebarge

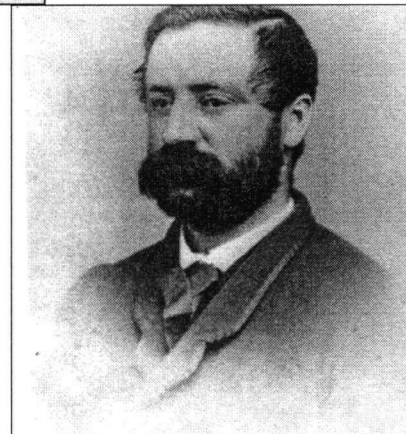
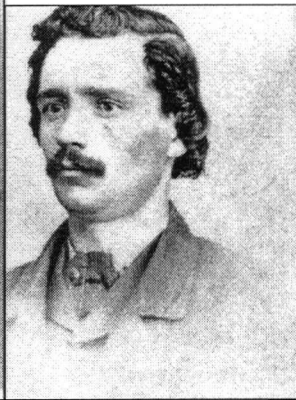


Fig 19: Frank Ketchum



Fig 20: Company Base at Fort St Michael's (Whymper, 1868)

They left for Russian America on July 10, 1865, in the *Golden Gate* and *George S. Wright*. Coming together as male adventurers, they bonded as they ate "hash" and "duff" pudding, and listened to the "Quartette" of Joseph Dyer, Joe Denison, Fred Smith and Adams.¹⁴

At Sitka they received a warm welcome, but several days later their vessels were encircled by Native canoes. A frightened lieutenant pumped water on the Natives, thereby causing their hostility. Colonel Bulkley and Captain Scammon dealt with the Natives, Ennis claimed, by impressing them with military splendour and friendly words:

The day after the occurrence the Indians were seen haranguing the men and setting forth their grievances. This looked badly for us, strangers as we were on our first visit into a strange country to secure the ill will of the natives. The Col., noting the way affairs were taking, determined to assemble the chiefs on board and receive them in magnificent style. So on the next day all the officers from the various ships assembled in full uniform on board the *Golden Gate*, while the Col. and Capt. Scammon with epaulets and side arms strode the gangway ready to receive the Red Men. Soon they came on board when speeches were made. After which the chiefs were taken into the cabin and sat down too a sumptuous repast - thus indeed the great "Pow Wow" with the Colloshes.¹⁵

The men were confident; they had already dealt with angry Natives. At Sitka Bulkley had gathered information about the Yukon and Anadyr, and Ennis had enjoyed his exploits with his "lady friends Madams I. A. K. M."¹⁶ Set for great adventure where few white men had ventured, the men hoped to impose a measure of civilisation on a wild, cold land. The ships left Sitka on August 22 for the Redoubt of St. Michael's on Norton Sound, where the *Kwikhpak* entered the ocean.

¹⁴ Taggart, p. 7.

¹⁵ Harold Taggart, ed., "Journal of William H. Ennis - Part 2," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No.2, June, 1954, p. 149.

¹⁶ Taggart, p. 149. Madam 'M.' was likely "Princess Matsukoff," wife of Governor General Prince Matsukoff.

4.3.And an Unknowingly Daunting Environment.

Kennicott's men considered that they knew enough of Russian America to survey a telegraph route. With their maps, newly-acquired information, and Kennicott's knowledge of the Yukon, they anticipated to have determined the exact route by spring. That autumn and winter, Kennicott would survey from Norton Sound to the Kwikhpak River. If the Kwikhpak was also the Yukon, he could canoe to Fort Yukon and meet Pope's men coming north from British Columbia. Meanwhile, Ennis and Otto Bendeleben would lead surveys between Norton Sound and Grantley Harbour on Bering Strait. Construction would begin in the spring, and the line in Russian America, most thought, should be working by 1867.

However, even Kennicott knew little about the region to which they were going, even less about the intricacies of physical processes in arctic environments. First, the telegraph men expected a plentiful supply of trees from which poles could be cut. While the Yukon Valley was largely forested, the men did not realise that there were few trees west of Norton Bay. Second, they knew something of the cold and its effects, but little of its severity, particularly inland. Temperatures reaching -60 degrees Celsius would make outdoor work rather uncomfortable, but permafrost and active layer processes would prove especially significant.

In tundra environments sub-surface ground is permanently frozen, sometimes to a depth of several hundred metres. At the surface the ground alternately freezes and thaws as temperatures move above and below freezing point. In summer this 'active layer' thaws to a depth of a few inches and becomes "a soggy, spongy mass."¹⁷ If telegraph poles are not set into the permanently frozen ground (up to six metres below the surface), they become unstable and

¹⁷ J. Lewis Robinson, *Concepts and Themes in the Regional Geography of Canada*, Rev. Ed. (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1989), p. 253.

collapse in the 'marshy soup.' Even then, they might be dislodged by frost heave, upfreeze and upturning processes.¹⁸

Furthermore, spring floods could affect the telegraph route, particularly along river valleys. Should the men survey the Yukon in autumn, a season of low flow, they might return in spring to find their chosen route under water. Neither dog nor human could journey far on such marshy ground, so canoeing along rivers was essential. In winter, when rivers and active layers froze over, the men would journey overland by dog sleigh or by foot.

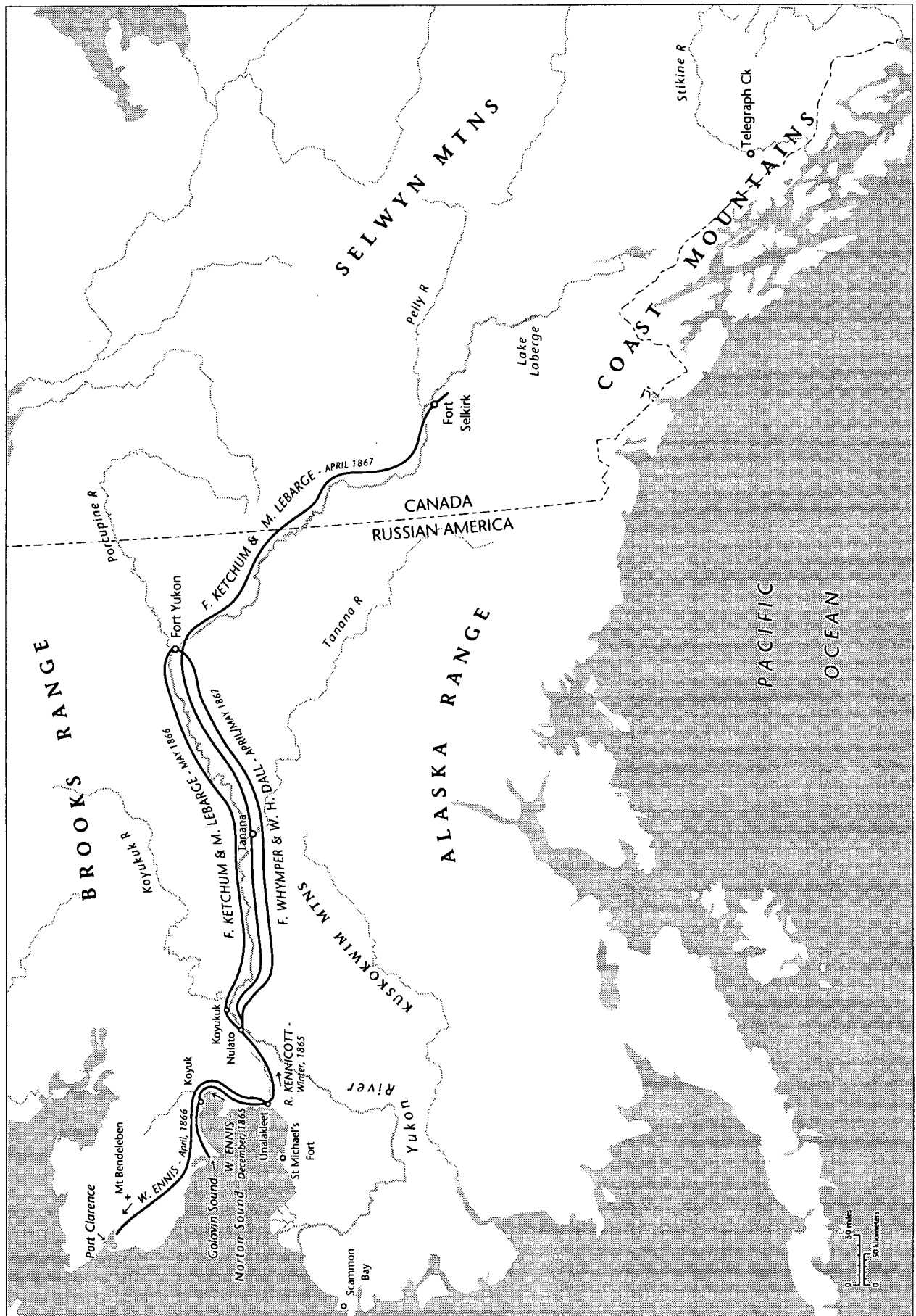
The men's optimism was hopelessly unrealistic. Using their limited knowledge of tundra environments, it would be virtually impossible to construct and maintain a telegraph line across Russian America. Poor planning, isolation, cold, and exaggerated expectations compounded their problems.

4.4. First Impressions, Unanticipated Problems and a Death.

Arriving at St. Michael's (fig. 20) on September 13, Ennis was immediately aware that their American military uniforms were impractical in an arctic environment. Seeing Russians "wearing similar dress to the Esquimaux," he surmised that "we would doff our civilized costumes and adopt the dress of the natives."¹⁹ They unloaded their supplies, including the small supply steamer *Lizzie Horner* - previously carried on the *Gate*'s deck - for sailing up the Kwikhpak. Once the *Gate* and the *Wright* departed, the men realised they had left the *Lizzie Horner*'s engine pipe at Sitka. Kennicott had hoped to travel a considerable distance up-river in her before the Kwikhpak froze; that way, he could reach Fort Yukon and hopefully meet with

¹⁸ See Stuart A. Harris, *The Permafrost Environment* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), especially pp. 44-47.

¹⁹ Taggart, p. 152.



Map 6. Telegraph explorations in Russian America.

Pope's men coming north from British Columbia. Even if the *Lizzie Horner* had an engine, however, she would be unable to travel far as ice already filled the river.

Instead, Kennicott decided to transport supplies to a winter base up-river, from where he could canoe up the Kwikhpak in spring. Journeying first to Unalakleet, a Russian post further north in Norton Sound, his men headed inland to Nulato on the Yukon. Adams reported that their Russian guide, Hacherine, "was saucy [and] the major played ball with H's head, using an axe handle for a bat. This did Mr. Russian good."²⁰ On the way they stopped at the house of their "half-breed" guide Ivan Lukine, who had ascended the river in 1862 as a spy of the Russian American Company to assess the fortunes and intentions of Hudson's Bay Company traders at Fort Yukon.²¹ Lukine knew full well that the Kwikhpak River was the Yukon River, but, because he was a 'Creole,' the telegraph men were probably dismissive of his integrity.

Arriving at Nulato on November 8, they realised that they could not obtain sufficient food for the winter. Kennicott thus abandoned any winter explorations up the Yukon. Instead, his men would carry supplies from the coast to Nulato, a distance of a hundred miles inland. The severe cold, lack of food, and tedious journeys, wrote Adams, caused them to be "completely disgusted with everything."²²

Meanwhile, Ennis left with Bendeleben, Jay Chappell, Richard Cotter and two unnamed others on two Malemute sleds for Bering Strait. At the village of "Chauk-talik-mute" (Shaktoolik) they were "treated well," but "found it impossible to trade with the Native inhabitants on account of a festival." Ennis recommended "Kwik-mute," another village in the vicinity of Norton Bay, as a suitable site for a telegraph station since "the Indians.... are friendly to the whites and their old Tyone is known of as being honest and truly good man."²³ Prevented by a vicious gale, they never

²⁰ Adams, p. 128, Diary, Nov. 2, 1865.

²¹ Coates and Morrison, p. 30.

²² Adams, p. 139, Diary, Dec. 19, 1865.

²³ Taggart, p. 156.

reached Grantley Harbour on Bering Strait. However, Ennis used Inuit information to conclude that its landscape, like Norton Bay, was forested. Perhaps there were communication difficulties or the Inuit had deliberately misled Ennis, but his assumption was false. Forced to return to Unalakleet, Ennis still considered his work worthwhile:

I believe the expedition has amply paid for itself in as much as it has given all of us an idea of the 'modus operandi' of travel in this country. Besides this useful knowledge we have gained a stock of information regarding that country which will go far toward facilitating our future movements.²⁴

Kennicott and Ennis joined Adams and Smith at Ulukuk, a village thirty miles north east of Unalakleet, which they decided was an ideal place for a telegraph station. They obtained provisions from the "Ingelik nation," a people who impressed Ennis: "This tribe speak a different language from the sea-coast Indians; are wealthy as far as the term can be applied to natives, and consequently are independent. They all speak more or less Russian, and are by far the most intelligent Indians I have seen in this country."²⁵

Transporting supplies, trading and performing scientific experiments, "the members of the expedition were not idle" that spring.²⁶ In March messengers from Kennicott at Nulato arrived at Unalakleet to notify Ennis of his appointment "in charge of the entire explorations for the telegraph line between Grantley Harbor and the Yukon River, [and] in case of my death.... this expedition."²⁷

With this news, Ennis left Unalakleet on April 3 to survey again to Bering Strait. He took Bendeleben, Dyer, Cotter and Chappell, Hanson the interpreter, five Natives, three sleds, twenty-one dogs and provisions for two months. They carried on despite unsatisfactory weather and

²⁴ Taggart, pp. 155-156.

²⁵ Ennis to Bulkley, St. Michael's, June 30, 1866, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 51.

²⁶ Ennis to Bulkley, p. 54.

²⁷ Taggart, p. 162.

depleting food supplies, since "by laying idle" they were "only consuming.... dog provisions and accomplishing nothing." At "Kvik-ikh-tage" on Golovin Sound, a guide advised them to go back: "The road was long, no dog feed, no Indians, the dogs would die,.... provisions become exhausted, the rivers break up and.... men and dogs would starve."²⁸ Despite this warning, and with Bendeleben unable to see due to snowblindness, Ennis advanced with a new Native guide, who, "intrigued by a gun," proved to be "an excellent man, feeding our dogs on the road, as we relied on the country to afford them subsistence."²⁹

Finally reaching Bering Strait, Ennis was alarmed at its "barrenness;" the lack of trees meant that, somehow, telegraph poles would have to be transported there. He had a solution:

The idea of oxen may appear preposterous, but what I have seen of that country, always taking into consideration that the line runs through the interior, I am safe in saying that without them it will be an undertaking replete with manifold difficulties to transport poles and plant them through such a barren route.³⁰

Ennis's enthusiasm for oxen extended beyond the construction of the line. There would be subsistence for the oxen in the summer and "they could be killed in winter, and thus afford subsistence to the men."³¹ This uninformed transposition of an American agricultural imagination onto the far northwest only enhanced his optimism for the future: "Once the line was constructed through this country there would be no difficulty to go from one end to the other, either in Summer or Winter, to make any necessary repairs." Returning to Norton Bay, Ennis decided that the line would run north and west from Nulato along the Kwikhpak River to Pereval and then by the Ulukuk River, through "Ivan's Barbara" (Lukine's place) to Norton Bay. The line would not

²⁸ Taggart, pp. 163-165.

²⁹ Ennis to Bulkley, p. 57.

³⁰ Ennis to Bulkley, p. 58.

³¹ Ennis to Bulkley, p. 59.

be straight, Ennis wrote Bulkley, but with some ingenuity they could "accommodate [themselves] to the country and the advantage of the best locations."³²

Ennis advised Bulkley that trade with the Natives was useless, because Natives obtained supplies from the Russian Company. As labourers, some Natives might be useful. Ennis wrote of one man who "left his hunting grounds when reindeer were abundant to act as a guide," who might become "a valuable man for Company's service, as he has more influence among the different tribes, and is a man of much intelligence." Most other Natives, Ennis considered, were "idle:"

My experience here has shown me that an Indian will work one or two days well, after which he is suddenly taken ill and decamps. The only reliable tribe for working are the Malemutes, and even they are doubtful. They do not care to leave their hunting grounds, fisheries etc, and prefer to live in idleness so long as they can secure a meal.³³

He preferred Russians for labourers; serving as interpreters and guides, they had been paid "one dollar per day while on the road, and fifty cents per day while at post." Considered to be exiled criminals, Russian men could be forced into Company service, but, Ennis maintained, "their goal will be little and their energy less." Instead, men such as "Talyik Nikelor and V. Hanson,.... who understand the natives and their language," could "render valuable service to the Company" if paid well.³⁴

Ennis considered he was well equipped to identify the abilities of Natives and Russians as factors of production, work being an essence of a civilised existence. He considered the Natives "idle," but thought that Russian men might be attracted with "good pay." As for Ennis's Americans, "any errors [they] committed will be attributed to the head, and not the heart."³⁵

³² Ennis to Bulkley, pp. 59-60. Incidentally, 'Pereval' is a Russian word, meaning a mountain pass.

³³ Ennis to Bulkley, pp. 61-62.

³⁴ Ennis to Bulkley, p. 60.

³⁵ Ennis to Bulkley, p. 172.

Situating themselves as superior, Ennis and his men felt entitled to direct and colonise the lives of others.

It is ironic that without Native, 'Creole' and Russian sources of food and knowledge, the Americans would have had much less "heart." They had not ascended the Yukon; the *Lizzie Horner* was inoperable; Bendeleben suffered from snowblindness; Ennis had failed in his first attempt to reach Grantley Harbour; and men like Adams and Kennicott were increasingly frustrated. Nevertheless, Ennis retained great optimism in their ability, as Americans, to construct the telegraph line, conquer the north, and prove their destiny.

By spring Kennicott was less optimistic, and deemed his own efforts unproductive. With little accomplished, he had already sent George Adams back and forth between Unalakleet and Fort St Michael's, then to Nulato and, to Adams's astonishment, back again to Unalakleet. Kennicott now worried that if he took most of the rapidly diminishing provisions with him to Fort Yukon, the men would have to return to the coast. Adams and his friend Fred Smith, exhausted by their pointless voyaging, were angry with this turn of events: "Mr. Kennicott has made another change in his plans (nothing unusual). I don't know what to make of the man. I begin to think he is crazy, he has succeeded in making himself generally disagreeable and has disgusted us all."³⁶

Adams never reached the coast; the snow was too soft. Returning to Nulato, he found that Kennicott had abandoned his spring voyage to the Yukon, as the land was too unstable for his dogs. On May 13 Adams's diary recorded a tragedy:

I was in the fort yard and some women came running up and said that the Major was lying on the beach. I ran down with the rest and there saw.... the Major lying stretched out on his back at a glance.... - dead.... The last seen of the Major was when he got up [that morning,] he made a remark that he could not sleep and.... [He] lit his pipe and went out side.... this was the last seen of him until Pease (his companion from boyhood) and

³⁶ *Diary of Fred Smith*, PABC, p. 11; Neering, p. 172.

Mike [Lebarge] taking a walk along the river bank saw him lying.... [B]y his side was lying a compass open.³⁷

Writing "over a half century later," Adams claimed that Kennicott had committed suicide.³⁸ "White froth" came from his mouth, suggesting to Adams that Kennicott had taken strychnine: "We knew he had had strychnine to poison wild animals for their skins for the Smithsoneon [sic] Institute at Washington."³⁹

This revised account is not supported by Adams's original diary or Ennis's reports to Bulkley. Rosemary Neering, author of *Continental Dash*, asks "whether his friends and the telegraph company conceal[ed] the cause of his death, both to save Kennicott's memory and to whitewash the company?"⁴⁰ This claim is probably fanciful, but it is surprising that the pages from May 12 to May 18 were torn out of Smith's diary; also puzzling is Kennicott's premature warning to Ennis, in March, of his possible death. Suicide or not, Kennicott was clearly frustrated by his failure to survey a telegraph route. As Ennis wrote Bulkley:

The failure to proceed to Fort Youkon in winter preyed so much upon the mind of the late commander, that I am certain it in some measure hastened his untimely death. From personal knowledge I state that everything that it was in the power of man to do, he did to try and overcome the numerous obstacles that impeded his road.... The bad roads, soft snow; poor dogs, and in fact everything that could be conjured up, conspired to blast his every plan.⁴¹

Kennicott's body was transported by Adams, Smith, Dyer, Pease, "two Esquimo Indians and one Ingilick" to St Michael's.⁴² They remained there while waiting for the late arrival of supplies and tried to repair the *Lizzie Horner*, but failed: "So endith the steamer," remarked Smith, "a rather

³⁷ Adams, pp. 160-161, Diary, May 13, 1866.

³⁸ Richard Pierce's introduction to Adams's *Life on the Yukon*, p. 4. Apparently, Adams did not have his original diary at hand.

³⁹ Adams, p. 91, Autobiographical Sketch.

⁴⁰ Neering, p. 175.

⁴¹ Ennis to Bulkley, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 55.

⁴² Adams, p. 162, Diary, May 25, 1866.

costly try for the company, costing \$3000 in New York, the expense of bringing her round the Horn, [and] her engineer's salary for over 18 months [compounding] the fail[ure] to do anything with her."⁴³ Advanced American shipping technology had proven totally inadequate on this occasion.

Few of the men's original objectives had been achieved after one year of work: Major Kennicott never reached Fort Yukon and most of the work remained to be surveyed. By May 1866, construction had not begun; no supplies had yet arrived from America; and the men were preoccupied with the tasks of obtaining and transporting food from unwilling Native suppliers. Ennis's remarkable optimism concealed many problems: Adams reported daily suffering from cold, lack of food, excessive travel and the insecurity of living in a land populated mainly by Natives. For Kennicott, the "numerous obstacles" had affected him greatly; too mentally tired to fight the pressures, he died.

4.5. The Unmanly Agony of Henry Bannister.

At St. Michael's that first year was another disconsolate Smithsonian scientist, Henry M. Bannister. Permanently stationed there as quartermaster, he measured temperature, wind direction, animal sightings, and ice depth. This was not necessarily through choice. Making a journey from Unalakleet to St. Michael's on December 30 with Bendeleben, a Russian "halfbreed" and two Natives, he suffered immensely. In a letter to his parents, he wrote of the great physical and emotional pain that he had incurred:

Our load was a very heavy one, and one of the dogs dropped dead almost at the start. The wind soon increased to a perfect gale and though the shore was very near we could see it only once in a while through the driving snow which filled the air.... I remember thawing my nose nine

⁴³ Smith, p. 21, Diary, June 10, 1866.

times and my cheeks several times but at the tenth trial Jack Frost got the best of me, and.... before long my face swelled so much that my eyes were nearly closed up and I was obliged to fall behind. I lost sight of the sled entirely at a point about two miles from Ikiktowat, our destination, not being able to see more than two rods ahead.... [I] was working along shore when I met with an Eskimo, one of several who had been sent out to find me. He took me directly to the village where I thawed out with cold water. I was not fit to travel the next day, which was still very cold but without wind. I stopped with the natives till the next day when they sent after me. At St. Michael's I was well cared for and was almost entirely well in two weeks, though I could not endure any severe cold for the rest of the winter. Mr. Bendeleben my fellow traveler lost a part of his ear.⁴⁴

While other men such as Adams, Ennis and poor Otto Bendeleben, even without part of one ear and once snowblind, would travel frequently in arctic conditions, Bannister felt ashamed that he could go no further. Kennicott consoled Bannister about his "misfortune" and his lack of "muscular accomplishments:"

I beg of you Bannister to be less sensitive on the score of muscular accomplishments. And on no account to feel there can be the slightest disgrace attached to such a misfortune as this. An Indian dog can stand more cold, starvation, or fatigue or run faster than any of us, so for God's sake don't brood any more over any failure on your part to endure all you expected to.

Think more of your brains and less of your legs. I only wish I could go down to St. Michael's and stay all winter myself. I *guarantee* that no one will ever ridicule about this.⁴⁵

Apart from occasional sojourns around St. Michael's Bay with fellow scientist Charles Pease, Bannister hardly used his 'feeble' legs. It was no surprise that Bulkley, when he finally arrived, ordered Bannister to return to the United States.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Letter from Bannister to his parents from Petropavlovskii, Kamchatka, as quoted in James, p. 269. Bannister, after leaving St. Michael's in September 1865 for San Francisco, sailed via Kamchatka, where he wrote the letter.

⁴⁵ Kennicott to Bannister, Jan. 7, 1866, Unalakleet, as quoted in James, p. 274.

⁴⁶ Bannister's Diary, Dec. 12, 1866, as quoted in James, p. 258.

This was not the first time that Bannister was humiliated on the Telegraph Expedition. When Bannister worked with Franklin Pope in British Columbia in May 1865, he did "not have a very pleasant time.... chiefly on account of one of the leaders named Birnie a man with whom I could never agree no matter how hard I tried."⁴⁷ Robert Birnie, a former Hudson's Bay Company man accustomed to tough living in British Columbia, was probably far stronger and more 'manly' than the intellectual Bannister.

Bannister also incurred the humorous attentions of the Company's medical officer, Dr. Henry Fisher, while returning to San Francisco via Petropavlovskii in Kamchatka, a supply base for the Siberian expedition. Bannister wrote that "at lunch to-day.... our 'medica'.... made a short speech with some insulting allusions to myself." Bannister's response was not confrontational, but submissive: "I felt a little angry but had the consolation of knowing that he was making an ass of himself."⁴⁸ One wonders whether the rest of the men on the ship agreed with Bannister, or if they felt Bannister provided an easy target for their 'laddish' bullying, particularly after he spoke out against their drinking and brawling at Petropavlovskii.⁴⁹ If Bannister's antitheses were masculine pioneers, he was no man. With a minimal contribution to the Telegraph Expedition, he was deemed useless; in effect he was feminised.

In her feminist critique of polar exploration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Lisa Bloom argues that polar places (including Russian America and the Yukon) became symbolic sites of male domination: "As all-male activities, the explorations symbolically enacted the men's own battle to become men. The difficulty of life in desolate and freezing regions provided the ideal mythic site where men could show themselves as heroes capable of superhuman feats."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Bannister to his parents, p. 272.

⁴⁸ Bannister's Diary, Nov. 17, p. 252.

⁴⁹ Bannister's Diary, Nov. 9, p.250; Nov. 12, pp. 250-251.

⁵⁰ Lisa Bloom, *Gender On Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Expeditions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 6.

Most considered that women were not physically or mentally tough enough to survive in the north: "'The boundlessness of the individual spirit' [was] hardly likely to accrue to women living within the bounded spaces of everyday life, marriage and the workplace."⁵¹ It did not matter that Inuit and Athapascan women had successfully lived in northern regions for thousands of years; modern women, their bodies weak and their minds full of emotion, could not cope with the demands of the north.

As women were excluded, exploring the north became a test of manhood. Not 'man' enough to reach Fort Yukon, Kennicott paid the ultimate price - death. Bannister hardly travelled beyond St. Michael's. Unable to withstand the arctic conditions, he feared ridicule from his colleagues. Weak, superfluous, and humiliated, Bannister's agonies appeared womanly.

4.6. To Fort Yukon with Two Surveyors, a Scientist, an English Artist and Some Irrelevant Others.

Others faced the arctic challenge in a more 'manly' fashion. While Adams and Smith took Kennicott's body to St. Michael's, Mike Lebarge (fig. 18), Frank Ketchum (fig. 19) and Ivan Lukine (no picture available; he was a 'Creole') travelled into the interior. Leaving Nulato on May 26, they ascended the Kwikhpak, now clear of ice, with two Natives in a Russian *baidara*, a small, oared boat with a sail. On their way they struggled to obtain supplies; near Nulato a Native brought "thirty pounds of dried meat for which he modestly asked 'my coat, vest and pants.'" Ketchum concluded that "to depend upon the natives for supplies is worse than useless, it being hard work for them to find provisions for themselves." At Nukuklayet they received a "warm reception," the Native villagers "firing guns as we approached, and cheering us." Ketchum noted

⁵¹ Bloom, p. 6.

that Nukuklayet's population numbered one hundred, including two Chiefs, "one made by the English and one by the Russians."⁵²

Continuing upstream, they met an Anglican missionary, Mr. McDonald, who carried letters with pictures of Pope and Bulkley sent by the directors in Rochester, urging him to assist the telegraph crews.⁵³ Arriving at Fort Yukon on June 21, their voyage convinced them that the Russian Kwikhpak was also the Yukon. It also proved, to Ketchum at least, that "a vessel drawing four feet can proceed to Fort Youcon and beyond, as far as Fort Selkirk." Basing his judgement on spring flow, Ketchum did not suggest how far the steamer could go in summer. He was less optimistic about employing Natives: "In my opinion, from what I have seen of the Indians in that section of the country, it will be very difficult to secure a small number to prosecute work on the line. Their habits, etc, render them totally unfit for anything like hard work."⁵⁴

They then returned to St Michael's expecting to find Bulkley, a voyage taking just eight days; he was not there.

When Bulkley finally arrived in September, Bannister, Cotter, Pease and Bischoff left, depleting the numbers of the Science Corps. Scientist William Healey Dall (fig. 17) and the English artist Frederick Whymper would continue the scientific investigations. The previous winter, Dall had travelled around the North Pacific with Bulkley and expected to pursue his studies in Siberia. Hearing of Kennicott's death and his promotion to head of the Science Corps, Dall decided to complete Kennicott's work in Russian America and the Yukon.⁵⁵ Dall, with Whymper, now planned to explore between Nulato and Fort Yukon, and finish Kennicott's

⁵² Ketchum to Ennis, St. Michael's, Jul. 12, 1866, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 151-153.

⁵³ It is quite possible that some record of this encounter exists in the Anglican mission archives.

⁵⁴ Ketchum to Ennis, p. 154.

⁵⁵ William Healey Dall, *Alaska and Its Resources* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1870); reprinted in *The Yukon Territory*, ed. F. Mortimer Trimmer (London: Downey, 1898), p. 6.

experiments. Frank Ketchum and Mike Lebarge also planned further explorations along the Yukon, hopefully to Fort Selkirk.

On October 1 most of the party sailed to Unalakleet in a *baidara* and the new freight-steamer *Wilder*, previously carried on the deck of Company flagship, the *Nightingale*. At Unalakleet, men would settle down for winter and prepare to start line construction in spring. The boats were therefore overloaded with supplies and provisions. Like the *Lizzie Horner*, the *Wilder* would not be able to travel far as the Yukon began to freeze over. It was also technically inadequate:

Unable to tow anything, or to carry any freight, while in a breeze of any strength it is no easy matter to steer.... We bore more resemblance to a party of slaves en route for the galleys.... than to a party of young and ardent explorers, defying the powers of winter, and only anxious for an opportunity to exhibit our prowess.⁵⁶

Its design reflected the disjunction between the vision of managers in New York and the reality of the Yukon River. Just a line on a map, the managers probably considered the Yukon to be like the Hudson or the Delaware in a somewhat colder climate. They had little idea of the river's flow, ice conditions and navigability, or of the winds, temperatures and storms in which the *Wilder*, representing modern American technology, would operate.

At Unalakleet the men extended their headquarters. This was a new experience for the young Englishman, Frederick Whympers, who claimed to be "*au fait* at building sod walls, and was consequently allowed to follow the natural bent of his genius."⁵⁷ Dall and the astronomer, Ferdinand Westdahl, arrived a few days later. Unimpressed with his "cockroach-infested"

⁵⁶ Dall, p. 7.

⁵⁷ Whympers, p. 145.

quarters, Dall erected a tent with the ensign of the Scientific Corps, pledging "to carry the blue cross and scallop, before the year was out, where no other flag had yet floated."⁵⁸

On October 27 Whymper, Ketchum, Dall, Lebarge, Pickett, Francis and "three Indians" "bade adieu" to their colleagues as they left for Nulato where Dall would carry out scientific experiments, Whymper would draw, and Ketchum and Lebarge would plan their spring explorations up the Yukon. The men's supposed bravery was celebrated "with a grand, but rather irregular volley of blank cartridge from revolvers, muskets and the old battered cannon of the Russian post."⁵⁹

As told in *Travels and Adventures*, Whymper's travels resembled a merry jaunt in the English Lake District. The apparent ease of the expedition and the carefree humour with which he represented the landscape and the Native peoples are startling. Indeed, Whymper was concerned to humourously elaborate about his more mundane activities. One time, Whymper complimented his fine "telegraph stew" of "Arctic grouse (ptarmigan) and dried deer-meat, flavoured and thickened at the right moment with salt, pepper and flour."⁶⁰ He also recounted an eccentric conversation with a colleague, Mr. Francis, about beans:

It was in Igtigalik that Francis and myself engaged in a great discussion - known afterwards as a *cause célèbre* - "beans *versus* rice." Francis.... was persuaded that rice was the staff of life, and that millions of Chinamen lived on little else.... I contended that beans were more nourishing and glutenous, and that the miners and travellers of the Pacific coast swore by them as the most portable and satisfying of food. Francis pointed out the short time taken to cook rice; but I showed that beans, when cooked, were more inviting food. Beans fried *à la mineur*, baked *à la Yankee*, or boiled *à la clod-hopper*, were lively food, compared with insipid rice. We advanced our opinions with deep feeling and earnestness on either side, yet I fear left each other, and our listeners, exactly where they were before !⁶¹

⁵⁸ Dall, p. 21.

⁵⁹ Whymper, p. 149.

⁶⁰ Whymper, p. 155.

⁶¹ Whymper, p. 155.

On another occasion, when caching supplies with Ketchum at Nulato, Whympers announced: "It would require some faith in one's species to do the same in St. James' Park."⁶² On November 11 Whympers first saw the Yukon River. Romanticising the river's 'natural' and 'unspoilt' attributes, he poetically described its "dreary grandeur:"

Hardly a patch of ice was to be seen, - all was covered by a wintry mantle. Large accumulations of hummocks had been in many places forced on the surface before the river had become thoroughly frozen, and even now the water was still open, and running swiftly in a few isolated and detached streaks. From bank to bank was not less than a mile, and several islands were visible in either direction.I had been prepared to see a large stream, but had formed no conception of the reality. Neither pen nor pencil can give any idea of the dreary grandeur, the vast monotony, or the unlimited expanse we saw before us.⁶³

At Nulato on November 26, they suffered freezing temperatures of -58 degrees Fahrenheit.

This caused Whympers great concern:

Once forgetful of the fact (and it is a fact of which you do not become forgetful), I mixed some colours up with water that had just stood near the oven, and, wetting a small brush, commenced to apply it to my drawing-block. Before it reached the paper, it was covered with a skin of ice, and simply scratched the surface, and I had to give up for the time being.⁶⁴

Remaining at Nulato over Christmas, Whympers, Dall, Ketchum, Lebarge and the "Indian servant, Kuriler, [who] might have passed for a Russian" cooked a Christmas "repastof a high-toned and elegant nature."⁶⁵ On New Years Eve there was a great celebration:

⁶² Whympers, p. 186.

⁶³ Whympers, p. 164.

⁶⁴ Whympers, pp. 172-173.

⁶⁵ Whympers, p. 177.

[We] raised the first telegraph pole, ornamented with the flags of the United States, the Telegraph Expedition, the Masonic fraternity, and the Scientific Corps. A salute of thirty-six guns were fired, - one for each State; and the enthusiastic Kurilla was brought to the ground by the recoil of a great Russian blunderbuss which he had undertaken to discharge.⁶⁶

Ketchum planned to erect a telegraph station near Nulato, to be named Fort Kennicott. This station built, Ketchum and Lebarge left Nulato in March to ascend the Yukon. Arriving at Fort Yukon on May 9 and Fort Selkirk on June 25, they encountered many discontented Natives along the way. The "Kutchuk-kulchin Indians" near Fort Selkirk, Ketchum claimed, "promised to hunt and save the Fall meat of this year for us. They are much dissatisfied with the English, having to take their meat 300 miles and then get nothing but powder and ball for it." Below Fort Selkirk they discovered an abandoned fishing settlement, where the Natives had "died out with the scarlet fever two years ago."⁶⁷ Ketchum did not explain the source of the disease.

Dall and Whymper left Nulato on May 26 with Russian and Native companions. According to Whymper, "The Russians had rather pooh-poohed the notion of Dall and myself - both comparatively young men - ever reaching Fort Yukon." In revenge, they beat the Russians in a canoe race around a bluff (fig. 21). Whymper and Dall were 'dignified' in their victory, perhaps because the victory belonged to their Native assistants. Whymper wrote: "By Kuriler's excellent steering we crossed safely, and then travelled along the bank for some distance a-head of our Muscovite friends. Nothing could exceed the glee of our Indians, and they could not understand how Dall and myself could show no more excitement about it."⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Dall, p. 59.

⁶⁷ Ketchum to Bulkley, St. Michael's, Ju. 25, 1867, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 225.

⁶⁸ Whymper, p. 198.

Five days later they passed "the fishing-village of Sachertelontin," the furthest point inland mapped by the Russian explorer Lavrentii Zagoskin.⁶⁹ Dall and Whymper began to collect detailed records of bearings, geology, natural life and their encounters with Native peoples. They arrived at Fort Yukon later that June only to find its factor absent (fig. 22). Nevertheless, Whymper and Dall "shook hands with everybody - including the Indians."⁷⁰ Factor MacDougall and missionary MacDonald soon returned. Of the latter's success in converting the Natives to Christianity, Whymper was doubtful: "With an audience of Indians, representing half-a-dozen different tribes, speaking as many dialects, it must be very questionable whether they all understand the missionary's words."⁷¹ Numerous baptisms apparently took place, but probably little 'salvation.' After Ketchum and Lebarge returned from Fort Selkirk, they all left for Nulato "at the rate of 100 miles a day."⁷²

The accounts of Dall, Whymper and Ketchum all differ in their representations of the Yukon explorations. For Whymper, it was a big adventure. Lisa Bloom notes that English hero Scott of the Antarctic "valorized the inner qualities of fortitude and dignity."⁷³ Whymper certainly retained an English upper middle class sense of vision. His observations of Russian America were firmly based upon English conceptions of adventure: good humour, character and a denigratory wit. His "*cause celebres*," "beans *a la Yankee*," "*au fait*" genius at building sod walls, and his Christmas feast of a "high-toned and elegant nature" indicated his *blase* literary representation of what he probably found to be a difficult, hazardous, and exhausting journey. On the other hand, the scientist Dall, as revealed in his aptly-titled book, *Alaska and Its Resources*, perceived the

⁶⁹ Whymper, p. 201. Lt. Lavrentii Zagoskin led the most extensive Russian inland survey, accompanied by 'Lukeen,' likely the father of Ivan Lukine. He had proposed, based on information obtained from Natives, but was not certain, that Fort Yukon was the head of navigation on this river. See Sherwood, *Explorations*, p. 21.

⁷⁰ Whymper, p. 218.

⁷¹ Whymper, p. 226.

⁷² Whymper, p. 231.

⁷³ Bloom, p. 13.

landscape as a gigantic scientific experiment, ripe for economic exploitation and scientific discovery. One episode summed up Dall's scientific vision:

April 23d being a good snowy day, I took advantage of the opportunity, to visit a grave on the point, near the Nulato River. Carefully lifting the cover, I removed the cranium, and putting it into my haversack, I returned by a roundabout way to the fort. I had long had my eye upon this grave, and had been waiting for the weather which would cover up my tracks, in order to secure the skull. The Indians are very superstitious in regard to touching anything that has belonged with a dead body, and would have been highly incensed had it become known. Therefore I took the first opportunity of packing safely away the only Ingalik cranium ever collected.⁷⁴

This startling tale reveals Dall's enthusiasm to exploit the "Ingalik" dead for scientific (and his own) gain. It is hardly surprising that the Natives would be "highly incensed" had they caught Dall with the skull, as he was appropriating their burial traditions in the interests of Western science. Dall's belief in the legitimacy of his thievery revealed his confidence in his right as a man of science to override Native 'superstition.' Such appropriations would be repeated many times in the future.

For Ketchum and Lebarge, the voyage was fundamental to their work. In a letter to Bulkley, Ketchum mainly reported on food sources, modes of transport, the usefulness of Natives as labourers, and opportunities for trade, although he did provide general information on topics such as the Fort Selkirk scarlet fever epidemic.⁷⁵ Generally, Ketchum envisioned the landscape as a telegraph route, approaching the explorations seriously, dutifully and methodically.

As for the impressions of Lukine, Kurilla and the other Natives, 'Creoles' and Russians, little is directly revealed in expedition literatures. After all, Ketchum, Lebarge, Dall and Whympers considered themselves the heroes; the others were mere assistants. Whympers and Dall,

⁷⁴ Dall, p. 67.

⁷⁵ Ketchum to Bulkley, *Bulkley Papers*, pp. 224-227.

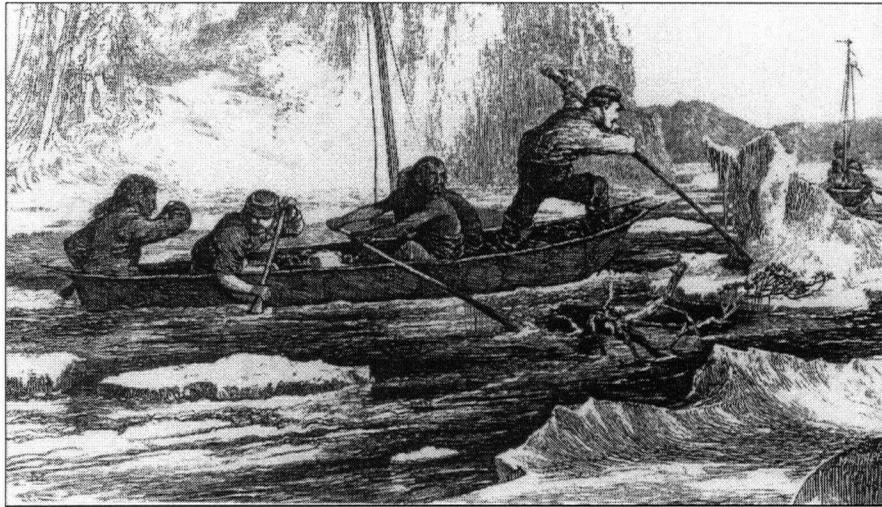


Fig 25: Exploring the Yukon with Dall, Whympers, Kurilla and another Native



Fig 22: Fort Yukon (Whympers, 1868).

however, provide indirect insights into Kurilla's experiences. When Kurilla and the other Native beat the Russians in the canoe race, they were ecstatic, probably revealing anti-Russian sentiment. Whympers portrayed the event as an insignificant lark in which Kurilla revealed his 'child-like' qualities. It more likely was a site of symbolic resistance against Russian authority. If this was so, then it is interesting to consider why Kurilla appeared willing to work for Dall and Whympers. Indeed, when Dall continued scientific experiments into 1868, Kurilla remained the scientist's 'faithful sidekick,' his insights into Native knowledge of the north proving invaluable. Neither Dall nor Whympers reveal much about Kurilla's motivations. Unlikely to have been attracted by meagre pay, Kurilla may have been intrigued by the white men's exotic possessions. He might also have been glad to break free from the Russians.

The Yukon voyages were presented differently by each man according to their character, interests, ambitions and duties. Nevertheless, Dall's and Whympers' travel accounts reveal that the three Americans and the Englishman, having 'properly' explored the Yukon, considered themselves heroes.

4.7. The Problems of Constructing a Telegraph in the "Frigid Zone."

Ennis was now a Major, and those in Russian America since 1865 now became "Pioneers." This meant, complained Adams, an increase in pay but not provisions: "We have had left here about half the provisions we will need this year and I am afraid there will be 'tall skirmishing for hash &c' before the ships arrive again.... We are living now on Coffee without sweetening, and of course no milk. (The cows have all died)."⁷⁶ Ennis had restricted his men to two meals a day while they lay "idle" to preserve supplies.⁷⁷ Planning the winter operations, Ennis created three divisions. He appointed 'Lieutenant' Fred Smith in charge of construction from Unalakleet to Norton Bay, 'Lieutenant' Chappel in charge of Norton Bay to Golovin Sound, and 'Lieutenant' Adams in charge of Unalakleet to Nulato (map 7).

At Grantley Harbour on Bering Strait, work led by Captain Daniel Libby and the persistent Pioneer Bendeleben had already begun. Libby had impressed Conway in British Columbia, but Bering Strait was an altogether different matter. Having landed that autumn with thirty-nine men, Libby soon notified Adams that fifteen miles of line were laid, despite severe food shortages. Libby abandoned work as winter approached and his men revealed their discontent. Libby told Bulkley that "getting short of supplies was the cause of much grumbling.... and most all of them said they would not remain in the country and work for a company that committed such a great mistake in not leaving them even the necessities of life." He considered the lack of medicines "an injustice to the men and a disastrous thing for the company." Nevertheless, several workers "ought to be made to leave as they are lazy and spoil better men by their conduct."⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Adams, p. 175, Diary, Dec. 12, 1866. His statement about the cows is intriguing. Adams was perhaps being sarcastic, but it is quite possible that some cows were brought to Russian America, if only to St. Michael's; but, of course, the climate was most unconducive to their survival.

⁷⁷ Ennis to Bulkley, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 200.

⁷⁸ Libby to Bulkley, Port Clarence, June 20, 1867, *Bulkley Papers*, pp. 214-218.

If doubtful of the work's progress, Libby was confident of initiating "friendship" with the Inuit: "Our advent among them is a new era in their lives and without doubt will lead to great and good results." He thought trade would encourage the Inuit to remain "peaceable and friendly." This imperialist ploy was necessary, since "if they used their strength combined against us, they might cause us a great deal of trouble."⁷⁹

Back at Unalakleet, Adams was working on Smith's section, heading north toward Chappel's section. He soon discovered that building a telegraph line "with dogs and sleds only for transportation in the frigid zone is not so much fun as it is 'cracked up to be.'"⁸⁰ If work was not suspended for bad weather, the ground resisted their efforts: "Digging post holes in frozen ground was slow and hard work, as but small chips.... could be cut away at each blow of the bar. The best of the men could not dig more than six poles a day."⁸¹ Their tools, blunted by frozen wood or soil, cracked in the intense cold. Snow drifting over holes caused men to fall in and become "half-buried in holes that they had dug themselves."⁸² This caused Whympers great amusement, but the situation was too much for Adams:

Most of the men are unable to work. Hard work and no grub or very little has completely played them out. We are almost entirely out of provisions. Only a little tea and bran is all we have to depend on - our bacon has given out. Sugar is all gone two weeks since - and bread and tea is all we will have to live on unless we can get reindeer meat.⁸³

The telegraph men were not the only people after reindeer meat; Adams noticed that "the Indians think that the tel-line is the cause of scarcity of deer. If the Indians give us any trouble on account of this we may have to give up building Telegraph lines and go gunning for Indians."⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Libby to Bulkley, p. 220.

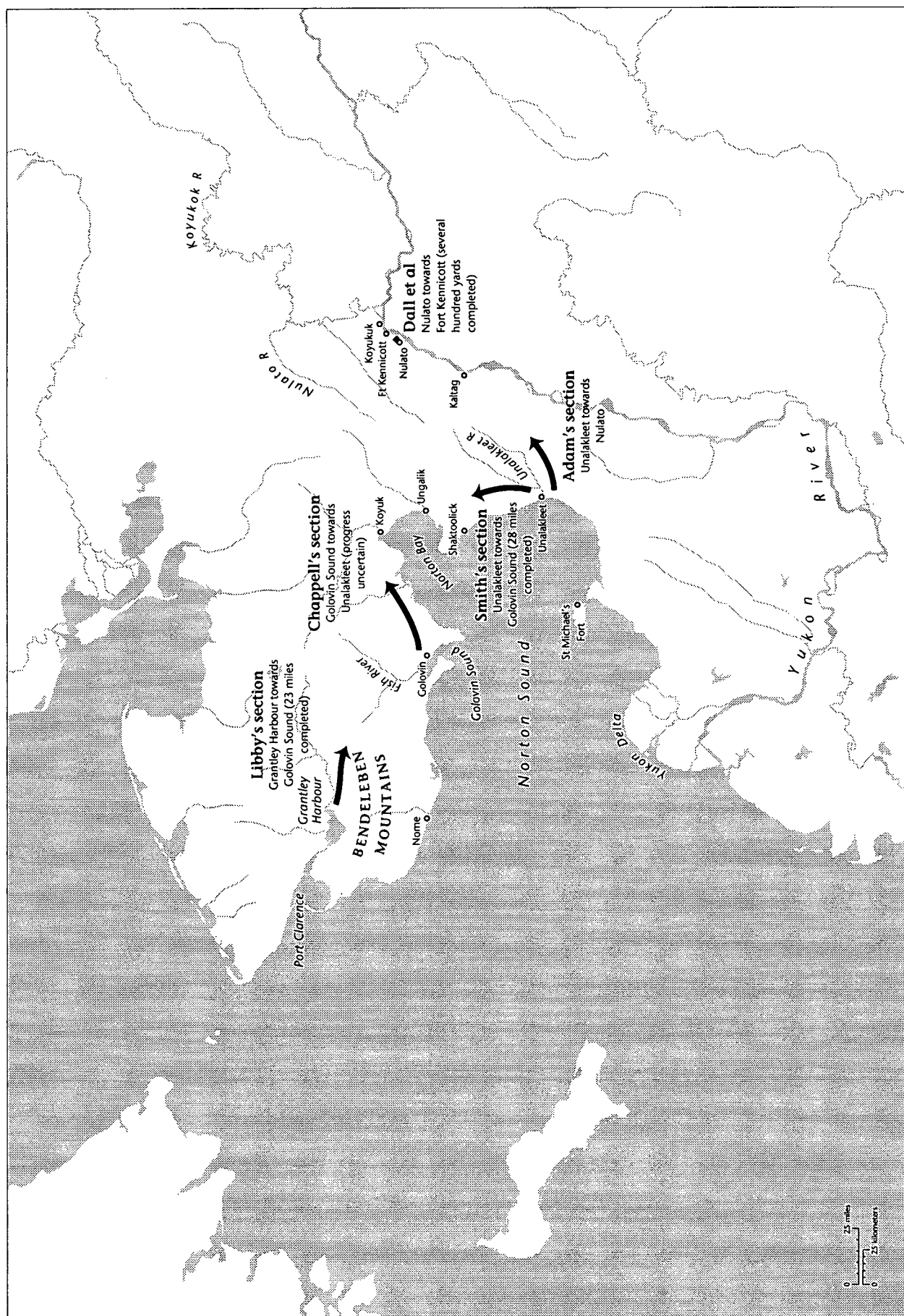
⁸⁰ Adams, p. 189, Diary, Feb. 4, 1867.

⁸¹ Adams, p. 108, Autobiographical Sketch.

⁸² Whympers, p. 240.

⁸³ Adams, p. 201, Diary, Apr. 26, 1867.

⁸⁴ Adams, p. 196, Diary, Mar. 17, 1867.



Map 7. Telegraph line construction in Russian America, 1867.

For Adams, the first priority was to construct the line; and, like Libby, he wanted to protect the men and the line against Native resistance. Unlike Libby, he openly proposed the use of violence to secure Native respect. On one occasion his revolver effectively deterred a Native attack on a colleague:

An Indian sold a wooden Basin to one of the officers for a plug of tobacco - he then went away but returned after an hours absence saying that he did not want the tobacco and asked for the Basin - on being told that the basin was not his but that he could keep the tobacco or not just as he pleased he went below and stole a table knife and made off with it - on being informed of this Fred and I started for him, found his house, told him to bring it out, he refused saying to bring his basin out first. Fred took my revolver with which he had armed himself when he started and held it to his head saying - bring that knife out immediately. The Indian hesitated for a minute and then rushed into the house and brought out the knife. We took it and then started to take him also but he was not inclined to go and concluding we had frightened him enough to let him go telling him if he ever stole anything more he would assuredly get hurt. Left him in peace. They will after a while understand our way of doing business after we once make a trade the thing is over with.⁸⁵

On May 8 work started in Adams's "Pera Valley Dist," going east from Unalakleet to Nulato. After only four days his fifteen men were "not so much sick as playing off."⁸⁶ Claiming to have built twenty miles of line, Adams suspended work because of snow melt; spring marshes meant that holes for the poles could not be dug.⁸⁷ These problems were compounded by the proliferation of mosquitoes, making work much more uncomfortable than Adams had ever thought back in San Francisco.

Adams's responsibilities were relieved when Mr. Bean, the storemaster of St. Michaels, arrived on June 26 with news of the suspension of operations and America's purchase of Russian America for \$7,000,000.⁸⁸ Despite the men's joy, they hung black cloth on the telegraph poles to

⁸⁵ Adams, p. 202, Diary, Apr. 29, 1867.

⁸⁶ Adams, p. 203, Diary, May 10, 1867. 'Pera Valley' was presumably a pun on the Russian word 'Pereval,' referred to earlier.

⁸⁷ Adams, p. 112, Autobiographical Sketch.

⁸⁸ Adams, p. 207, Diary, June 26, 1867.

"put them into mourning."⁸⁹ The *Clara Bell* arrived on August 18, taking all except Dall, who had "become pretty well versed in colonial Russian," had "knowledge of the InnuIt and Indian dialects, and understood the mode of life necessary."⁹⁰ As he explained to the Company adjutant, he did not consider this a sufficient achievement:

A pretty thorough reconnaissance had been made of the geology and natural history of the Yukon above and at Nulato, and on the shores of Norton Sound. The Lower Yukon and the delta had yet to be examined. I felt unwilling that the plans of Mr. Kennicott, so far carried on successfully, should be left uncompleted. I therefore proposed to carry them out alone, and at my own expense.⁹¹

Dall continued his scientific research for another year, enabled by Kurilla's assistance and supplies left him by the Russian American Company and Western Union. The results of Dall's work were great quantities of taxonomic data, used later in his *Alaska and Its Resources*, the first major scientific work on Alaska. Returning to St Michael's the next summer, he "stumbled over" Mike Lebarge, now representing a trading company, and George Adams, working for a company primarily engaged in the liquor trade.⁹²

Back in San Francisco, Ennis reported the work a success and that the line might yet be completed:

Had the Company carried on the work the line could easily have been completed in my division during the ensuing year.... It is a matter of discouragement to myself as well as Officers that the work has been suspended, for we had everything so prepared that the completion of the line, in this division, was but a question of one year. We have proven that men can work in the severest winter and with a small amount of determination the work could have been successfully carried through.⁹³

⁸⁹ Whympers, p. 241.

⁹⁰ Dall, pp. 121-122.

⁹¹ Dall, p. 122.

⁹² Dall, pp. 239-240; also Pierce's introduction to Adams's *Life on the Yukon*, especially p. 5. Adams left San Francisco in 1868 for the Pribilof Islands, leaving a manuscript about commercial rivalries in the north Pacific. He later became a mining engineer, working in Russia, Siberia, Europe, Asia and, from 1903 to 1905, southern Congo.

⁹³ Ennis to Bulkley, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 206.

4.8. Visions, Realities and New Visions.

Unlike Ennis, I doubt that the line could have been built through to Bering Strait. As Adams had discovered, repeated freezing and thawing made the ground unstable. Ferdinand Westdahl, the astronomer, wrote that "in summer we found many [poles] which we supposed to be firmly erected, entirely loose."⁹⁴ Their vision of a telegraph line, based on those in Europe and America, was unattainable in northern tundra. Poles would collapse as the ground froze, thawed and flooded.

This illustrates the disjuncture between the men's image of the far northwest and its reality. The Americans arrived believing they could conquer any nature. They assumed that their existing stock of knowledge, technological know-how, determination and, perhaps, some heavenly approval for their civilising mission would see them through. The black flags hung on the telegraph poles symbolised their sense of failure. To be sure, the work's cancellation was attributed to the Atlantic cable, but the telegraph men were soundly beaten. They had encountered a severe climate, unhelpful Natives, starvation, and great physical and emotional pain. They had also unknowingly encountered the intricate workings of permafrost, active layers and arctic climates - God had not yet revealed to his American apostles how to cope with hellish tundras.

The expedition also called into question the state of American technology. The *Wilder* and *Lizzie Horner* were less useful on the Yukon than small, stable, manoeuvrable canoes and *baidaras*. Advanced American telegraph technology was also inappropriate for laying a line in frozen ground that would, when thawed, become "marshy soup." The men had no means of providing enough food for themselves. While innovative, Ennis's idea of using oxen at Bering Strait for transport and food purposes was hardly practical, but he knew little better. American

⁹⁴ Personal statement by Ferdinand Westdahl, as quoted in Hubert Howe Bancroft, *A History of Alaska*, repr. (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1959), p. 578.

technological 'superiority' could not afford basic subsistence or mobility in arctic environments, and because of the Americans' lack of knowledge, they were forced to rely on 'primitive' others.

Despite their failures, the men considered themselves manly heroes after their efforts in the "frigid zone." Whympers, the Englishman, was surprised that the work was predominantly carried out by young men. This he considered very American: "In England, I have sometimes thought that youth was considered more of a crime than a recommendation, and that you were nowhere until you had - like old port - acquired 'body' and 'age.'" Bulkley had "more than once said that no old man (or old woman either) should serve on his expedition."⁹⁵ Since contemporary social norms did not require that women be considered for such an expedition, Whympers did not question Bulkley's choice of gender (or 'race') for would-be explorers, only his attitude to age. Such attitudes symbolised and substantiated modern notions of (White) male power in the north, maintained during and after the Expedition. By indicating male superiority in the "frigid zone," the men's representations of the telegraph work helped reinforce patriarchal societal structures elsewhere.

The expedition, therefore, was carried out by white males, who visualised a cold, unknown, barbaric, and exotic northern landscape. At the most general level, the "frigid zone" was for men only. Such opportunities of 'conquest' attracted adventurers such as William Ennis and George Adams, and opportunities to explore this 'untouched' landscape enticed the Smithsonian scientists. As such, northern landscapes provided the ultimate test of manhood; they were no place for 'womanish' Henry Bannister.

The experiences of individual men, however, reveal a plethora of responses to the place, reflecting the men's personalities, dreams, goals, strengths and weaknesses. Robert Kennicott, who preferred conducting scientific experiments to coordinating telegraph work in arctic

⁹⁵ Whympers, p. 71.

environments, was overcome by his responsibilities and died. For George Adams, the work would, one time, stimulate fondness for home in San Francisco:

O what a difference in my situation then and now. About this time, and I think a year ago today, I spent as pleasant a day as I think I have ever had. Geo Young - Nellie Crosette, Belle and my self went to a picnic across the Bay - and we four enjoyed ourself roaming about the woods sitting under the trees and my happiness was too much to continue, now what a difference - now almost the hight of misery. As I remarked to day to Dyer when speaking of picnics at home, here we are having a nice little picnic all to ourselves in a strange wild savage country among Indians whom we know not and have to keep a continual look out, to see that they do not do us harm wearing six shooters strapped about us, long sheath knives in our boots and looking as wild as any Indian. We have two sled with 14 dogs - 7 dogs to a sled and two malimute [sic] Indians - our dog feed will hold out for two feeds more. If we do not find feed for our dogs at the Indian town we think to reach tomorrow we may have to starve and perhaps kill most or all of our dogs, as we will have to go six and perhaps eight days until we can get more.⁹⁶

California now represented a romanticised homely land of picnics, women, trees and fun; a landscape in which Adams could be nurtured, satisfied and safe. California took on new feminised meanings as Adams discovered its tameness and subservience, at least in comparison to Russian America's unpredictable hostility. Feminist geographer, Gillian Rose, writes that "pleasure in landscape comes partly from its seductively sexual vision of narcissistic reunion with the phallic mother."⁹⁷ If this was the case for Adams, then his reunion with his "phallic mother" took place while he gazed over a distant "frigid," almost masculine environment.

For Frederick Whympier, the north was a place to discover his talents and realise the value of his upper middle class English roots. His writing style in *Travels and Adventures* was of an educated, upper class, English genre, revealing as much of his home as of the north. Indeed, his work with the Telegraph Expedition was part of his 'Grand Tour,' a year long journey to 'sow his wild oats.' If Whympier's north was at all feminised, then it was a flirtatious encounter;

⁹⁶ Adams, pp. 154-155, Diary, May 1, 1866.

⁹⁷ Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1993), p. 105.

somewhere to give him experience and help him appreciate the bountiful joys of Britannia's "green and pleasant land." He more likely perceived it, however, as a confrontational, almost masculine landscape. Completely different to the English countryside or American frontier, this "frigid zone" lacked "nymphs and dryads.... entwined in [its] trees," and was hardly the "infinitely receptive, seed-sheltering womb of a sweltering earth."⁹⁸

While the men failed to build a telegraph line in an exceedingly hostile environment, the images they took back helped define future identities of the north. For all the uniqueness of each man's response to Russian America, the north would be for 'men only.' Their tales, told in books, newspapers or by word-of-mouth, reinforced racialised and sexualised norms. As such, the telegraph men contributed to Jack London's "Wild North Land." Americans (and others) would continue to imagine the 'great white north' as a place for gold-miners, traders, adventurers, and explorers, most of whom were white males. In London's famous short story, *To Build a Fire*, a lone white man criticised those who advised him not to travel alone in a Klondike winter as "rather womanish."⁹⁹ The man died.

The telegraph men also represented a north ripe for exploitation. William Healey Dall was particularly influential in this respect. In *Alaska and Its Resources* he described the area's economic and scientific advantages. Like Robert Kennicott, Dall considered the north a gigantic scientific laboratory. At the same time another Telegraph man-come-Smithsonian scientist, Henry Elliott, was researching the Pribilof Islands in the southern Panhandle.¹⁰⁰ Such scientific investigations continue to the present day and reduce the region's geology, climate, plants and Native peoples to objects of curiosity, a hallmark of Western culture. Perhaps the most famous of

⁹⁸ Rose, p. 96. Rose equates 19th century bourgeois nude art with the masculine (appropriative) gaze over the landscape, citing A. Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill, N. C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1984). Admittedly, these American landscapes are more 'pastoral' than the Yukon, but feminist landscape theory has to come to terms with the polar regions.

⁹⁹ Jack London, *To Build a Fire* (New York: Book Essentials, 1994), p. 197.

¹⁰⁰ For the results of Elliott's work, see Henry Elliott, *Report upon the Condition of Affairs in the Territory of Alaska* (Washington: Treasury Dept., 1875)

all Alaskan scientists, geologist Alfred Hulse Brooks, paid tribute to Dall's scientific endeavours. He wrote in 1906 that Dall's *Alaska and Its Resources*, "based on these [telegraph] investigations and later reports written under the auspices of the Coast Survey, are still the standard works on Alaska."¹⁰¹

The Telegraph Expedition would also inform William Seward's vision of Russian America; an important event, because in March 1867, as American Secretary of State, he bought Russian America for seven million dollars.

¹⁰¹ Alfred Hulse Brooks, "History of Explorations and Surveys," in *The Geography and Geology of Alaska*, ed. A. H. Brooks (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906); repr. in Sherwood, *Alaska and Its History*, p. 43.

4.9. The American Purchase of Alaska.

The purchase of Russian America was announced to the men at St. Michael's in July 1867. It seems an anachronistic claim, therefore, that the Telegraph Expedition contributed to the agreement between the Americans and Russians on March 30, 1867, that was ratified by the American Senate on April 9. Historian James Alton James argued that the scientific explorations of Kennicott in 1865 and from 1859 to 1862 generated knowledge of the region's exploitable resources. James also claimed that Henry Bannister, the quartermaster at St. Michael's, and Ferdinand Bischoff were "the first of the scientists.... associated with Major Kennicott to reach Washington."¹⁰² Senator Sumner, proposing the purchase to Senate on April 9, paid tribute to Bannister's information about the habitability of Alaska:

I have an authentic statement with regard to the temperature north of the Aleutians, as observed by himself in the autumn of 1865 and the months following. Even here the winter does not seem so terrible as is sometimes imagined. During most of the time work [on the telegraph] could be done with comfort in the open air.¹⁰³

James therefore concurred with Bannister's claim, written several years later, that "the project of the Western Union Telegraph Company of an overland telegraph.... was a failure but its greatest result was the annexation of Alaska."¹⁰⁴ For Charles Vevier, also basing his conclusions on Bannister's diaries, "the overland telegraph had failed, but the 'northwestern limb of our continent' would allow the United States to take a stride to Asia."¹⁰⁵

Alaskan historian, Morgan Sherwood, asserts that James and Vevier exaggerated the Telegraph Expedition's role in the acquisition of Alaska. He argues that the research of the

¹⁰² James, p. 19.

¹⁰³ Sumner to Senate, Apr. 9, 1867, as quoted in James, p. ix.

¹⁰⁴ Bannister to Smithsonian, as quoted in James, p. 34.

¹⁰⁵ Vevier, p. 230.

telegraph men merely added to already available "Russian and English materials" and may only "indirectly have facilitated" the purchase.¹⁰⁶ More important, at least to Congress's vital ratification of the purchase in 1868, Sherwood suggests, was the Seward-sponsored George Davidson report. Davidson visited the islands of the Panhandle late in 1867, but relied "heavily on written materials" for information on the mainland. His final report for Congress was "used by proponents of the bill.... swaying the balance in favor of the purchase."¹⁰⁷

While the debate is interesting, neither James, Vevier nor Sherwood consider why Seward wanted to buy Russian America in the first place in March 1867; instead they essentialise the telegraph men's role in informing the later decisions of Senate and Congress. To understand Seward's personal decision to buy Alaska, we must examine the context in which the purchase arose and his close relationship with the Telegraph Expedition.

From the eighteenth century Russia considered this territory in America its own, and in 1796 granted a charter of monopoly governance to the Russian American Company. The Company's second term expired on January 1, 1862. Changing markets and new American and European interests in the region's resources contributed to declining Russian returns. As the Russian American Company struggled to cover its costs, the Russian Government was unwilling to defend the area as a "mare clausum."¹⁰⁸ The strategic advantages of Russian territory in North America were increasingly outweighed by the costs of maintaining it, particularly given the relative attraction of peeling south into the crumbling Chinese empire around Khabarovsk, Nikolayevsk and Vladivostok (all recently founded Russian cities).

In tune with American continentalist ambitions, American interest in the far north-west was evident from 1859. Historian Hubert Howe Bancroft suggested that William Gwin, Senator of California and an ex-business partner of Perry Collins, told the Russian Government that the

¹⁰⁶ Sherwood, *Exploration of Alaska, 1865-1900*, pp. 32-33.

¹⁰⁷ Sherwood, p. 33.

¹⁰⁸ Bancroft, p. 583.

United States would pay five million dollars for their territories; in effect providing compensation for Russian American Company assets of four and a half million dollars. Prince Gorchacoff of Russia refused the offer, but ordered an enquiry into the state of the territory.¹⁰⁹

The American Civil War stopped diplomatic procedures in 1860, but the Secretary of State, William Seward, demonstrated great interest in Collins's proposed intercontinental telegraph and his negotiations with Russia. Interconnecting objectives involving Seward, Gwin and Collins ensured American political interest in Russian America. For example, when Collins and Sibley discussed the terms of the telegraph agreement in St. Petersburg, Prince Gorchacoff questioned Western Union's ability to gain right-of-way through British Columbia, much of which was still dominated by the Hudson's Bay Company. Sibley replied that he would buy a controlling interest in the Company if it resisted. Gorchacoff, learning the price Sibley could offer, "remarked that Russia would sell Alaska for a figure not much larger."¹¹⁰

Sibley alerted Cassius Clay, the American ambassador to Russia, to these talks, and Clay wrote to Seward in 1864 that a purchase "would not only.... secure our telegraph holdings," but enhance the commercial welfare of American traders, fishing companies and whalers.¹¹¹ Seward's support for the Russian-American Telegraph suggested he took Clay's advice seriously. In a ten-page article in the *Western Union Statement*, Seward announced that the country with "the largest extension and the most thorough radiation of the telegraph wire enjoys the most active and profitable system of domestic commerce."¹¹² Keen to ensure the project's success, Seward facilitated the intercontinental telegraph however he could.

Seward's association with the telegraph also gave him access to information about Russian America. Some information was publically available in the *Statement*. This document did

¹⁰⁹ Bancroft, p. 592.

¹¹⁰ Vevier, p. 228.

¹¹¹ Clay to Seward, Nov. 14, 1864, *Diplomatic Dispatches Russia*, as quoted in Vevier, p. 228.

¹¹² Seward to Chandler, May 14, 1864, *Statement*, pp. 43-53; also Seward's recommendation to extend Western Union lines into South America, *Statement*, pp. 134-135.

not contain Dall's or Bannister's detailed science, but Bulkley wrote positively of Russian America. He explained that the expectations of the scientists had been exceeded, the workers were generally in good health, and the Natives were "friendly, honest and exceedingly hospitable."¹¹³ Bulkley, however, had to portray Russian America positively to ensure continued shareholder interest in the project.

Seward's associations with Western Union directors perhaps gave him access to private knowledge of Company exploits in Russian America. Officers frequently alerted Bulkley to American opportunities for fishing and fur trading. Charles Pease had obtained information from "some Indians on the Kvikpak of.... coal deposits about 100 miles below Nulato."¹¹⁴ Daniel Libby was told of "rich samples of gold and silver by the natives" on a tributary of the Niukluk River and prepared "a rough map for later use."¹¹⁵ Through Bulkley's enthusiastic correspondence with Company directors, such information may eventually have reached Seward. Economic opportunities would complement the area's continental significance. Luckily for Seward, the reception of such information coincided with Russia's decision to sell its American territory. James, Vevier and Sherwood argue that the reports by Dall, Bannister and Elliott helped the purchase pass through Senate and House of Representatives. For me, Seward's association with the telegraph expedition encouraged him to decide to purchase Alaska in the first place.

¹¹³ Bulkley's Report, San Francisco, Dec. 18, 1865, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 5; *Statement*, p. 124.

¹¹⁴ Pease to Bulkley, St Michael's, Sept. 20, 1866, *Bulkley Papers*, pp. 167-169.

¹¹⁵ L. H. Carlson, "The Discovery of Gold at Nome, Alaska," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. XV, Sept, 1946, repr., *Alaska and Its History*, ed. Sherwood. Carlson's source was E. S. Harrison, *Nome and Seward Peninsula* (Seattle: n.p., 1905), p. 202. In 1897, Libby returned to the tributaries of the Niukluk River and found gold by Ophir Creek, Melsing Creek, and Libby Creek, and helped organise Discovery District and Council City District of Nome.

4.10. Concluding Comments.

The telegraph men's explorations of Russian America contributed to an American awareness of Alaska. Despite the harsh realities of life in the north, their representations advertised its attractiveness, and encouraged its purchase by America. Subsequent Americanisation, comprehensively discussed by historian Ted Hinckley, would enable American political, institutional and religious power to concentrate around the Panhandle and diffuse north and east.¹¹⁶ This new geography more reflected prior Russification than new American exploration, although it increasingly reflected American visions of the landscape.

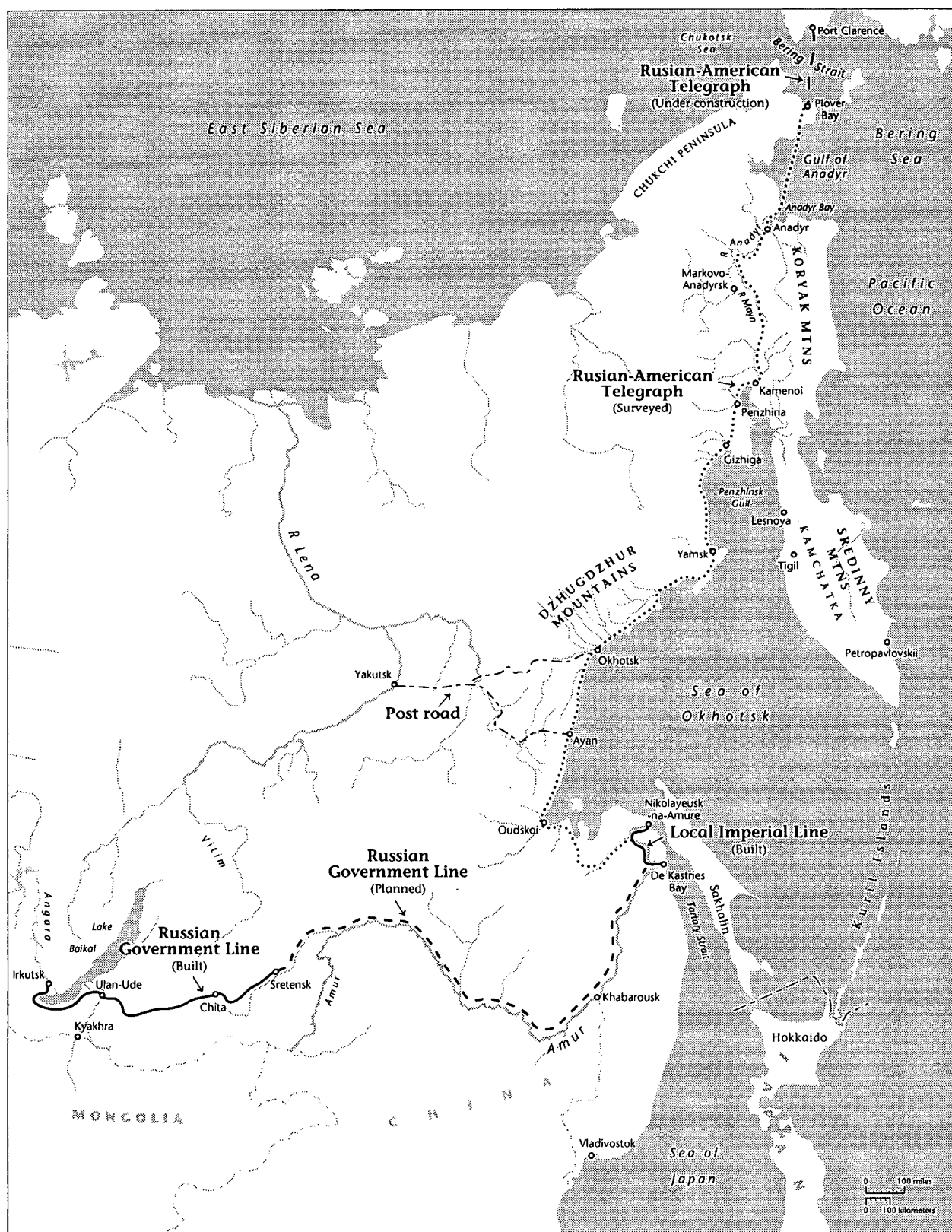
Memories of the telegraph men remain embedded in the Alaskan landscape, evident in place names such as the Bendeleben Mountains, Dall Island, Lake Labarge, Scammon Bay, Kennicott Glacier and the ghost-town of Kennicott in the Wrangell Mountains.¹¹⁷ Such names reveal American appropriation and colonisation of Native landscapes. As Alfred Hulse Brooks noted, the telegraph men contributed to non-Native geographical knowledge of Alaska. This included "a map of the Yukon River,.... establishing the identity of the Yukon of the Hudson Bay Company with the Kwikhpak of the Russians, and important additions to the knowledge of the Yukon Delta, Seward Peninsula, and the Norton Bay region."¹¹⁸ As Americans knew more about the landscape, it was possessed by them, especially by white males.

An American sense of Manifest Destiny therefore did not result in a telegraph in Russian America, but the Telegraph Expedition facilitated American imaginative and political claims to Alaska.

¹¹⁶ Ted Hinckley, *Americanisation of Alaska* (Palo Alto, California: Pacific Books, 1973).

¹¹⁷ Phillips, *Alaska-Yukon Place Names*.

¹¹⁸ Brooks, p. 43.



Map 8. Progress of the telegraph line in Siberia by 1867.

Chapter 5 - "Reindeer, Dogs and Snowshoes" and "Adventures Amongst the Koraks."¹

5.1. Perry Collins, Marco Polo and the Gateway to the East.

In 1856 Perry Collins travelled through eastern Siberia. He spent some time in Nikolayevsk, where the Amur River meets the Tartary Strait, and at Petropavlovskii on the southern tip of the Kamchatkan Peninsula. He noticed that several American trading houses were located on the coast at Petropavlovskii and Nikolayevsk, and inland at Yakutsk and Irkutsk.

The Russians, of course, had been there much longer. By 1697 Cossacks had occupied the harbour of Petropavlovskii, the base for Vitus Bering's mapping expeditions in the north Pacific from 1725 to 1728, and in 1741. With the forced and voluntary settlement of Russians and Cossacks, a Russian presence was established in Kamchatka. The settlers exploited a meagre living from furs and minerals, and by trading with indigenous Siberians such as Chukchi reindeer-herders, Koryaks and the coastal Yakutians. Toward China, the Amur region was a recent addition to the Russian Empire. Nikolai Muraviev, Governor of Siberia under Nicholas I, determined to expand Russian trade eastwards and considered the Amur an economic heartland: "Whosoever controls the mouth of the Amur would in turn dominate all of Siberia."² In 1850 his Cossack emissaries founded the imperial town of Nikolayevsk-na-Amure.

When Perry Collins heard of the annexation of the Amur, he decided to investigate its economic potential; after all, he had "already fixed.... upon the river Amoor [sic] as the destined channel by which American commercial enterprise was to penetrate the obscure depths of

¹ *Reindeer, Dogs and Snowshoes* was the title of Richard Bush's 1872 travelogue, and "Adventures Amongst the Koraks" was Kennan's subtitle in his 1870 *Tent Life in Siberia*.

² See Charles Vevier's introduction to Perry Collins's *Siberian Journey*, p. 15; cited in Neering, pp. 10-11. Vevier cites John Stanton, "The Foundations of Russian Foreign Policy in the Far East, 1847-1867," *PhD Thesis*, University of California at Berkeley.

Northern Asia, and open a new world to trade and civilization."³ Exploiting his friendship with Californian senator William Gwin, Collins secured a government appointment as commercial agent for the Amur in 1856. He recorded his travels in his 1860 book, *A Voyage Down the Amoor*, the first prominent American writing on this region. In it, Collins foresaw American opportunities for trade, mining and agriculture in landscapes that he compared to California.⁴ People therefore listened when he suggested that an overland telegraph connecting Europe to America by Siberia could open up the Asian East for American trade. Some incorporated his vision into their own orientalist imaginations. For example, John Cochrane drew on classical imagery to illustrate the potential economic advantages of the intercontinental telegraph route when negotiating in 1861, on behalf of Collins, for financial assistance from the House of Representatives:

This central gate of Inner Asia.... is renowned in history as the pathway of nations - the only practicable pass between eastern and western Asia by a central route. Through this gate, the great Mogul, Genghis led his victorious hosts,.... where Octai and Timour followed, and where Marco Polo saw an Asiatic Italy, rich in fruits and vines, wines and silks.⁵

Landscapes reputedly resembling California offered few hazards for determined American telegraph engineers. Despite colder temperatures near Bering Strait, this overland route seemed more viable for an intercontinental telegraph than one crossing the Atlantic. As Senator Latham suggested, "From New York to Paris, by the Russian-American line, we have but this one expanse of water where submerged cable will be required; and though the distance is great geographically, telegraphically it presents no very serious objection."⁶ Only two underwater

³ Collins, *A Voyage Down the Amur*, p. 3.

⁴ See Neering, p. 16.

⁵ John Cochrane of Committee of Commerce to House of Representatives, 36th Cong., 2d sess., report no. 82, "Survey of the Northern Waters, Coasts and Islands of the Pacific Ocean," Feb. 18, 1861, *Statement*, p. 21.

⁶ Milton Latham of Committee on Military Affairs to Senate, Feb. 17, 1862, *Statement*, p. 35.

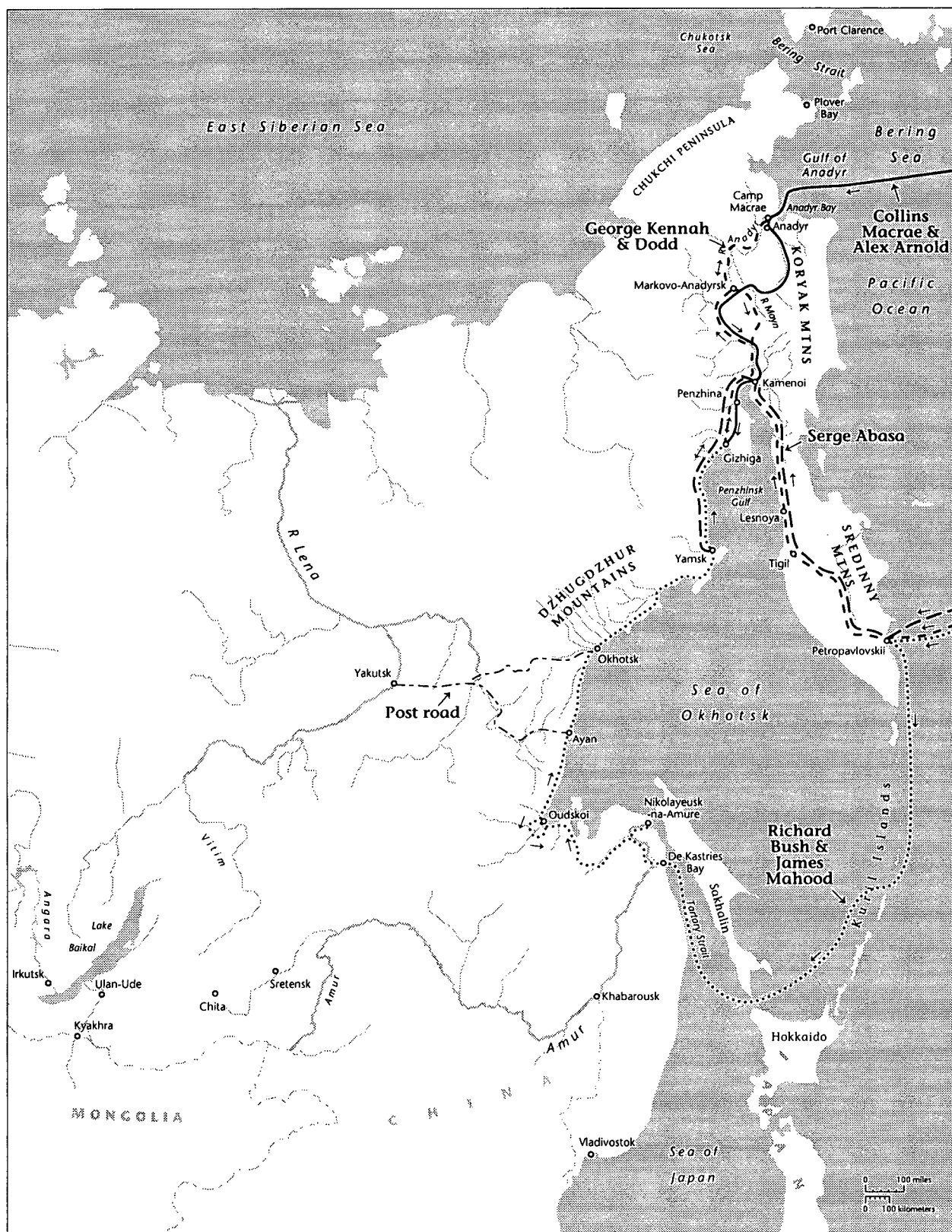
cables would be needed: first, a "one hundred and seventy eight mile" underwater cable from Port Clarence, at the western edge of Russian America, to Plover Bay (Provideniya), a headland between Bering Strait and Anadyr Bay; and second, a "two hundred and nine mile" cable from Plover Bay to the Anadyr River.⁷ It was expected, but not guaranteed, that the telegraph route would follow the Anadyr River north of the Koryak Mountains to the Okhotsk Sea, and go along the coast to Nikolayevsk. At that point, it would connect with the Russian Government's proposed line between Moscow and the Pacific.

At San Francisco in the spring of 1865, Western Union's Colonel Charles Bulkley determined to land six men in summer at Anadyr Bay. Led by Lieutenant Collins Macrae, they would survey southwest and meet a second party under Major Serge Abasa somewhere near the Okhotsk Sea. This plan was soon scuppered as no Company ships had arrived at San Francisco by May. However, Bulkley secured passages for Abasa's men on the *Olga*, a Russian trading brig bound for Okhotsk Sea.

5.2. American Heroes - Part 1.

Major Serge Abasa, George Kennan, Richard Bush and James Mahood arrived at Petropavloskii in Kamchatka on August 19, 1865. There Abasa appointed the Cossack Vushine and the American James Dodd as translators. Dodd had worked for the American Fur Company in Kamchatka for seven years, and knew something of the Russian language and of eastern Siberia.

⁷ 'Organization for the Expedition,' *Statement*, p. 15.



Map 9. Company surveyor's travels, June 1865 - April 1866.

Abasa decided that Bush and Mahood would continue to Nikolayevsk in the *Olga* and survey east to Okhotsk. Abasa, Kennan, Vushine and Dodd, would go north through Kamchatka to Gizhiga on the Penzhinsk Gulf, a likely base of operations and the home of the Russian Governor of northeastern Siberia. From Gizhiga, Abasa would survey west to Okhotsk, while Kennan and Dodd surveyed east to Anadyrsk (map 9).⁸ Surveys had to be conducted overland despite the likely coastal route, because Okhotsk Sea froze from October to May.

During the next nine months it seemed that a great deal had been achieved. The men all met again in April 1866 at Gizhiga. Also present were Macrae and Arnold, who had come from Anadyr Bay. In his 1870 book, *Tent Life in Siberia*, Kennan represented the work of 1865 as relatively successful:

Bush and Mahood.... had entered promptly upon the exploration of the west coast of the Okhotsk Sea. They had travelled with Wandering Tongoos through the densely-timbered region between Nicolaevsk and Aian, ridden on the backs of reindeer over the rugged mountains of the Stanavoi range south of Okhotsk.... The Major had explored the whole north coast of the Okhotsk Sea alone, and had made a visit to the Russian city of Yakootsk [sic], six hundred versts west of Okhotsk, in quest of laborers and horses. He had ascertained the possibility of hiring a thousand Yakoot [sic] laborers in the settlements along the Lena River, at the rate of sixty dollars a year for each man, and of purchasing there as many Siberian horses as we should require at very reasonable prices. He had located a route for the line from Geezhaga [sic] to Okhotsk, and had superintended generally the whole work of exploration. Macrae and Arnold had explored nearly all the region lying south of the Anadyr and along the lower Myan [sic], and had gained much valuable information concerning the little-known tribe of Wandering Chookchees [sic]. Dodd, Robinson and I had explored two routes from Geezhaga to Anadyrsk, and had found a chain of wooded rivers connecting the Okhotsk Sea with the Pacific Ocean near Behring's Straits. The natives we had everywhere found to be peaceable and well disposed, and many of them along the route of the line were already engaged in cutting poles.⁹

⁸ Abasa to Bulkley, Aug. 16/28, 1865 (allowing for the discrepancy between Gregorian and Julian calendars), Petropavlovskii, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 11.

⁹ Kennan, *Tent Life*, pp. 341-342.

It was autumn of 1866 when brackets and insulators, commissary supplies, wire, instruments and labourers finally arrived; construction could at last begin. Admittedly, Abasa would not, as originally intended, start work on ten sections between Gizhiga and Okhotsk, each point having a work station, a house and a store. Instead, difficulties of transport caused Abasa to concentrate his men and supplies, for the time being, in three major sections. He appointed Alex Arnold to manage American and Yakutian labourers cutting poles and building station houses near Yamsk, George Kennan to supervise work at Gizhiga, and Bush and Macrae as supervisors along the Anadyr (map 10). Several men, meanwhile, were constructing forty miles of line at Plover Bay, the headland separating the two underwater cables. Managed by Captain Jack Kelsey, the men completed thirteen miles by the onset of winter, and "dispatches were passing over it daily." The line was still incomplete when news of the suspension of operations reached 'Kelsey's Station' in June 1867. Kelsey maintained that they "would have had every pole out and all the wire strung by the last of July."¹⁰

Despite the announcement of the cessation of work, feelings of success prevailed.

Kennan wrote in *Tent Life*:

We had explored and located the whole route of the line, from the Amoor River to Behring's Straits. We had prepared altogether about 15,000 telegraph poles, built between forty and fifty station-houses and magazines, cut nearly fifty miles of road through the forests in the vicinity of Gamsk and Okhotsk, and accomplished a great deal of preparatory work along the whole extent of the line. Our resources for another season would have been ample. Besides seventy-five Americans, we had a force of a hundred and fifty natives already at work between Gamsk and Okhotsk, and six hundred more were on their way from Yakootsk: our facilities for transportation another year would have been almost unlimited. We had a small steamer on the Anadyr River, and had ordered another for the Penzhina; we owned a hundred and fifty dogs and several hundred reindeer at Gamsk, Okhotsk, and Geezhaga, and had purchased three hundred Siberian horses at Yakootsk.... By September

¹⁰ Kelsey to Bulkley, n.d., Kelsey's Station, Plover Bay, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 234.

we would have been able to take the field with a force of nearly a thousand men.¹¹

Bulkley reported such accomplishments to the Executive Committee of the Western Union Extension Company. Moreover, Bulkley announced that "the terrors of the climate to be encountered have proved almost mythical upon trial, and scurvy, the scourge of northern travellers has been altogether unknown."¹² This was a surprising claim given Bulkley's encounters with violent storms, rough seas, and extremely cold temperatures while sailing the north Pacific on the *George S. Wright*. In places where arctic "terrors" were less mythical, he acknowledged his men's fortitude:

Submitting to the hardships and braving the dangers of Arctic winters, they have remained faithfully at their posts and given to the world new examples of perseverance and energy. Whether facing the chill blast from the icy pole, doubtful whether the Indian's hut shall shelter, or a cold sky bend over their slumbers in the long dismal night or tossed on the seething waters of stormy northern seas in impact driven snows and cutting sleet, they have, with hardly an exception resolutely discharged their duties.... The greatest obstacles have been already surmounted and with the experience and knowledge gained the result must be satisfactory.¹³

The Siberian section, it seemed, was quite successful. The men had surveyed a three thousand mile route through land 'unknown' to Americans and even Russians. They had distributed poles across much of the middle and east sections. Had the work continued, the men thought that a Siberian line could soon be working.

¹¹ Kennan, pp. 422-423.

¹² Bulkley's Report to the Executive Committee, Mar. 1, 1867, San Francisco, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 192.

¹³ Bulkley to Executive Committee, pp. 194-195.

5.3. Problems Unencountered and Encountered..

They had not realised that Siberian tundra, like Russian American tundra, could not support a telegraph line of contemporary American design. Winter temperatures in eastern Siberia typically reach -50 degrees Fahrenheit. Consequently, most of the route from Bering Strait to Nikolayevsk crossed not only mountainous but frozen land, the surface of which thawed in spring. The men understood little of the mechanisms and significance of these environmental processes, except that they made work rather unpleasant. Alex Arnold and George Kennan near Yamsk and Gizhiga had supervised the construction of telegraph stations and roads, but not the setting of poles into the ground.¹⁴ In Richard Bush's section along the Mayn and Anadyr Rivers, poles were distributed but not laid. They had not, therefore, seen the effects of freeze-thaw processes on the telegraph line. Bush, however, noted the extent of the spring thaw: "Tundras along Penjinsk Gulf were nearly free from snow, making very difficult traveling. We also found it nearly impossible to ascend the Shestakova River on account of open water."¹⁵ Floods would bring problems for lines running through river valleys, especially if loose ice jammed river mouths causing flooding up-river. As much of eastern Siberia is mountainous, the most suitable routes for the telegraph, the surveyors considered, were through river valleys.

In the long run, the Siberian section would probably have failed. From 1865 to 1867, poor planning, the unexpected nature of the Siberian landscape, and a catalogue of disasters agonised the telegraph men. The reality of surveying and constructing a telegraph line through Siberia's 'frigid zone' proved more difficult than either Perry Collins or Charles Bulkley had anticipated, or than they reported to the public.

¹⁴ Kennan, p. 423.

¹⁵ Bush, *Reindeer, Dogs and Snowshoes*, p. 474.

Most likely concerned about future job prospects, Bulkley boasted of his Siberian successes to Western Union directors. He rarely discussed the horrendous problems his men faced. Reports made to Bulkley from Abasa, Mahood, Bush, Kennan, Macrae and others revealed frequent hardship. Post-expedition accounts such as Kennan's *Tent-Life in Siberia* also exaggerated their terrible situation.

Admittedly, in *Reindeer, Dogs and Snowshoes* Bush positively contrasted his situation on Okhotsk Sea in 1865 to those "thousands of homeless little orphans wandering through the gay, brilliantly-lighted streets of the great magnificent cities of the world, to whom a crust of bread would be acceptable." In an exotic place and a relatively mild climate, Bush's accommodation was comparatively luxurious: "A strip of deerskin stretched around a half circle of poles shelters us from the cold wind, and before us glows and crackles an immense camp-fire, the flames and sparks of which rise and circle among the thick branches of the fir trees beneath which we are lying."¹⁶ Behind these images, however, one senses loneliness and worry; in comparing his Siberian situation to American urban poverty, Bush was making the most favourable possible light on difficult circumstances.

His colleague James Mahood, however, wrote in frustration to Bulkley about the survey around Okhotsk Sea. Much of the 1200 mile route was mountainous. The Dzhugdzhur Mountains presented a huge obstacle for travel between Oudskoi and Yamsk, especially when there was no road between Ayan and Gizhiga. Wolves near Ayan, Mahood wrote, had eaten several of their reindeer, their mode of transport. Consequently, "the two Tungese [guides]," not Bush or Mahood, "were obliged to walk on the snow-shoes."¹⁷ Mahood also alerted Bulkley that the route was far tougher and more mountainous than expected, the cold (often -30 degrees Fahrenheit) was frequently unbearable, and that they had occasionally gone without food. Their chosen

¹⁶ Bush, p. 216.

¹⁷ Mahood to Abasa, Mar. 13, 1866, Okhotsk, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 99.

telegraph route would go inside the coastal mountains to avoid sea fogs and winds, offering no "insurmountable difficulties."¹⁸ Even so, constructing a line through such an environment would be extremely unpleasant.

For Major Abasa, his problems started immediately on arriving at Petropavlovskii. Kamchatka's isolation, no mail being delivered to Petropavlovskii in three years, meant that orders from St. Petersburg to facilitate the telegraph never arrived. Abasa forcibly negotiated local government assistance:

I can congratulate myself about having been able to impress upon their minds, that, though a private undertaking our telegraph enterprise has to be considered by them as a Government business.... I obtained the travel through the peninsula and a portion of the country north of Kamschatka, as an officer in the government employ; namely to pay only one half of the fare required.

It has been generally thought, and a very great error it was, that the work on the Asiatic side would be comparatively easy.... Our task will be difficult, hard and require an immense amount of energy and labor. In stating this I do not mean to say that the construction of a telegraph line through the country is impracticable or impossible, but I consider it my duty to expose the state of things frankly and honestly.¹⁹

Six months later, Abasa complained of the inability of the Company bureaucracy to overcome Siberia's isolation:

I am exceedingly sorry, that my financial circumstances prevent me from going to Yakoutsk myself, to hire laborers, and buy horses and cattle; but it would require an immediate outlay of eight or ten thousand roubles, and I am, as you know, almost entirely out of funds. I cannot avail myself of your authorization to draw money through Wm H. Boardman's House, the mail going from here to Nikolaevsk, via Yakoutsk and Irkoutsk, over a distance of nearly nine thousand versts....

¹⁸ Mahood to Abasa, pp. 99-103.

¹⁹ Abasa to Bulkley, *Bulkley Papers*, pp. 9-10.

I sincerely hope and wish, that it will not be found necessary to build the line in six years, instead of three, in consequence of some high financial combination at headquarters, incomprehensible to a common mortal like myself.²⁰

Abasa had not quite anticipated eastern Siberia's isolation, and was astounded by its poor infrastructure of administration and communications. He could only obtain Company money at Nikolayevsk, not too distant from Gizhiga across the mountains, but there was no road by this route. The post followed a road through Yakutsk, the long way. If Abasa was to coordinate a three thousand mile telegraph line, he needed assistance to help him overcome problems of distance and isolation. Abasa was frustrated by the feeble Russian presence in eastern Siberia, and by Western Union's unhelpful ignorance of his situation.

For George Kennan, only twenty years old, travelling two thousand miles between Petropavlovskii and Anadyr Bay was a big adventure. As he recalled in *Tent Life*, he frequently suffered cold, near-starvation, and exhaustion. At 'Devil's Pass' in northern Kamchatka, for example, he and his Kamchatkan guides were caught in "a driving snow-storm:"²¹

A long fringe of icicles hung around the visor of my cap, and my clothes, drenched with the heavy rain of the previous day, froze into a stiff crackling armor of ice upon my body. Blinded by the snow, with benumbed limbs and clattering teeth, I mounted my horse and let him go where he would, only entreating the guide to hurry and get down from somewhere off from this exposed position....

We wandered on aimlessly for two hours, over ridges, up peaks, and down into shallow valleys, getting deeper and deeper apparently into the heart of the mountains.²²

²⁰ Abasa to Bulkley, Feb. 15, 1866, Okhotsk, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 78.

²¹ Kennan, p. 139.

²² Kennan, pp. 141-142.

Making it through the mountains, not without pain, Kennan and Dodd finally reached Anadyrsk.²³ There they heard from Chukchi reindeer herders of white men stranded at Anadyr Bay two hundred miles away. Apparently these men lived in a "subterranean hut" with a "curious iron tube out of which came smoke and sparks."²⁴ Speculating that Macrae's Party had landed at Anadyr Bay that autumn, Kennan feared for their safety; a journey from Anadyr Bay to Anadyrsk in sub-zero temperatures required expert assistance. Kennan and Dodd, with Cossack Gregorie, and Cossack and Chukchi drivers left to rescue their fellow Americans. On the way, Kennan imagined "a shadowy stove-pipe rising out of a bank of snow - the 'San-greal' of which we, as Arctic knights-errant, were in search."²⁵ In truth, the Chukchi and the Cossacks were the "knights errant;" without them, Kennan and Dodd would not find Macrae's hut.

Lieutenant Collins Macrae, Alex Arnold, Alex Harder, and Messrs. Robinson, Smith and Davis had been landed in this isolated hell in late September. Temperatures were decreasing fast and they had no transport to Anadyrsk. Macrae blamed the captain of the marine service, Charles Scammon, for their predicament. Bulkley explicitly directed that Macrae's men should be landed at Anadyr Bay only in summer; as it was autumn, they should have been taken to Petropavlovskii. Scammon, probably assuming that a two hundred mile trek to Anadyrsk was a mere stroll, still ordered Captain Harding of the *Milton Badger* to land them at Anadyr Bay. Despite Scammon having disobeyed orders, Bulkley arrived at Anadyr Bay on the *George S. Wright* on October 2. He presumably had no fears about his men's fate, since he left on October 13 taking only Davis.

²³ Anadyrsk consisted of four settlements, the largest being Markovo and Crepast (this was probably an Americanism of the Russian word 'Krepost' meaning fort), near where the Mayn flowed into the Anadyr. It was an old Cossack and Russian military camp from when Russia was wrestling local control from the Chukchi. After most Russians left for new bases in Kamchatka, many Chukchi took revenge on tribes who had sided with the Russians. Many of those who survived this onslaught settled at Anadyrsk.

²⁴ Kennan, p. 300.

²⁵ Kennan, p. 307.

Isolated, with few supplies and in a small log cabin protected from the wind by snow, the men's unlikely saviour was "O-Cargo-Cray," a Chukchi reindeer herder. Visiting "Camp Macrae" in November, O-Cargo-Cray promised to take all five men to Anadyrsk in December in exchange for guns and tobacco. He returned in January, one month late, and announced that he would take two men to Anadyrsk (his reindeer were "too small" to take any more) after a detour by the "Great Deer Chief." Macrae and Arnold protested, but there was little they could do. Completely dependent on the local knowledge of O-Cargo-Cray, Macrae and Arnold departed. They left the other three men, who would soon starve if assistance did not arrive. Macrae might have taken Harder instead of Arnold, as he was the only Russian speaker among them, but "thought him too young and inexperienced to deal with the rough people."²⁶

Reluctantly, Macrae and Arnold were "forced to adopt the Tchutchu mode of living;" 'going native' was an undesirable option. Unpopular with the Chukchi, O-Cargo-Cray's colleagues wanted to abandon them, perhaps thinking they were Russian spies. Nevertheless, Macrae and Arnold remained with the Chukchi and, surprisingly, surveyed two possible routes to Anadyrsk. Their 'barbaric' adventures finally ended: "Subjected to innumerable annoying delays and petty persecutions, and.... obliged for more than fifty days to adopt the Tchutchu mode of living, with all its disgusting details," they reached Anadyrsk. They carried only "a quart of whisky and an American flag," symbols of imagined civilisation in the Siberian wilderness.²⁷

When Cossack Gregorie found the "long-looked for stovepipe," Kennan and Dodd found Harder, Robinson and Smith, who, not surprisingly, were quite glad to be rescued.²⁸

²⁶ Macrae to Abasa, Mar. 28/Apr. 9, 1866, Gizhiga, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 137.

²⁷ Bush, pp. 344-345.

²⁸ Kennan, p. 315.

In the late spring of 1866, the men were in no position to start construction: Major Abasa had little money to hire Yakutian labourers and Company supplies were not forthcoming. In August the *Clara Bell* finally arrived at the Company headquarters at Gizhiga. The corvette *Variag*, donated by the Russian Navy, arrived the next day but her excessive draft prevented her reaching shore. With such a liability, the *Variag* was almost useless as a supply ship. The Russian supply steamer *Saghalin* and the American barque *Palmetto* arrived at Gizhiga on September 23, carrying commissary supplies, wire, instruments and labourers. However, the *Palmetto's* anchor broke causing her to drift onto rocks. For four days "all the boats of the *Saghalin* and the *Palmetto*, with the crews of both vessels, were constantly engaged in transporting stores from the barque to the shore."²⁹

When the *Palmetto* was announced seaworthy, its "negro crew" refused to leave, preferring "to spend the winter in Siberia." Abasa warned them of the consequences of mutiny and ordered "their ring-leader" into "the 'black hole.'"³⁰ The *Palmetto* set sail after his release. Gizhiga had, for a short time, been a Siberian boiling pot of post Civil War ethnic tension; the white Americans, Serge Abasa and the Russian officers from the *Saghalin* were hardly sympathetic to the *Palmetto's* blacks.

Late in autumn, work began on the middle section of the Siberian line: American labourers cut poles and built telegraph stations at Yamsk and Gizhiga. Abasa had also hired eight hundred Yakutian labourers for three years "at a fixed rate of sixty roubles, or about forty dollars a year for each man."³¹ Abasa preferred Yakutians to Koryaks, Chukchi or Tunguse, because of their seemingly superior work ethic. Little information remains as to the progress of this work.

²⁹ Kennan, p. 377.

³⁰ Kennan, pp. 377-378.

³¹ Kennan, p. 400.

More information is available about the progress of the northern section. In the spring of 1866, Bush and Macrae, who were responsible for the line from Gizhiga to Anadyr Bay, surveyed the Mayn River. This took some time because of the difficulty of finding food. Finding the Mayn valley a suitable passage between Anadyr River and Okhotsk Sea, they left for Anadyrsk, where they found its inhabitants suffering from severe famine. Apparently the summer salmon had failed to ascend the Anadyr. Consequently, "many of the poorer inhabitants were living upon their deerskin beds, which they boil and make into soup, and their starved dogs were prowling about eating the carcasses of other dogs."³² Unable to find food locally, Bush and Macrae left for the Mayn River to cut poles. Fearing floods as the ice melted, they piled 1,500 poles where the rising waters could not reach them, but left 300 more to chance. On June 6 the ice broke on the Markovo River near Anadyrsk: "The river was strewn with tree-trunks and logs, writhing in the mad tumult, and tossing their scarred and twisted arms in the air as if imploring assistance."³³

What was frozen was now marsh and the buildings at Anadyrsk were mostly underwater. Bush was amazed at the extent of these floods, but did not consider how they might affect the telegraph line. Once the rivers subsided, Bush, Macrae, Alex Harder and their Chukchi assistants left for the mouth of the Anadyr to await Bulkley and supplies (fig. 25). While the Chukchi rowed, Bush selected sites every sixty miles for telegraph stations. Plagued by mosquitoes, the men had to "suffocate themselves with smoke to have any peace."³⁴

Without labourers, the Anadyr men could do little. On September 19 the *Golden Gate* and *Wade* finally brought men and supplies to Anadyr Bay. Almost immediately, the *Golden Gate* ran aground, while the *Wade*, the new Anadyr river steamer towed to the bay by the *Golden Gate*, tried to pull her back into the water. The *Wade* consumed so much fuel that the crew had to stop her frequently to build up more steam pressure. She was soon trapped amid ice, while the

³² Bush to Abasa, May 28, 1867, Markovo, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 243.

³³ Bush, pp. 396-397.

³⁴ Bush, p. 413.

Golden Gate, already damaged, took on water (figs. 26 and 27). Both vessels were stranded and their shipwrecked sailors were forced to remain at Anadyr Bay. Bush's men now numbered forty-six rather than twenty-five: "Every man saw at once the necessity of saving every ounce of food, and in a few moments our four boats were manned with volunteers to attempt another passage to the wreck." They retrieved most of their provisions, including five hundred sawed British Columbian telegraph poles, now used to build a "large, comfortable apartment" for the extra men.³⁵ Such a situation revealed the inadequate knowledge and incompetent decisions of the *Golden Gate* captain; once stranded in permanent ice, there was little chance of escape.

The men could not be put to work without sufficient food; only after Kennan brought provisions from Gizhiga in January could Bush send men to distribute telegraph poles along the Mayn. With no snowshoes and little food, the men found work painful and hard. Travelling up-river in temperatures measured at -68 Fahrenheit, *Golden Gate* crew member John Robinson died. Macrae recounted the horrific circumstances of his death:

I sat by him rubbing his wrists and hands and giving him tea every fifteen minutes. It was deeply distressing not to be able to do more for him. He talked constantly but did not say one word to show that he was aware of his situation. I delayed letting him until too late hoping he would say something himself. At 8 1/2 o'clock he asked for tea. I raised him up and he took a single swallow and straightened himself and breathed slowly for 10 minutes and expired without speaking again.³⁶

By April the rest of the Mayn River party, already suffering from starvation, faced a new problem as daytime temperatures rose. They "were so badly bitten by mosquitoes [sic] and

³⁵ Bush, p. 447.

³⁶ Macrae to Bush, Mar. 16, 1867, Telegraph Bluff Station, Mayn River, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 260.

muskes that they were hardly recognisable and many could scarcely open their eyes."³⁷ Another man named Geddes, "weak from diarrhoe [sic]," soon died of "remittent fever."³⁸

They finally gave up their work to attempt a return to Anadyr Bay. Lieutenant Norton, in charge of the men while Macrae left to try and obtain food from nearby Koryak people, admitted that the assistance of the Chukchi Illia was invaluable: "We would be almost reduced to the last mouthful [of food] when a present of fish or deer meat would be sent in by him."³⁹ Despite Illia, their suffering continued; "Mr. Kelly," having lost feeling in two fingers after becoming "frozen stiff" when lost on an evening stroll, underwent an emergency amputation:

Mr Dixon deserves great credit... having nothing to perform the operation with, but the most rude implements which consisted of a hand saw and jack knife to do the cutting with, and a pair of old rusty tweezers to pick up the arteries. The operation was performed in two hours, the patient being under the influence of chloroform. Mr Kelly is now recovering and I think has learned a lesson that will benefit him in future.⁴⁰

The spring work carried out on the Anadyr and the Mayn had been disastrous. With little food, appallingly cold winter weather, mosquitoes in the spring, and minimal Chukchi assistance (except from Illia), the Americans had little chance of success. They had assumed that work would be hard, but not like this. After the deaths of Robinson and Geddes, Kelly's amputation and the risky journey back to Anadyr Bay, the men were utterly demoralised.

At Anadyr Bay in July, Major Wright of the *Clara Bell* announced that operations were suspended. Their misery was over. All returned to America except Alex Harder, who had resigned in April; it is unclear for what reason. He could have returned to America, but opted to

³⁷ Bush to Abasa, July 15, 1867, Bush's Station, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 256.

³⁸ Bush to Abasa, p. 254; Macrae to Bush, June 4, 1867, Markovo, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 268.

³⁹ Norton to Bush, Apr. 20, 1867, Mayn River Station, Mouth Olga, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 285.

⁴⁰ J. A. Robinson to Bush, June 27, 1867, Bush's Station, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 286-287.

leave "the steamer in the night carrying his baggage with him."⁴¹ According to Frederick Whymper, he was "smitten by the charms of some lovely squaw, [and] determined to remain."⁴²

At Gizhiga another labourer called Mr. Leet shot himself "at one of the lonely Siberian settlements on.... the Sea of Okhotsk."⁴³ According to Kennan, Leet was "one of the bravest and most capable men we had in Siberia," but he suffered greatly on a spring journey from Gizhiga to Yamsk.⁴⁴ Kennan described Leet's response to a violent storm in the Stanovoi Mountains:

Our guide.... demonstrated with us upon the folly of going deliberately into such a storm as this evidently would be; but Leet laughed him to scorn, declaring in broken Russian that he had seen storms in the Sierra Nevadas to which this was not a circumstance - "Col-shoi storms, you bet!" But in five minutes more Mr. Leet himself was ready to admit that this storm on the Viliga would not compare unfavorably with anything of the kind which he had ever seen in California.⁴⁵

With the eyes of their dogs "completely plastered up with snow" and "oozing drops of blood," they continued on.⁴⁶ The storm unabating, the men sheltered beneath a tent canvas held down by the sledges:

In the course of fifteen or twenty minutes we noticed that the flappings of the canvas were getting shorter and shorter, and that it seemed to be tightening across our bodies.... In half an hour the drift had increased to such an extent that we could no longer turn over, and our supply of air was almost entirely cut off. We must either get out or be suffocated.... I cut a long slit in the canvas above my head and we crawled out. In an instant eyes and nostrils were completely plastered up with snow.... I

⁴¹ Bush to Abasa, p. 254.

⁴² Whymper, *Travels and Adventures*, p. 241. Whymper does not specify this man by name, but it was likely Harder.

⁴³ Kennan, p. 420.

⁴⁴ Kennan, Manuscript Autobiography, as quoted in Frederick Travis, *George Kennan and the Russian-American Relationship, 1865-1924* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1990), p. 17.

⁴⁵ Kennan, p. 409.

⁴⁶ Kennan, pp. 410.

wanted to ask [Leet] how this would compare with a gale in his boasted Sierra Nevadas, but he was gone.... He went away somewhere in the darkness and squatted down alone upon the snow, to suffer cold and hunger and anxiety until morning.⁴⁷

The following morning, Kennan "could not hold an axe or shovel," and their drivers, "frightened and discouraged seemed unable to do anything.... By Mr. Leet's individual exertions the sledges were dug out.... His brief spasm of energy was the last effort of a strong will to uphold a sinking and exhausted body." Close to death, Leet said "something about 'worse storms in the Sierra Nevadas.'"⁴⁸ Although he would recover, remarked Kennan, his injuries were horrific:

Snow in great quantities had blown in at his neck, had partially melted with the warmth of his body, and had frozen again in a mass of ice along his whole spine, and in that condition he had lived to be driven twenty versts. Nothing but a strong will and the most intense vitality enabled him to hold out during these last six dismal hours.⁴⁹

Leet was placed in charge of some Yakutian labourers at Okhotsk, but he had suffered enough. Lonely, injured, distraught and shattered by the sheer power of the Siberian landscape and climate, he committed suicide. Adventures in the Sierra Nevadas could never have prepared him for this.

⁴⁷ Kennan, pp. 417-418.

⁴⁸ Kennan, pp. 418-419.

⁴⁹ Kennan, pp. 419-420.



Fig 23: Christianity Claims Gizhiga (Bush, 1872)

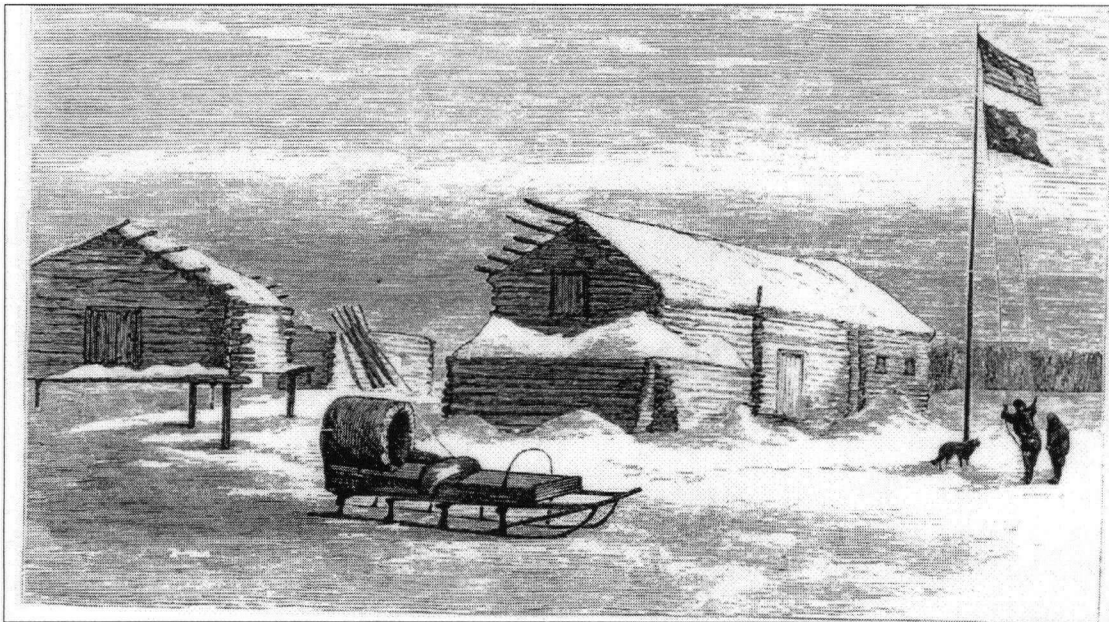


Fig 24: American and Western Union Flags at Markovo-Anadyrsk (Bush, 1872)

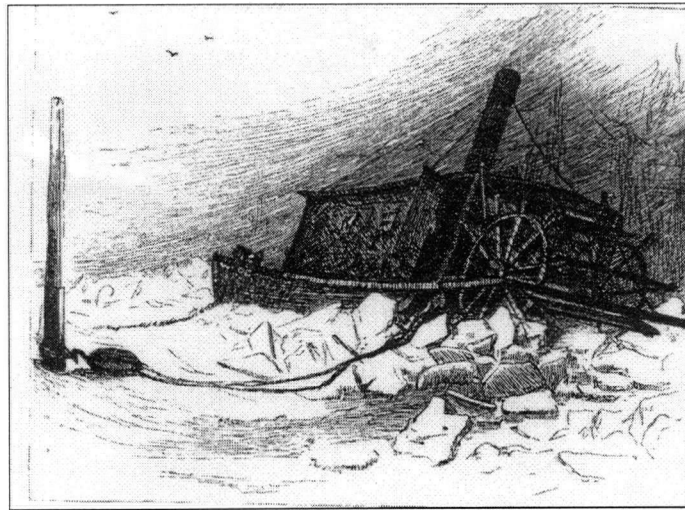


Fig 26: *Iced Wade* (Bush, 1872)

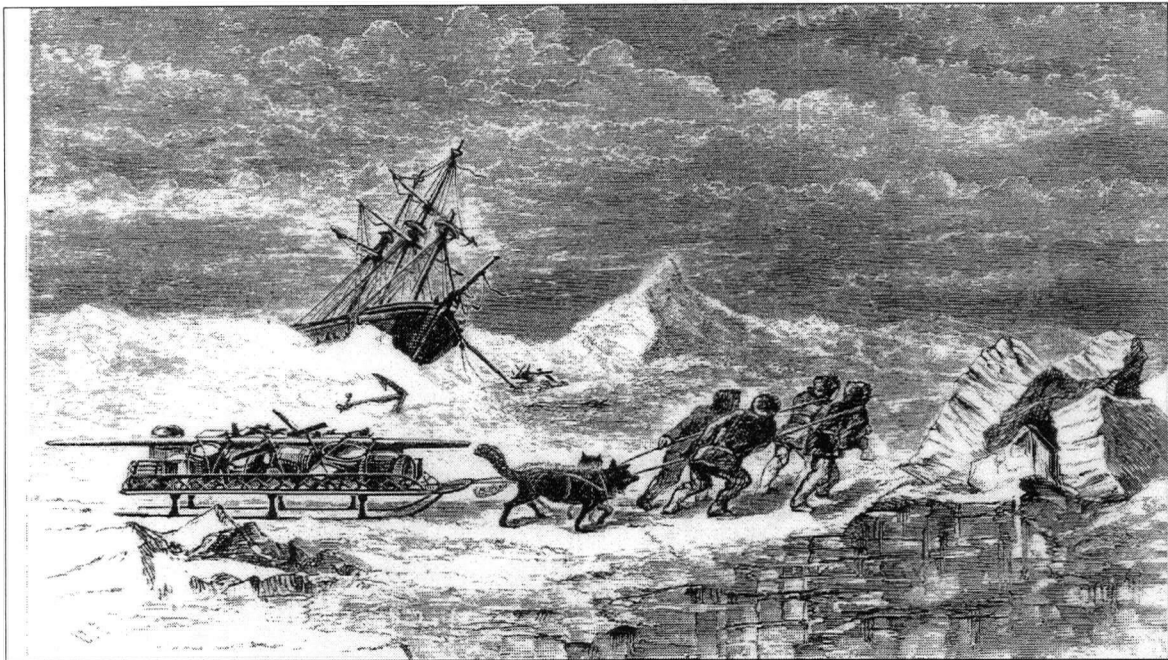


Fig 27: *Dismantling The Golden Gate*



Fig 25: Travelling on the Anadyr (Bush, 1872)

5.4. Interlude.

The telegraph men suffered greatly in Siberia. They left America convinced of their mission to connect two continents by telegraph and entwine the East within the web of American influence. They also perceived opportunities for adventure in an exotic land, but surveying 3000 miles between Bering Strait and Nikolayevsk was a daunting experience. The surveyors worked mostly in a cold mountainous land where few spoke English, and they relied on the assistance of 'primitive' Siberians and Cossacks. Furthermore, as the late autumn landing of Macrae's men at Anadyr Bay proved, Company officers, especially Bulkley and those from the marine corps, understood little about the landscapes in which the men worked.

When line construction started, the lack of provisions, labourers, telegraph materials and transportation enhanced the effects of cold, floods and mosquitoes. The men's suffering was apparent in the officers' reports to Bulkley. The deaths of Geddes, Leet and Robinson hardly substantiate Bulkley's claim that "the terrors of the climate" were "mythical." The disastrous fate of the *Golden Gate* and the *Wade* caused adverse consequences for the land service: supplies arrived late, Bush had more mouths to feed at Anadyr Bay, and the men's mobility was reduced.

The men were also unaware of engineering difficulties caused by tundra processes. They believed that once they had hammered the poles into the frozen ground, a secure line would stand. They did not understand the significance of the spring thaw, particularly along river valleys susceptible to spring flooding. Reporting to Abasa on his 1865 winter explorations of the Anadyr, Kennan announced: "I have experienced a great many 'pourgas' [snowstorms], but I have never yet seen one, which would in my opinion injure a well constructed line, where the poles are set in

solid ground."⁵⁰ It is ironic that when Bush returned to the same region the next spring, "pourgas" were not the problem - Kennan's surveyed route was underwater.⁵¹

With the ground freezing, thawing and flooding, the line would not stand up long. By June 1867, the men had not set many, if any, poles into the ground. They had faced hazards and heartaches enough, but had they continued, the impracticality of the telegraph project in Siberia would have become more manifest.

5.5. American Heroes - Part 2.

I have already contrasted Bulkley's images of the expedition's success with the 'realities,' evident in the officers' reports to Bulkley and in Kennan's and Bush's travelogues. These experiences were represented to Americans, most notably in Kennan's *Tent Life in Siberia*, Bush's *Reindeer, Dogs and Snowshoes* and Thomas Knox's *Overland Through Asia*.⁵² In general, these books fused scientific observation, geographical description and ethnographic representations with thrilling narratives. The authors wrote of heroic American encounters with starvation, loneliness, mosquitoes, disease, bitter cold, barren landscapes, snowstorms, wild Cossacks, and 'barbaric' native Siberians speaking unknown languages. While American men were presented as heroes, the Siberian landscape, its indigenous peoples, Cossacks, Russians, and Russian institutions were usually treated unflatteringly.

⁵⁰ Kennan to Abasa, Feb. 5, 1866, Markovo, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 146.

⁵¹ Contrast Kennan to Abasa, pp. 142-147, with Bush to Abasa, Jul. 21/Aug. 2, 1866, Mouth Anadyr, *Bulkley Papers*, pp. 111-122, and Bush to Abasa, June 9, 1866, Markovo, *Bulkley Papers*, pp. 134-135.

⁵² Thomas Knox was a travel correspondent with the *New York Herald*, who sailed with Bulkley on the *Golden Gate*, and then travelled independently from Nikolayevsk through Mongolia, China, Siberia, and eventually to Russia. *Overland Through Asia* was the resultant travelogue.

The landscape was deemed to possess both natural beauty and uncultured primitivism.

For example, a romantic Kennan discussed the Kamchatkan landscape with an ambivalent Dodd:

It was a warm, beautiful Indian summer's day, and a peculiar stillness and Sabbath-like quiet seemed to pervade all nature.... I laughingly said to Dodd that instead of being in Siberia - the frozen land of Russian exiles - we had apparently been transported by some magical Arabian Night's contrivance to the clime of the "Lotus Eaters," which would account for the dreamy, drowsy influence of the atmosphere. "Clime of the Lotus Eaters be hanged!" he broke out impetuously, making a furious slap at his face; "the poet don't say that the Lotus Eaters were eaten up themselves by such cursed mosquitoes as these...."⁵³

Kennan and Dodd, comparing Kamchatka with eastern America, considered it primitive, exotic, and exciting, but also uncivilised and dangerous. Embedded within such visions were beliefs that the landscape, like Russian America, tested manhood. Kennan wrote:

There [in the far north], man carries on.... an almost incessant fight with a hostile and pitiless environment. He is alone - or almost alone; he has little sympathy or encouragement from the outside world; he is deprived of the faculties and appliances of material civilization; most of Nature's laws and forces are arrayed against him; and he backs his own unaided body and brain against the cold, storms, ice, deep snow, hunger, desolation and all the depressing influences of darkness and solitude. In such a situation, personal character rises into absolute predominance; and success, when achieved, is due almost wholly to the courage, forethought, and steadfastness of the individual actor. He triumphs, not as the result of a combination of adventitious circumstances, but by sheer force of inherent manhood; and the consciousness that he has made and won the fight alone, against overwhelming odds, gives him a feeling of self satisfaction that must be counted among the keenest and most enduring pleasures of life. The North is attractive, therefore to a young and high spirited man, because it affords him an opportunity to isolate himself, try his unaided strength, and develop the traits of character that give lasting power, self-control, and self-respect.⁵⁴

⁵³ Kennan, pp. 72-73.

⁵⁴ Typed MS fragment of unpublished lecture by Kennan, titled "A Winter journey Across Northern Asia," GK MSS, Library of Congress (hereafter LC), Box 97, as quoted in Travis, p. 20.

In this geographical vision, Kennan has entwined the landscape within a masculinist fantasy of male prowess. While he does not directly construct the landscape as feminine, he sees it as barren and unwelcoming; only the extent of his "inherent manhood" could determine whether the landscape could be conquered.⁵⁵

Kennan also reduced and constrained other people and places within the bounds of American ideologies, evident in American descriptions of native Siberians. Believing in their own Anglo-Saxon 'racial' superiority, they judged Natives to be part of Siberia's "primitive barbarism."⁵⁶ Kennan described the "Kamchadals" as "a quiet inoffensive, hospitable tribe of semi-barbarians, remarkable only for honesty, general amiability, and comical reverence for legally-constituted authority."⁵⁷ He was far less complementary about the settled Koryaks of the Penzhinsk Gulf, who were "unquestionably the worst, ugliest, most brutal and degraded natives in all Northeastern Siberia."⁵⁸ Bush wrote that the "settled Tungusians.... were far inferior to the wanderers, possessing neither the robust constitutions, spirited and independent dispositions, nor cleanly habits of the latter."⁵⁹ Of the Yakutians, who in some ways resembled American entrepreneurs, he was more complimentary:

[They were] a very quiet, inoffensive people, industrious, ingenious, and gifted with a natural business tact. They might, with propriety, be called the Yankees of Siberia. It is not uncommon to meet them in the most isolated regions with long trains of deer laden with trinkets of all kinds, which they peddle out to the nomadic tribes in exchange for pelts.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ One of the reasons why Kennan embarked on the expedition was to prove his bravery. Frequently ill during childhood and protected from front-line action in the American Civil War, the expedition provided an excellent opportunity for him to develop courage, strength and life-experience. So concerned had he been about his perceived weaknesses that while stationed in Cincinnati during the Civil War, he frequently walked around the rough sections of the city to expose himself to the maximum amount of danger.

⁵⁶ Kennan, p. 205.

⁵⁷ Kennan, p. 155

⁵⁸ Kennan, p. 232.

⁵⁹ Bush, p. 263.

⁶⁰ Bush, p. 161.

The Americans generally disparaged Native religion, food, clothing, language, manufactures, weapons, customs and technological knowledge. To illustrate their technological deficiencies, Kennan humorously related Chukchi and Yookaghir attempts to use his field glasses:

Observing their curiosity, I gave the glass to one of them and told him to look through it at another native who happened to be standing out on a plain at a distance of perhaps two hundred yards. The expression of blank half-incredulous surprise which gradually came over his features as he saw that native brought up, apparently within a few feet, was irresistably comical.... [H]e removed the glass, and saw the man standing quietly as before, two hundred yards away. The idea then seemed to occur to him that if he could only get this mysterious instrument to his eyes quickly enough he would surprise the man in the very act of coming up - catch him perhaps about half-way - and find out how it was done. He accordingly raised the glass towards his face very slowly (watching the man meanwhile intently to see that he took no unfair advantage and did not start too soon) until it was within an inch of his eyes, and then looked through it suddenly. But it was of no use.... His comrades of course denied indignantly that the man had moved at all, and they engaged in a furious dispute as to whether this innocent and unconscious man had been anywhere near them or not. The native who maintained the affirmative appealed to me; but convulsed with laughter, I could make no reply.⁶¹

Kennan, their observer, explained their responses for his American readers:

We who are familiar with these discoveries of science can hardly realize how they appear to a wholly uneducated savage; but if a superior race of beings should come from the planet Jupiter and show us a mysterious instrument which enabled a man to be in two different places at the same time, we would understand the sensations of a poor Chookchee in looking through a field-glass.⁶²

⁶¹ Kennan, pp. 326-327.

⁶² Kennan, p. 327.

Kennan also wrote of his attempts to 'educate' his "native drivers upon the wonders of modern science" by giving them a "course of lectures" on astronomy:

I was compelled, like John Phoenix, to manufacture my own orrery and I did it with a lump of frozen tallow to represent the earth, a chunk of black bread for the moon, and small pieces of dried meat for the lesser planets. My first lecture would have been a grand success if my native audience had only been able to understand the representative and symbolical character of the bread and tallow. The great trouble was that their imaginative facilities were weak. They could not be made to see that the bread stood for the moon and tallow for the earth, but persisted in regarding them as so many terrestrials having an intrinsic value of their own. They accordingly melted up the earth to drink, devoured the moon whole, and wanted another lecture immediately. I endeavored to explain to them that these lectures were intended to be astronomical rather than gastronomical, and that eating and drinking up the heavenly bodies in this reckless way was very improper.⁶³

In these examples, Kennan ridiculed the Natives. In the former, as the American voyeur, he concluded that the Native inability to use his field glasses reflected their 'uneducated' and 'savage' state. Their apparent technological inferiority to his own race, and also to the mythical Jupiterian, indicated their "primitive barbarism." The description of his astronomy lecture, meanwhile, perfectly conveys how Kennan differentiated between their savage 'nature' and his own modern 'culture.' His Native drivers saw his demonstrative aids as food, while Kennan considered them symbolic of scientific knowledge. Humorously, he contrasted their simplicity with his cultured complexity.

These tales would amuse his American readership, but on another occasion Kennan's calm use of technology in a life or death situation illustrated the advantages of modern

⁶³ Kennan, pp. 279-281.

civilisation. Kennan and his Kamchatkan and Koryak assistants were trapped in a severe snowstorm in the Kamchatkan mountains; his Koryak guide considered the party lost. Kennan came to the rescue with his compass:

I finally called the guide, told him I would take the lead myself, and, opening my little pocket compass, showed him the direction of the sea-coast. In that direction I determined to go until we should come out somewhere. He looked in stupid wonder for a moment at the little brass box with its trembling needle, and then cried out despairingly, "Oh Bahrin!" "How does the come-pass know anything about these proclaty mountains ? the come-pass never has been over this road before. I've travelled here all my life, and, God forgive me, I don't know where the sea is!".... I assured him confidently that the "come-pass" was "shipka master," or a great expert at finding the sea in a storm; but he shook his head mournfully, as if he had little faith in its abilities, and refused to go in the direction which I indicated.⁶⁴

Kennan and his "come-pass" guided the crew to the nearby sea. Kennan wrote of the guide's response:

It was a simple picture, but it was full of cheerless, mournful suggestions. Our guide, after looking eagerly up and down the gloomy precipitous coast in search of some familiar landmark, finally turned to me with a brighter face, and asked to see that compass. I unscrewed the cover and showed him the blue quivering needle still pointing to the north. He examined it curiously, but with evident respect for its mysterious powers, and at last said that it was truly "shipka master."⁶⁵

Kennan and his "come-pass" were vindicated. Western technology succeeded where the natural instincts of the Koryak guide had failed. Moreover, this had taken place in Koryak territory. All of these representations imply that technology was a major factor differentiating modern, educated and civilised American man from primitive, instinctive and heathen Siberian.

⁶⁴ Kennan, p. 142. 'Bahrin' was a term meaning 'sir,' used to address the pre-revolutionary upper classes. 'Proclaty' is Russian for 'cursed.'

⁶⁵ Kennan, p. 143.

Such ethnocentric representations were not limited to the indigenous inhabitants. Cossacks such as Vushine and Gregorie were essential to the expedition, but were infrequently referred to in the travelogues and rarely portrayed as heroes. Considered as Kennan's intermediary with the native Siberians, Vushine made an effective lieutenant but no more. His skills as a violent disciplinarian, for example, came in rather useful when dealing with a drunk Kamchatkan boat crew:

Our native crew, sharing in the universal dissipation which had attended our departure, and wholly unaccustomed to such reckless drinking, were reduced by this time to a comical state of happy imbecility, in which they sang gurgling Kamchadal songs, blessed the Americans, and fell overboard alternately.... Vushine.... hauled the drowning wretches in by their hair, rapped them over the head with a paddle to restore consciousness.... shouted, swore, and proved himself fully equal to any emergency.⁶⁶

As colonisers, Russians and Cossacks were usually deemed ineffective. Serge Abasa was especially critical. He wrote that Siberia needed "a more efficacious representation of the Russian authority."⁶⁷ In that way, the road between Gizhiga and Okhotsk might be improved. After all:

A compass cannot be of much use in this mountainous country, where a false step or a team of dogs becoming unmanageable can lead to fatal consequences.

All means for making the road more practicable have been neglected through the carelessness of the inhabitants, who themselves know but little about the country, when forty or fifty versts from their homes.⁶⁸

Abasa could, however, empathise with native Siberian responses to Russian colonisation. He noted the Tunguse tribe's "unwillingness....to initiate Russians into the secrets of their territory:"

⁶⁶ Kennan, pp. 57-58..

⁶⁷ Abasa to Bulkley, Feb 15, 1866, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 71

⁶⁸ Abasa to Bulkley, p. 74.

Here we find a sort of shrewd servility mixed with the proverbial obstinacy of the Asiatic races, instead of the somewhat rough frankness of the wild, but openhearted Kuriak [sic]....

Prudent and anciliatory behaviour towards them is indispensable. They don't dread or hate us like invaders, but consider us as intruders, who will do much harm to their hunting grounds. The supposition is certainly not without foundation.⁶⁹

Abasa nonetheless assumed that stronger Russian authority would enhance indigenous respect for the benefits of European institutions and modern civilisation. The transposition of modern infrastructures would assist this process. An inefficient fifty-mile Russian telegraph between Nikolayevsk and De Kastries Bay, Bush thought, was of limited use and needed improving: "Upon arriving at the telegraph station, we learned that the line was out of repair...., and not unfrequently days elapse before it is put in working order again."⁷⁰ Also the proposed Government line between European Russia and the Amur had only reached Sretensk by 1867, about five hundred miles east of Irkutsk.⁷¹ As bearers of civilisation, the Russians were deemed ineffective.

Siberia, therefore, was ethnocentrically perceived according to American norms of landscape, civilisation, institutional control, trade, and Christian salvation. Embodied in the accounts of Kennan, Bush and Knox were beliefs in the universality of modern progress; in effect they portrayed Siberia as an unmodern other. Mary Louise Pratt shows "how travel books by Europeans about non-European parts of the world went (and go) about creating the 'domestic subject' of Euroimperialism; how they have engaged metropolitan reading publics with (or to) expansionist enterprises whose material benefits accrued mainly to the very few."⁷² By

⁶⁹ Abasa to Bulkley, p. 74.

⁷⁰ Bush, p. 73.

⁷¹ Travis, p. 18; also Jorma Ahvenainen, *The Far Eastern Telegraphs - The History of Telegraphic Communication Between the Far East, Europe and America Before the First World War* (Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae, 1981), p. 31. The line reached Irkutsk by 1863.

⁷² Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 4.

objectively representing the state of others (in both imperial core and periphery) as unfortunate, uncivilised and ungodly, the travel writings of Kennan, Bush and Knox justified imperial ideologies embedded within American Manifest Destiny.

These three travelogues contributed only minimally to the plethora of writings which have informed Western discourses of orientalism.⁷³ Kennan, though, noticeably affected the American imagination in other ways.

5.6. *Tent Life* in Siberia and Russian Expansionism as Told by George Kennan.

In *Tent Life in Siberia* Kennan used remarkable word imagery and humour to portray his adventures among barren landscapes and exotic tribes. Abetted by his successful lecture career in America, *Tent Life* "sold continuously, if not spectacularly for half a century."⁷⁴ It was reprinted with illustrations and a new introduction in 1910. Republished as recently as 1986, it was reviewed by the American Museum of Natural History as "a thrilling account," an "adventurous tale," and "a great escape into the subzero land of the midnight-sun!"⁷⁵

Tent Life reveals indirectly how Kennan's work with the Telegraph Expedition helped him perceive Russian imperialism. Having experienced Yakutian, Chukchi and Koryak societies, he considered their societies admirably innocent, but in need of civilisation. The expansion of Russian laws, infrastructures, and trade into their lands was, he thought, one means by which these peoples could be morally raised from their barbaric state.

Such visions affected his career path in the United States after 1868. After all, "there were few positions.... for a man who knew best how to drive a team of howling Siberian huskies

⁷³ For a now classic discussion on orientalism, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vantage, 1978).

⁷⁴ Travis, pp. 41-42.

⁷⁵ American Museum of Natural History, *Members Book Program, 1988 Catalog.*, as quoted in Travis, p. 42.



Fig 28: George Kennan Aged 20.

and make camp in a driving arctic blizzard."⁷⁶ Kennan used his Siberian experiences as suitable material for entering a career in journalism and lecturing. His first publication, "Camping out in Siberia," appeared in *Putnam's Magazine* in September 1868. At the same time he emerged as a skilled, professional lecturer. Donning a 'Siberian' costume of fur, Kennan told humorous anecdotes of his Siberian travels and of the exotic people he had encountered. He also wished to 'instruct' his audiences, not just entertain them. In some of his lectures he tried to "correct what he believed to be the American public's erroneous view of Siberian exile."⁷⁷

The Siberian exile system was a Russian policy of corrective reform and eastward colonisation. Criminals and political revolutionaries were sent to Siberia and forbidden to return to European Russia. Thus Russia would rid itself of 'criminal' elements while settling its vast eastern empire. The scheme was criticised by many Europeans, particularly in Britain, for offering little to Russian and Siberian society or to exiles. Kennan disagreed, asserting that exiles could help civilise indigenous Siberians. For the exiles this was not a severe punishment. As Kennan once said, he would prefer exile for life in Siberia to five years in the Ohio State Penitentiary.⁷⁸

His ideas were confirmed after revisiting the Russian empire in 1870. Renewing his acquaintance with Serge Abasa in St. Petersburg, he left for the Caucasus where he again saw how Russian expansion could facilitate the region's moral development:

The more I see of wild people, the more I am inclined to believe that it is education which makes the man. There is no reason to doubt that the innate quality of these wild Lesghian mountaineers is equal to that of the average Englishmen or American & the only difference between them arises out of the circumstances in which they are respectively placed. One has advantages, education, culture, & the other has not. One grows

⁷⁶ Travis, p. 36.

⁷⁷ Travis, p. 39.

⁷⁸ *Cincinnati Chronicle* and *Cincinnati Gazette*, Jan. 22, 1870, in Scrapbook of Kennan's Early Lecture Notes, as quoted in Travis, p. 40.

up an intelligent thinking reasoning human being & the other a mere wild animal.⁷⁹

With the gentle persuasions of Russian officials and Serge Abasa, an associate of the Russian royal family, his belief in Russian expansion as a mechanism of civilisation was reinforced. He also had new materials for his lectures and journal articles.

It was in 1882 that he began to focus mainly on Russian expansion in his lectures. That year he successfully lectured before the American Geographical Society on "Siberia - The Exiles Abode." In it, he defended Russian policies of exile by bombarding his unknowledgable American audiences with 'objective' statistics, frequently relieved by humorous anecdotes. He argued that popular American criticisms of this exile system were biased by British misrepresentations of Russian expansion and that reports of Russian brutality, particularly toward political exiles, were exaggerated. Instead, Kennan proposed that the system benefitted criminals and native Siberians. Having spent considerable time in northeastern Siberia and the Caucasus, he claimed to have seen how such a system might be effective. In reality, he saw many indigenous peoples but few exiles, as their main "abode" was west of Irkutsk. Nevertheless, he secured new commissions for lectures, the most significant being six dates at Boston's famous Lowell Institute in February 1884.⁸⁰

His influence was not limited to the lecture circuit. He frequently corresponded with the *New York Tribune* on Russian policy.⁸¹ He also possessed many influential acquaintances, such as scientists William Healey Dall (Kennan's friend from the Telegraph Expedition), Spencer Baird (of the Smithsonian Institute), the inventor Alexander Graham Bell and his prestigious father-in-law, Gardiner Hubbard. In 1888 Kennan and Hubbard would found the National Geographic Society; Kennan was its first secretary. Through his lectures and scientific associates, he became

⁷⁹ Entry, Oct. 2, 1870, GK, MS Caucasus Journals, vol. 1, as quoted in Travis, p. 46.

⁸⁰ Travis, p. 86.

⁸¹ Travis, p. 77.

acquainted with Presidents Hayes, Cleveland and Garfield, and Secretaries of State John Hay, John Foster and Robert Lansing. Kennan certainly influenced American opinion on Russian issues, particularly, before 1885, by refuting criticisms of the Siberian exile system.

5.7. The Evils of Siberian Exile as Told by George Kennan.

In May 1885, Kennan returned to Siberia to investigate and report on the exile system for *Century Magazine*. After fifteen months of interviewing Siberian exiles, Russian officials and Russian emigres in London, and having studied the imperial justice system and Russian politics, Kennan significantly revised his former conclusions:

Confession of one's errors is said to be good for the soul and I shall have to subject myself to a little of that sort of discipline. In fact I am not sure that I shall not have to call my forthcoming book "How I became a Nihilist."... What I saw, heard and learned in Siberia stirred me to the very depths of my soul - opened to me a new world of human experience and raised in some respects all my moral standards. I made the intimate acquaintance of characters as truly heroic in mould - characters of as high a type - as any outlined in history and saw them showing courage fortitude self-sacrifice and devotion to an ideal beyond anything of which I could believe myself capable.... I went to Siberia regarding the political exiles as a lot of mentally unbalanced fanatics bomb-throwers and assassins and.... when I came away from Siberia I kissed these same men good bye with my arms around them and my eyes full of tears. You will I am sure understand that it was no ordinary experience which brought about such a revolution as that.⁸²

During 1885 and 1886 Kennan traversed south west Siberia; he visited Ekaterinburg, Tomsk, Irkutsk, the Nerchinsk mines and the prisons at Kara. He was affected by what he considered the maltreatment of political exiles, many of whom were implicated in the populist 'People's Will' revolt against Alexander II. With the Tsar's assassination in 1881, the Russian

⁸² Kennan's letter to Anna Dawes, Dec. 15, 1866, GK MSS LC, Box 6, as quoted in Travis, pp. 111-112.

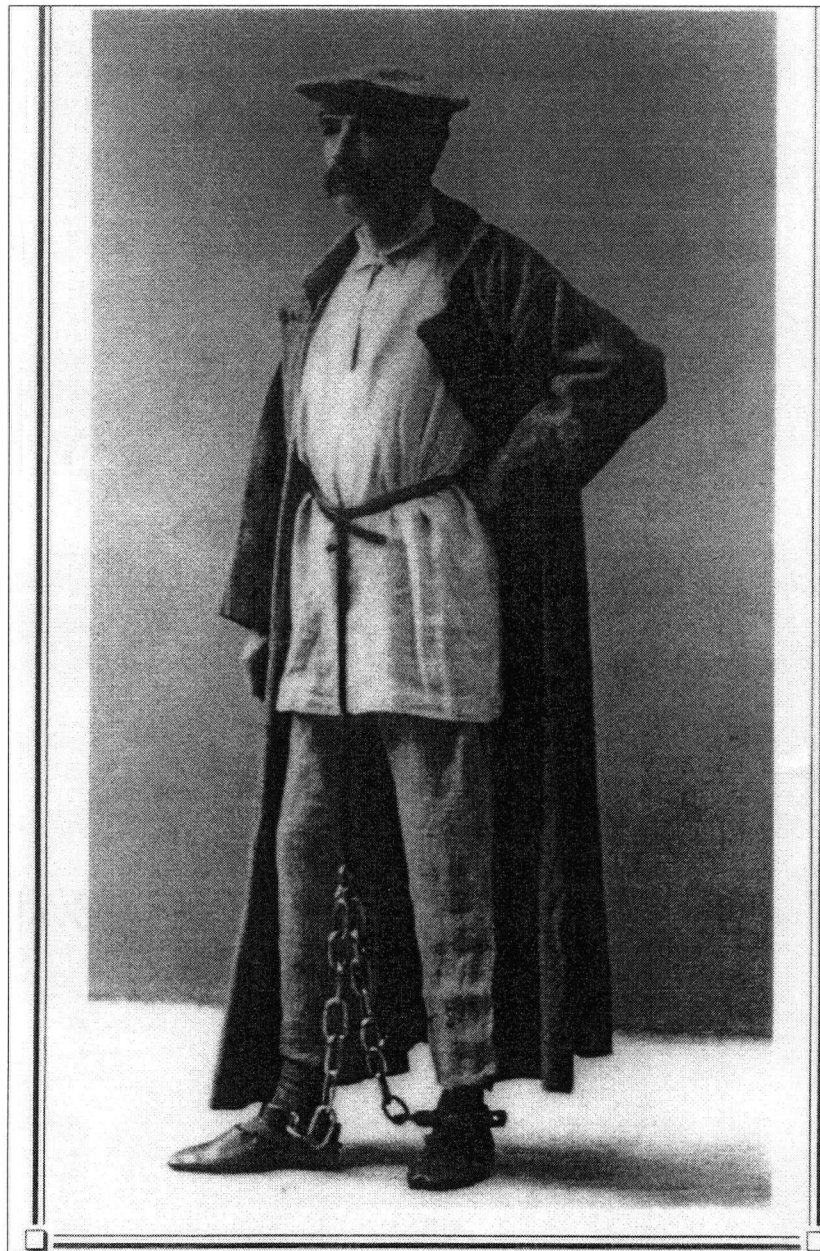


Fig 29: George Kennan Clothed as a Siberian Exile

Government sent many alleged radicals and nihilists to Siberia. Kennan perceived that these exiles stood for democracy, liberty, and individual freedom. He considered it a grave injustice that they were removed from their homes, families and friends.

He wrote his opinions for *Century Magazine*, a journal with a readership of 200,000, a number that increased with Kennan's contributions. Between May 1888 and October 1891, he ran twenty-nine features. Century Company President Roswell Smith wrote that "it is the simple narration of such thrilling facts as these, without note or comment, which will move the indignation of the civilized world, and will produce such results as 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' produced in this country."⁸³ Smith later wrote to Kennan that his exile series was "the highest honor and privilege to which the *Century Magazine* has ever attained."⁸⁴ Kennan's articles were revised and reprinted in 1891 in his influential two volume *Siberia and the Exile System*.⁸⁵

From 1889 to 1898, Kennan also delivered eight hundred lectures. Sergei Kravchinskii, a Russian emigre in London popularly known as Stepniak, wrote that while Kennan's writings had "as much influence upon the minds of his contemporaries as any thing that has been penned by any man," his lectures "fanned to fever heat American sympathy and indignation."⁸⁶ Major Pond, Kennan's lecture manager after 1888, thought him "about as good" as any contemporary lecturer.⁸⁷ In March 1888, after a private address on exile prisons to the Washington Literary Society, Kennan reported that Mark Twain rose to his feet and proclaimed, "If dynamite is the only remedy for such conditions, then thank God for dynamite!"⁸⁸ In February 1889 Kennan again lectured at the Lowell Institute. He claimed to have performed in front of 1,000 seated people and hundreds more crammed into the aisles.⁸⁹ Lecturing extensively throughout eastern America, he

⁸³ Roswell Smith to Kennan, Oct. 13, 1887, GK MSS, LC, Box 57, as quoted in Travis, p. 154.

⁸⁴ Roswell Smith to Kennan, Dec. 5, 1888, GK MSS, LC, Box 57, as quoted in Travis, p. 154.

⁸⁵ George Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*, 2 Volumes (New York: Century, 1891).

⁸⁶ Unsigned letter, June, n.d., 1893, *Free Russia* [American Edition], 3 (June, 1893), p. 17, as quoted in Travis, p. 177.

⁸⁷ Pond, *Eccentricities of Genius*, p. 290, as quoted in Travis, p. 178.

⁸⁸ GK MS Autobiography, Box 13, as quoted in Travis, p. 178.

⁸⁹ Kennan to Felix Volkhovsky, Mar. 17, 1889, GK MSS, LC, Box 1, as quoted in Travis, p. 178.

was advertised as "the mouthpiece and spokesman to the world of the oppressed thousands of Russia."⁹⁰

Kennan's nephew, George Frost Kennan, a future American Ambassador to the Soviet Union, explained why Kennan generated such a sensation:

It was a time when America was coming of age, abandoning the egocentricity of its youth, and turning its eyes to the world beyond its borders. Tales of suffering and oppression elsewhere were particularly stirring to a generation which firmly believed in progress and which, still recovering from the trauma of the Civil War, was disinclined to any intensive introspective analysis of its own weaknesses. Kennan's [material] struck squarely and with great effect into that curious Victorian capacity for sympathy and indignation over evils that were far away.⁹¹

Of course, many of the reports of Kennan's successful lectures came from Kennan himself. Nevertheless, as an able opportunist he exploited America's self-confidence to inform sympathy for maltreated Russian exiles, who, he considered, held mature political views.

His experiences as a twenty year old with the Russian-American Telegraph Expedition traversing tundra and living among 'barbaric tribes' had significantly affected the course of his career. By the turn of the century, his ideas were different to those he purported after returning from Siberia in 1868, but Kennan still acknowledged the importance of the telegraph:

The web of the environment... in which I was caught, in my earliest childhood, was spun out of telegraph wire.... [I]t was the telegraph that first sent me to Siberia, made me a traveler and an explorer, and gave me an interest in Russia, and to the telegraph I am indebted for my introduction to journalism, literature and the lecture field. I have sometimes wandered far, but by a telegraph line, or the influence of a telegraph line, I have always and everywhere been bound.⁹²

⁹⁰ *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, Feb. 5, 1890, as quoted in Travis, p. 179.

⁹¹ George Frost Kennan, Introduction to *Siberia and the Exile System* by George Kennan, abbrev. and ed. version (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958), as quoted in Travis, pp. 179-180.

⁹² GK MS Autobiography, as quoted in Travis, p. 4.

The failed telegraph expedition contributed to Kennan's success: first, as a defender, and then, as an adversary of Russian imperialism. I think it ironic that from one failed American mission, Kennan found success in another.

5.8. Concluding Comments.

The telegraph exerted little permanent influence on Siberian landscapes. It was never constructed from Bering Strait to Nikolayevsk. Given the unsuitable application of contemporary American telegraph engineering to Siberian tundra, it probably never could have been. However, work on the telegraph brought this 'unknown' and 'barren' place into the American imagination. The ethnocentric representations of Siberia, evident in Bush's, Kennan's and Knox's books, contributed to American attitudes of orientalism, legitimising self-considered American superiority over barbaric others. Perhaps the greatest impact of the expedition was on the career of George Kennan. Having traversed eastern Siberia as a twenty year old telegraph surveyor, he would influence American opinion on Russia.

Of course, I have made only few comments about the fate of the Siberians associated with, and affected by, the telegraph men. Little information, at least in English, remains about the Yakutian labourers, the Chukchi Illia and O-Cargo-Cray, Harder's "Siberian beauty," or Cossacks Vushine and Gregorie. These were the irrelevant others of Perry Collins's mission to connect two continents telegraphically.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

The Russian-American Telegraph was an ambitious modern mission with an American flavour. The managers and planners of the project oozed the rhetoric of global American Manifest Destiny. Through the proposed telegraph line by Bering Strait to Europe, the United States could expand its interests to Asia. Not only would the first telegraph link between America and Europe derive immense profits for investors, it would also morally uplift East Asia to the standards of the West. Its construction was both a cultural mission and a business venture. Perry Collins elaborated the spirit of his project to the Travelers Club in New York:

I shall therefore present.... our North Pacific Overland plan, and incidentally speak of the great world of Northern Asia where slumbering millions of the human race await our magnetic touch, and where commerce in vast proportions will be made quick and soon grow to man's estate, by the life-giving principle of the telegraph. Half the population of the whole world will be tributary to us as we pass through Asia to Europe; our network of wires radiating from the grand trunk line will penetrate the great cities and marts of commerce, bringing to us the daily wants, ideas and commerce of the heretofore Eastern world; but now by the march of progress, steam and electricity, we find it changed to the West. Therefore, I say success and God speed to all telegraph lines on sea or on land.¹

Underlying Collins's rhetoric was a belief in the power and goodness of God, trade and science. It was an optimistic and considerably courageous agenda. Such a simple idea could accrue tremendous rewards for Collins, those associated with the work, Americans in general, and those who would 'become civilised.' As Company secretary O. H. Palmer wrote to Colonel Bulkley, "You are entering on a work which if successful will give you a name and reputation, not only in the history of this country, but in that of all the civilized nations of the earth, well

¹ Collins to Traveler's Club, *Statement*, p. 144.

worth all the efforts and sacrifices before you."² Bulkley replied, "More courage was exhibited in the determination of those who said 'this shall be done - we will do it,' than is requisite in your engineer to accomplish the task."³ If Bulkley and his men succeeded, financial gain and historical fame would accumulate for project financiers, managers, labourers and supporters.

The route did not appear to be a problem. In comparison to the Atlantic cable, with all its underwater technical difficulties, this overland route seemed rather straightforward. Perry Collins in *Overland Explorations* had waved his pen over a map of the Pacific to indicate the likely route. On the map, a broad black line left the known headwaters of the Fraser, entered Russian America and then left it at Bering Strait. It followed the coast of Siberia to Nikolayevsk to join the Russian telegraph system. The surveyors had only to determine the details of the route and two years hence, messages could be passing to and from Europe.

Of course, Americans had little idea of the landscape under that penned line. American science was yet to be alerted to arctic tundra. Contemporary telegraphic technology, wonderfully effective in the United States, was all but useless where ground would repeatedly freeze and thaw. The telegraph line, usually located in river valleys in mountainous East Siberia and Russian America, was also susceptible to spring flooding, especially where ice jams were common. Furthermore, tundra conditions made land transportation problematic. The enormity of the operation was not limited to the land. The marine service covered great distances in cold, icy and rough waters. Planned timetables were rendered useless as Company ships struggled to reach destinations on time; more useless if, like the *Golden Gate*, ships were trapped in ice. Unsurprisingly, at the suspension of work in April 1867, only a small portion of the proposed line operated. Messages ran between New Westminster and Quesnel in British Columbia and could, if needed, reach Fort Stager (Ans'pa yaxw or Kispiox) north of the Skeena. In Russian America,

² O. H. Palmer to Bulkley, Dec. 16, 1864, *Statement*, p. 82.

³ Bulkley to Palmer, May 2, 1865, *Statement*, p. 83.

Ferdinand Westdahl revealed that telegraph poles hammered into frozen ground collapsed into summer's marshy soup. In Siberia poles were distributed along some of the route, but, except at Plover Bay, remained unlaied; after all, the men had faced considerable difficulties.

Surveying and constructing a line in sub-zero temperatures through canyons, mountains, taiga and tundra was not easy, especially when the men were so ill-equipped. These problems were compounded as starvation loomed, ships were trapped in icy waters, Native peoples were angered, and mosquitoes came out in clouds. This caused immense stress for all workmen and contributed to the deaths of Kennicott, Leet, Geddes, and Robinson. After the Atlantic cable successfully linked America to Europe and the Western Union suspended work, most men gratefully returned to the United States. They also felt a sense of defeat: at Plover Bay and Unalakleet, for example, men left black flags on abandoned poles to symbolise their failed mission.

It was in the men's actions and stories that the historical and geographical significance of the Russian-American Telegraph was embedded. In America after 1867, the telegraph men usually portrayed themselves as heroes. Northern life, they said, provided great hazards, but was exotic and exciting. Few could deny the strength, fortitude, character and manhood of those who survived the barren and dangerous "frigid zone." Neither would many people dare suggest, after hearing their stories, that the north was a place for modern women. These gendered fantasies implied that men such as Henry Bannister, who failed to beat the arctic challenge, were less manly than those who conquered the 'wild north land.'

Obviously, every telegraph man perceived his northern encounter differently. Frederick Whymper was willing to muck in and sow his wild oats along the Yukon's "dreary grandeur." William Dall believed that as a scientist (therefore superior to 'superstitious' Natives), he could treat the north and its peoples as a gigantic science laboratory. Daniel Libby, who literally struck

gold, considered that trade was the best mechanism of modernising 'primitive' "Esquimaux" people. George Adams considered violence as the best means of disciplining others. Ed. Conway considered that work in British Columbia made "punishment in Siberia" seem like "paradise," but Charles Morison relished his times pioneering the Skeena with the "happy crowd."

In Siberia, George Kennan - just twenty years old in 1865 - carried great weight on young shoulders. Within two years he proved his coming of age by exploring Kamchatka and northeastern Siberia, coordinating the rescue of Macrae's men at Anadyr Bay, living among wandering Koryaks, managing Yakutian labourers, and learning Russian. Mr. Leet, his colleague, responded to a cold, lonely journey through mountains by committing suicide. Collins Macrae, who faced starvation with five other men at Anadyr Bay at the onset of the arctic winter in 1865, reluctantly 'went native' with O-Cargo-Cray's Chukchi. For Russian nobleman Serge Abasa, untamed landscapes and disrespectful native Siberians reflected inadequate Russification.

Such images, painted over with a gloss of manly heroism, informed new external intervention into the transformation of the north and re-informed modern ideas. This was particularly evident with George Kennan, who, having seen Siberia's "primitive barbarism," felt able to write and lecture for a time on the desirability of Siberian exile as a civilising mechanism of Russian expansion. His remarkable oratories considerably affected American opinion of Russia.

William Seward, hearing from Bulkley and others of the abundance of furs, fish and other exploitable resources in Russian America, bought the territory for \$7,250,000 in March 1867. William Dall, Henry Bannister and Henry Elliott would later argue against popular notions that 'Seward's Folly' was a mere 'icebox.' Without images generated by the telegraph men, the Americanisation of Alaska would have taken a very different form.

A telegraph line to the United States and well into the interior enhanced British Columbian communications. Despite the line's inefficiency, colonial and capitalist power more easily diffused north. Such tentacles of progress facilitated corridors of economic development and immigrant settlement, bringing modern images, ideas, institutions and identities into places lived in by Native peoples. One such modern institution was Western Union's corporate strategy of work, entailing strict managerial discipline over the time and movement of workers, whether American, Chinese, Russian or Native.

Telegraph exploration enhanced knowledge of potential corridors of power, such as the Bulkley Valley in the northern interior, and the Stikine, Nass and Skeena rivers along the north west coast. These routeways provided future entry points into northern British Columbia for colonial government, capitalists, missionaries and settlers. It was no coincidence that non-Native settlement in Hazelton and Telegraph Creek gathered momentum soon after the telegraph work, and resulted in the dislocation of nearby Native peoples.

Perry Collins's and Western Union's original objective to build a telegraph between America and Europe by Bering Strait had failed: a telegraph line would not facilitate the "distanciation" of modern social systems "across time-space" except in a small part of British Columbia.⁴ The deeds of the telegraph men in their own unique way, however, distanciated modernity through to Nikolayevsk. Visions of destiny and mission, blatant in the rhetoric of Perry Collins, Milton Latham and William Seward, confirmed and enhanced American imperialism. Euro-American ideologies impacted on distant places as the telegraph men powerfully interacted with peoples in Siberia, Russian America and British Columbia; in effect invading the lived spaces of others and filling them with modern notions of trade, violence, God, work, gender and

⁴ See Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, Volume 1, *Power, Property and the State* (London: Macmillan, 1981); also Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984).

technology. The invasion was carried out without the permission of others, but that mattered little - the Americans simply attributed this to Native ignorance.

White confidence in power and righteousness informed beliefs that the telegraph men could legitimately employ, exploit and manage Native peoples. Trade especially, Bulkley reported, "brings them [Natives] into more immediate contact with us, and will render them more dependent and servicable."⁵ If such dependency, framed in an altruistic rhetoric of civilised friendship, was openly rejected, the Company could ensure its authority by resorting to violence. Beliefs in White supremacy legitimised Abasa's employment of eight hundred Yakutians, Dall's scientific investigation of Native lands, and the British Columbian workmen's symbolic, appropriative renaming of Native places.

Of course, indigenous peoples were frightened as powerful white men "compressed" their lifeworlds.⁶ Certainly, as Wet'su'wet'en John Brown revealed years later, the Wet'su'wet'en feared the "talking wire" taking away their "treasured secrets" and leaving "nothing concealed."⁷ There would be some resistance to this White invasion, sometimes blatant but often more subtle. Not surprisingly, expedition literatures reveal little of Native resentment. It might be speculated that when hungry telegraph men needed food, especially in Russian America, Natives might claim they had none. Sometimes, Native resistance was noticeable. Ennis revealed that Natives at Unalakleet, angered by American interference in their land, blamed the telegraph men for the scarcity of reindeer: "it was owing to the Americans planting poles through their mountains, which... they believed, frightened the reindeer off."⁸ Similarly, J.A. Robinson noted the Chukchi refusal to distribute poles and wire along the Anadyr River: "some of them said they were afraid

⁵ Bulkley to Executive Committee, *Statement*, p. 192.

⁶ See David Harvey, "Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Volume 80, 1990, pp. 418-434; also David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989)

⁷ Cassidy, *The Gathering Place*, p. 23.

⁸ Ennis to Bulkley, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 204.

of the wire."⁹ Robinson blamed their "laziness," but the Chukchi feared and resented the strange, imposing, American men and most definitely did not want to work for them.

Overall, the spirit of the Telegraph Expedition invoked the imposition of a Euro-American culture onto less powerful cultures. The deeds of the telegraph men between New Westminster in British Columbia and Nikolayevsk-na-Amure contributed to modernity's encroachment into northern places. In time, Americans, Canadians, Britons and Russians would claim unconstituted authority over Alaska, the Yukon and Siberia, dispossessing Native peoples of many of their traditional livelihoods and freedoms.

The telegraph men did not "hold the ball of the earth" and "wind upon it a network of living and thinking wire" as Senator Milton Latham had hoped. Neither was "the whole.... held together and bound with the same wishes, projects and interests," but the telegraph men made a mighty good attempt. Perhaps a hymn, commemorating the success of the Atlantic cable, might provide a suitably fitting tribute to the modern Christian objectives of Perry Collins's unlaidd electronic rim around the Pacific that would affect so many others:

From world to world His couriers fly,
Thought-winged and shod with fire;
The angel of his stormy sky
Rides down the sunken wire.

And in one heart, as in one blood,
Shall all her peoples be;
The hands of human brotherhood
Are clasped beneath the sea.

Throb on, strong pulse of thunder! beat
From answering beach to beach;
Fuse nations in thy kindly heat,
And melt the chains of each!¹⁰

⁹ J. A. Robinson to Bush, June 27, 1867, Bush's Station, *Bulkley Papers*, p. 289.

¹⁰ Neering, p. 195; taken from *Cyrus Field*, ed. Isabella Judson (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1896), p. 196. The tune goes, I think, to that of "While Shepherds Watched...."

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