



# FORTUNE'S DISTANT SHORES

A History of the Kotzebue Sound Gold Stampede  
in Alaska's Arctic



CHRIS ALLAN



As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural and cultural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation.

The Cultural Resource Programs of the National Park Service have responsibilities that include stewardship of historic buildings, museum collections, archeological sites, cultural landscapes, oral and written histories, and ethnographic resources.

Our mission is to identify, evaluate and preserve the cultural resources of the park areas and to bring an understanding of these resources to the public. Congress has mandated that we preserve these resources because they are important components of our national and personal identity.



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***Fortune's Distant Shores***

***A History of the Kotzebue Sound Gold Stampede in Alaska's Arctic***

**Chris Allan**

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Front Cover: Carl von Knobelsdorff, known as "The Flying Dutchman," traveled hundreds of miles on ice skates along the Kobuk River delivering news and personal letters for one dollar each, ca. 1898. Bancroft Library, Samuel W. Fansher Collection (2015.79).

Title Page: Frank Nichols of Fall River, Massachusetts and colleagues with their steam launch on the Kobuk River, ca. 1898. Alaska State Library, Frank C. Nichols Photograph Collection (p256-33).

Back Cover: The George M. Stoney towing a raft of stampedees and supplies toward Hotham Inlet and the Kobuk River, ca. 1899. The propeller-driven steamer was built for a mining company led by William A. Hayne, Jr. of Santa Barbara, California. Alaska State Library, Frank C. Nichols Photograph Collection (p256-44).

All color photographs were taken by Dr. Andrew Hope during a 2014 research trip on the Kobuk River. Collection held by the National Park Service, Central Alaska Network, Small Mammal Vital Signs, Fairbanks, Alaska.

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HISTORIC CONTEXT STUDY FOR:

GATES OF THE ARCTIC NATIONAL PARK & PRESERVE

NOATAK NATIONAL PRESERVE

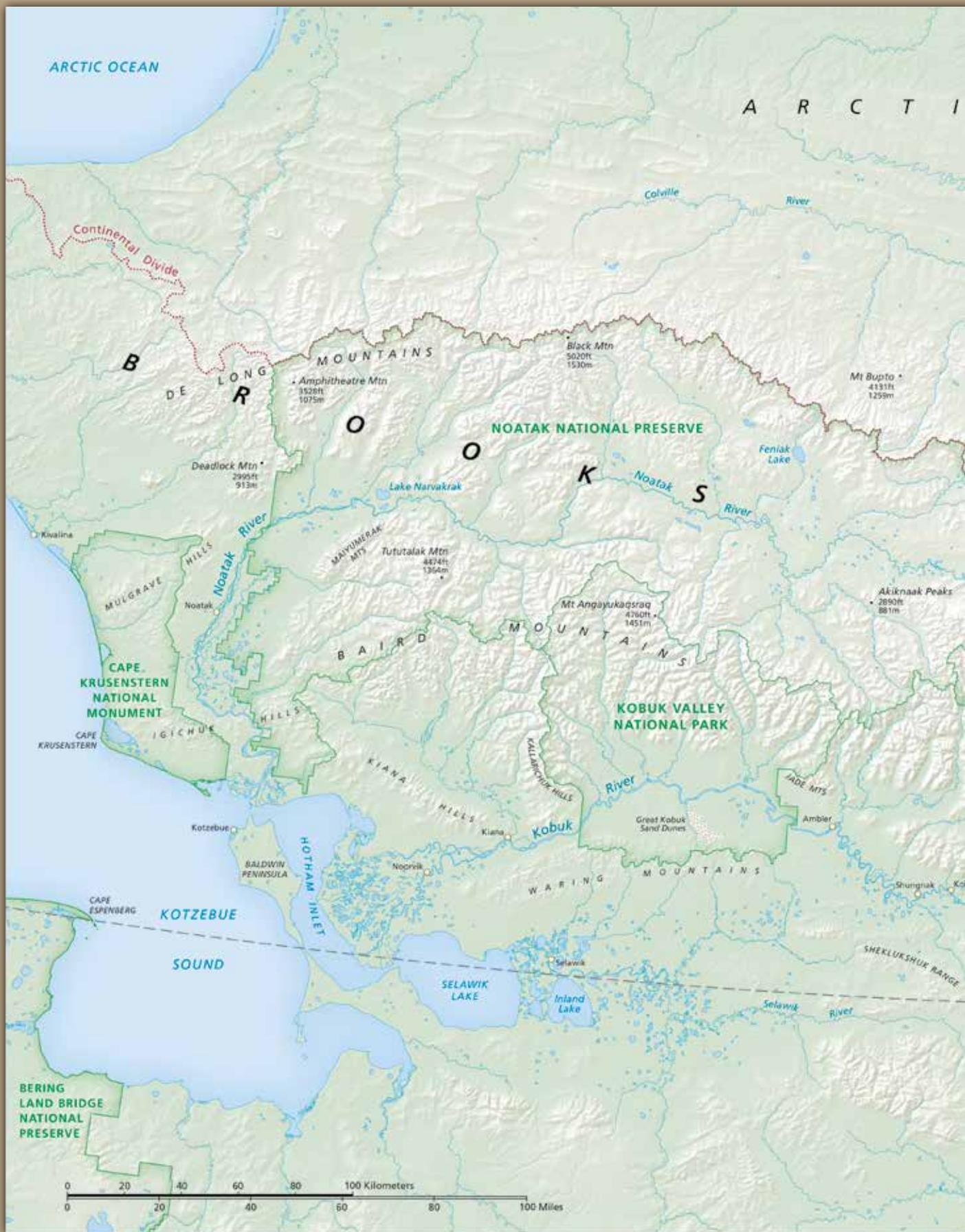
KOBUK VALLEY NATIONAL PARK

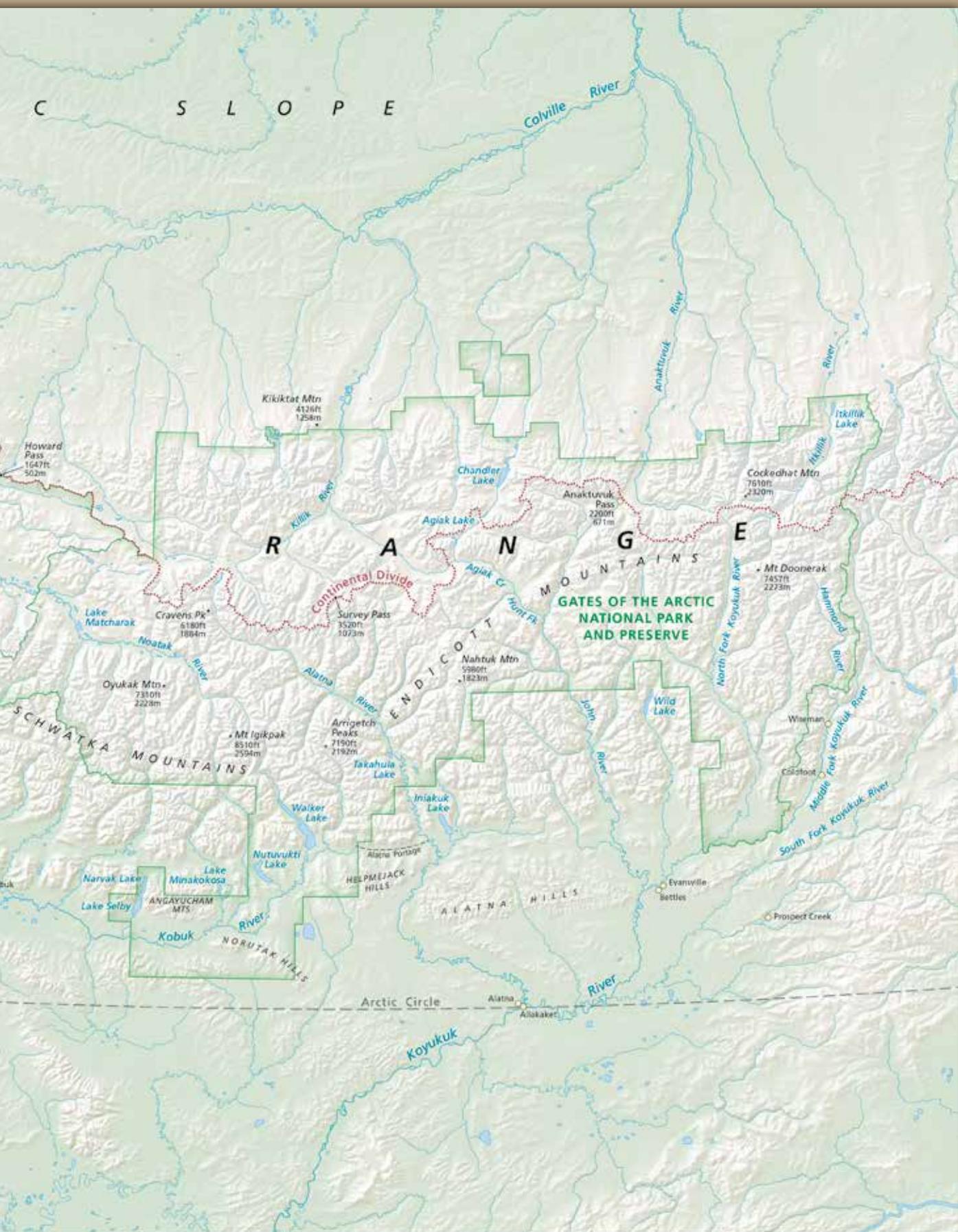
CAPE KRUSENSTERN NATIONAL MONUMENT

BERING LAND BRIDGE NATIONAL PRESERVE

CHRIS ALLAN  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
FAIRBANKS ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER

2019







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## A NOTE ON NAMING

One of the most problematic placenames in the story of the Kotzebue Sound gold stampede is the 350-mile-long Kobuk River. The Inupiaq name means “big river.” However, the spelling has changed over time. The name was first recorded by the surgeon John Simpson who arrived in the area in 1850 as part of the search for the British explorer Sir John Franklin. Simpson wrote it as *Kowuk*, and over the years it took many other forms, including *Ku-buck*, *Kooak*, *Kopak*, and *Kowak*. In the 1890s, when tales of Kotzebue Sound gold first emerged, the river usually took this last spelling—*Kowak*—but within a short time the stampeders and newspaper writers shifted their preference to *Kobuk*, which remains the preferred spelling today. In nearly every case in the Kotzebue Sound region, geographic locations have both local indigenous names and Euro-american names, and during the 1890s these were often used interchangeably. When quoting the letters or journals of stampeders, I add spelling corrections or alternative names in brackets only if there is a risk of confusion.

Another naming convention that deserves explanation is the use of Inupiaq/Inupiat. The indigenous peoples of Arctic North America and Greenland have long been referred to as Eskimos or, more recently, Inuit. However, in Alaska the people of the Arctic coast and northern interior are known as the Inupiat, or Inupiaq Eskimos. Other, more specific names are based on village groups or river systems. For example, the Nunamiut are an inland Eskimo group who now live primarily in the village of Anaktuvuk Pass and the indigenous people of the Kobuk River are identified as Kuuvanmiit. All are more broadly Inupiaq people. The plural form of the word is Inupiat. The adjectival form is Inupiaq.



The schooner *Chasseur* from Aberdeen, Washington at a point sixty-five miles up the Kobuk River, ca. 1898.  
Alaska State Library, Frank C. Nichols Photograph Collection (p256-32).

## FOREWORD

Truth be told, Joseph Grinnell was more interested in birds than gold when the opportunity arose to join twenty fellow Californians searching for treasure in a distant, northerly corner of North America. At twenty-one he was the youngest member of their newly formed mining syndicate—the Long Beach and Alaska Mining & Trading Company—and the only ornithologist. As a teenager in Pasadena, Grinnell prepared zoological specimens of birds and small mammals he caught near his home and this passion for biology would later evolve into a lauded career. Unlike his fellow gold-seekers, he had been to Alaska before—he had recently returned from fifteen months in Sitka, in southeast Alaska, where he collected bird skins and eggs, chatted with the naturalist-philosopher John Muir, and had an all-round fabulous time. When Grinnell returned from Sitka, the lust for Klondike gold was reaching a fevered pitch and people from all walks of life were setting their sights on northern gold fields. On May 19, 1898, he and his comrades boarded their 72-foot yacht *Penelope* and sailed from San Francisco harbor for unknown shores.<sup>1</sup>

They were not alone. Thousands of fortune hunters were headed in the same general direction, though the vast majority wanted to reach Dawson City and the Klondike gold fields in Canada where rich deposits of nuggets and dust had been discovered. Grinnell's group had different ideas. They decided to focus instead on an unlikely section of northwestern Alaska called Kotzebue Sound, which straddled the

Arctic Circle and was much closer to Siberia than to Sitka. Grinnell promised his mother he would keep a journal of his adventures “for the folks back home,” and he began this account with a comment on his mining company's choice of destination: “Why we have selected Kotzebue Sound as the field of our maneuvers it would be difficult to give a rational reason. It may be nothing more nor less than the universal rush to the gold fields of Alaska, which rush, being infectious, attacks all grades and conditions of men.”<sup>2</sup> The roughly two thousand stampeders going to Kotzebue Sound were thrusting themselves into a world of extremes where they would live side by side with indigenous people and struggle with rugged terrain, profound cold, accidents, and disease. The experience would test their bodies and their minds—and many would not return.

Stampeding to high latitudes in search of gold was rarely a decision made in sober contemplation, and the affliction known as Klondike fever (or Klondicitis) hijacked the imagination, jettisoned reason, and thrived on rumors and unsound advice. As the rush to Alaska and the Klondike accelerated, dependable news-reporting was in short supply and newspapers often relied on men disembarking from ships for testimonials. Newspapers also printed letters sent by stampeders or paraphrased correspondence intended for family and friends. In the process, the truth was often exaggerated in the telling or distorted as stories passed from one newspaper to another across the United States. In addition, many people had reasons to boost the idea that Far North gold was

plentiful and easy to recover. Business owners selling food, equipment, and transportation to stampedeers often employed this tactic. People forming mining companies—some real, some fraudulent—also benefitted from stoking Klondike fever. And many would-be gold miners seemed all too willing to build castles in the sky, believing whatever the latest reports might offer. In the case of Kotzebue Sound, the truth was nowhere to be found, and when Grinnell wrote to his concerned parents, he expressed the blind faith of many gold-seekers of the era: “Kotzebue will have a bigger boom than Klondyke, and we’ll be right in it, don’t you forget it!”<sup>3</sup>

The anatomy of a gold stampede can be hard to flesh out because first-hand accounts are often scarce. There are several reasons for this—events unfolded quickly, not allowing much time for reflection; not every stampeder was an able or eager writer; and the journals, letters, and photographs that were produced can go missing over time. The Kotzebue Sound gold stampede does not have this problem. Grinnell, for example, kept careful notes for a year and a half, and when he returned from Alaska his mother, Elizabeth, edited them for publication as *Gold Hunting in Alaska* (1901). Eugene McElwaine, who also sailed to Kotzebue Sound, wrote about his experiences in *The Truth About Alaska: The Golden Land of the Midnight Sun* (1901). A number of accounts by Kotzebue Sound stampedeers were later published in magazines, and other materials—journals, letters, advertisements, and maps—reside in archives. Historical newspapers, many recently digitized and available online, are a particularly rich source of stampeder accounts, and photographs, taken by the stampedeers themselves, also provide a wealth of information about their daily lives during this dramatic rush to northwestern Alaska.

When woven together, these primary sources reveal a colorful cast of characters drawn from across the United States and around the globe. Take, for example, the thrill-seeking Italian prince Luigi Amedeo of Savoy, also known as the Duke of the Abruzzi, who was busy climbing Mount St. Elias near Alaska’s southern coast when news of the Klondike gold rush broke. Unable to go himself, he financed a mining company of Italians and Americans to investigate Kotzebue Sound. The Kotzebue Sound story also features the German mailman Carl von Knobelsdorff who strapped on ice skates to deliver letters and newspapers along the frozen Kobuk River—the stampedeers affectionately dubbed him The Flying Dutchman. Accounts from this Far North stampede tell of the Quaker missionaries Robert and Carrie Samms and Anna Hunnicutt who arrived in Kotzebue Sound just months before the stampedeers, not to find gold but to save souls. They socialized with other Quakers in the newly formed mining camps and built a mission compound that would eventually grow into the city of Kotzebue. And finally, this story introduces Bernard “Barney” Cogan, the whaling captain who convinced the world that Kotzebue Sound was a first-rate alternative to the Klondike, and who, it seems, also fell victim to gold fever.

Understanding the gold rush era is important not merely because it offers rippin’ good yarns (though it does that) but also because it allows us to hear voices from the past and to better comprehend the forces that shaped Alaska’s present. When the gold-seekers arrived in Kotzebue Sound, they were entering the homeland of the Inupiat who supplied the newcomers with food and survival gear like snowshoes, mukluks, parkas, and sleds with the dogs to pull them. The Inupiat fished and hunted

for the stampeders and traded with them for Western foods and other goods. And because Inupiaq settlements and the stamper camps were close together, opportunities arose for cultural exchanges between the two groups. The presence of Quaker missionaries in Kotzebue Sound and in the gold camps on the Kobuk River also marked the beginning of dramatic changes on a local level for Alaska's indigenous people. Gold stampedes are often remarkable for how quickly they fade—the gold-seekers arrive, scramble about for a year or two, and then disappear. The Kotzebue Sound stampede fits this pattern, but it can also be viewed as a harbinger of profound and lasting changes in the lives of local residents.

Also, when searching for historical significance, we should not ignore the influence the Kotzebue Sound gold stampede (and others like it) had on Alaska's reputation in the minds of Americans in the Lower 48 states. When the stampeders returned home, they told their families

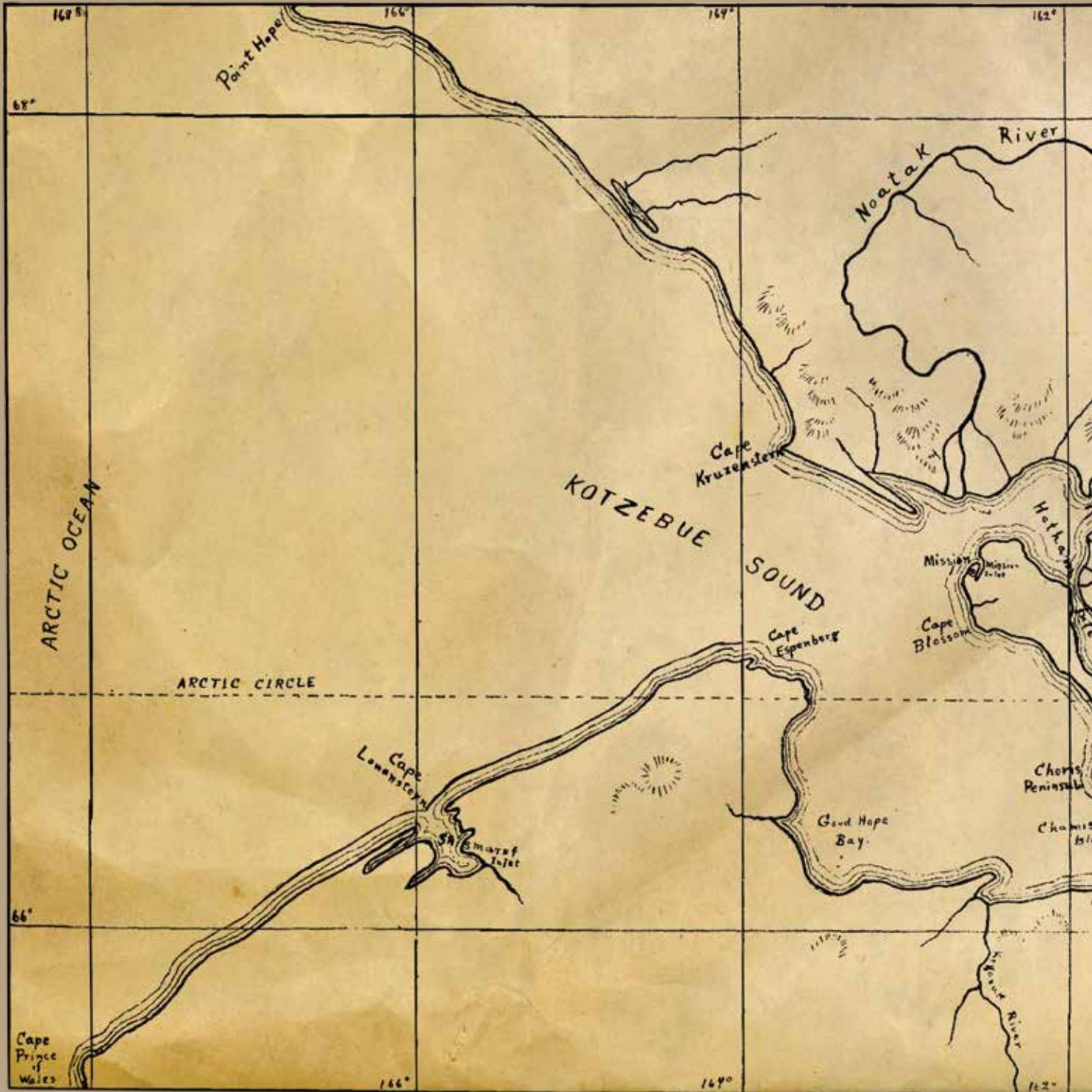
about hardships they suffered, the long, dark winter, and their disappointment at not finding more gold, but they also described landscapes of exceptional beauty and the sense of adventure that thrilled even the most jaded fortune hunter. Today a battery of national parklands—Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, Noatak National Preserve, Kobuk Valley National Park, Cape Krusenstern National Monument, and Bering Land Bridge National Preserve—cover much of the area the Kotzebue Sound stampeders encountered. Each of these parks serves the mission of the National Park Service to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”<sup>4</sup> This mission, and a host of laws guiding the management of cultural and historical resources, demand that we seek to understand and protect the rich human history of these special places.

<sup>1</sup> “Gold Hunters Purchase the Yacht Penelope,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 1, 1898, 19; Hilda W. Grinnell, “Joseph Grinnell, 1877-1939,” *The Condor* (January-February 1940), 3-5. The Long Beach and Alaska Mining & Trading Company was formed in San Pedro and left that city's harbor on April 8, 1898, but the *Penelope's* last port of call in California was San Francisco.

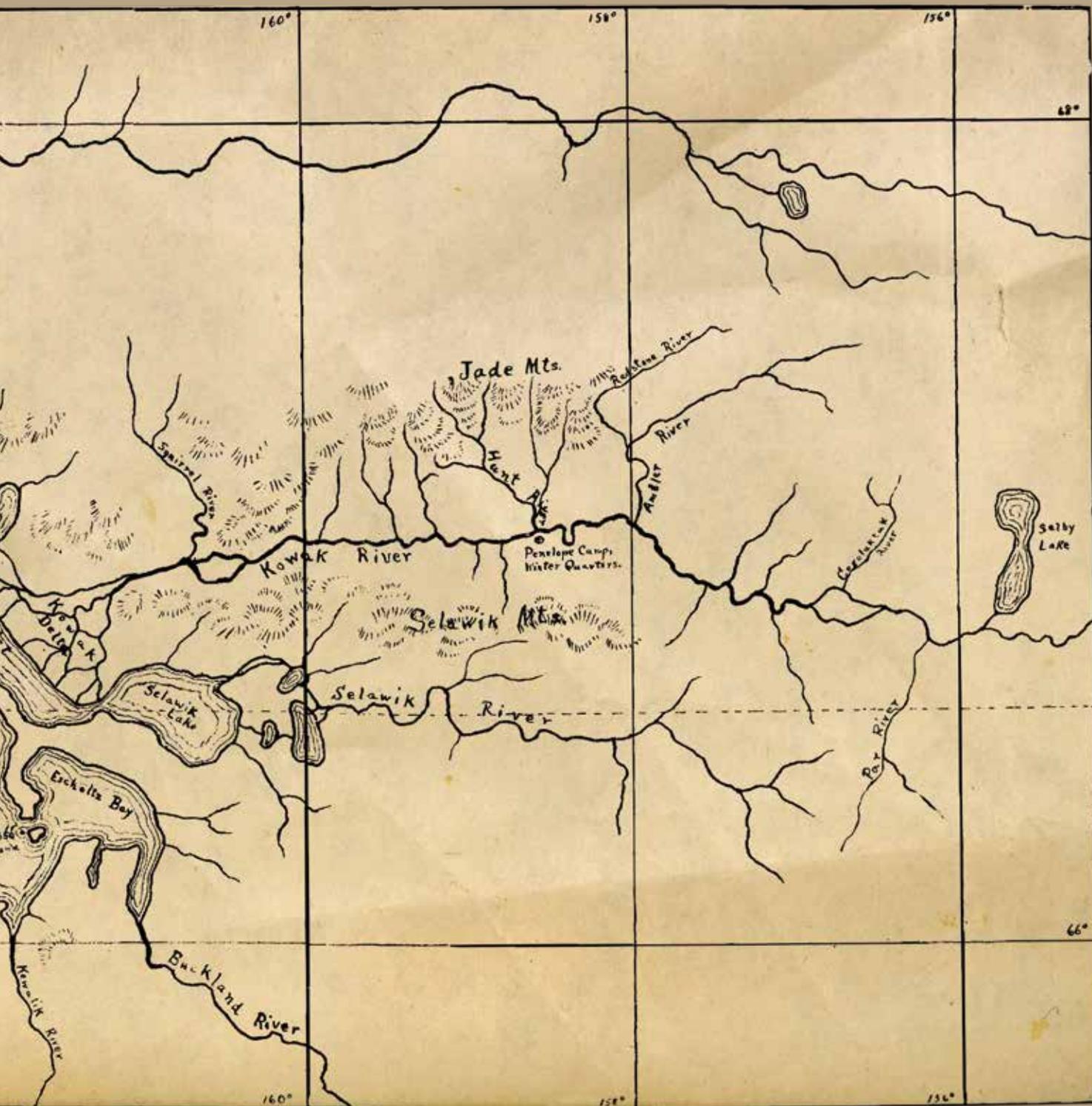
<sup>2</sup> Joseph Grinnell, *Gold Hunting in Alaska*, edited by Elizabeth Grinnell (Chicago: David C. Cook Publishing, 1901), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Grinnell to parents Fordyce and Elizabeth Grinnell, April 20, 1898, Bancroft Library, Joseph Grinnell Papers.

<sup>4</sup> The Organic Act of 1916 (16 U.S.C.) created the National Park Service and articulated its mission.



This map, designed by Joseph Grinnell, includes all of the river systems prospected in the first year of the Kotzebue Sound gold stampede. It also shows the location of Penelope Camp where he spent



the winter of 1898-99 and the location of the Quaker mission where the city of Kotzebue formed. From Grinnell's *Birds of the Kotzebue Sound Region, Alaska* (1900).



Wife and child of Selawik Chief.

The wife and child of a Selawik River chief, 1886. This photograph was taken as part of Lt. George Stoney's exploration of the Kobuk River and the Brooks Range. New Bedford Whaling Museum (1979.26.77).

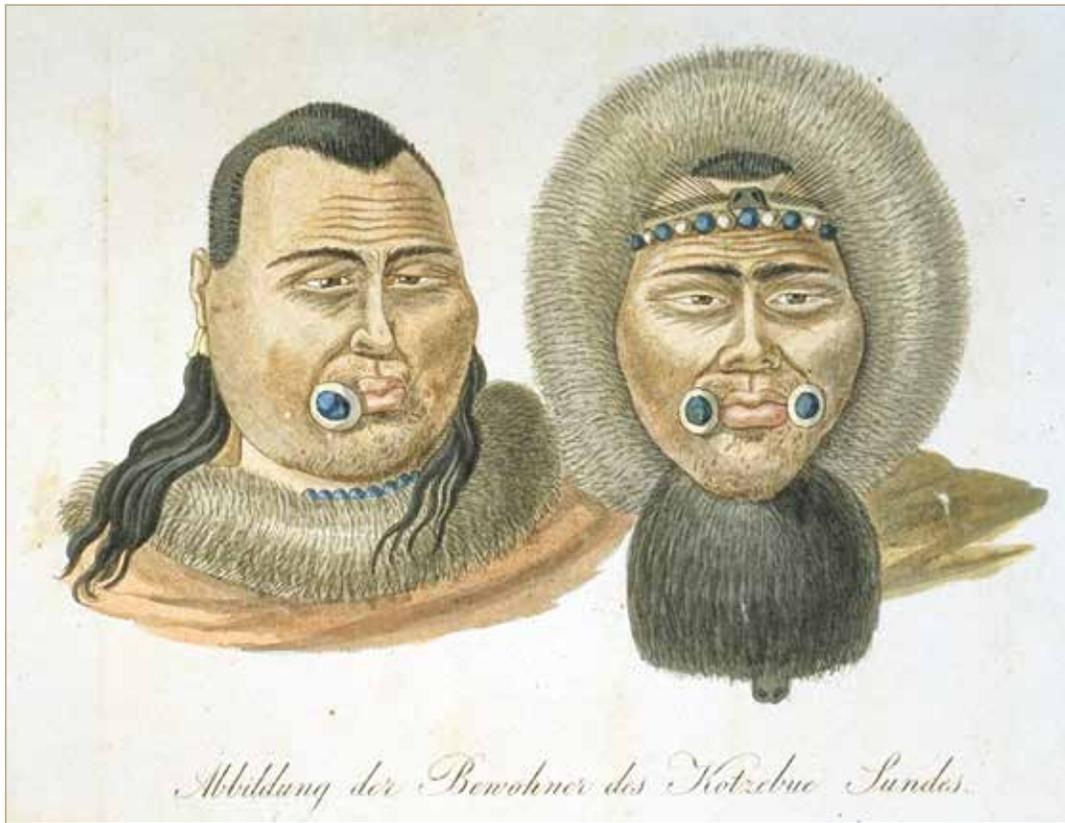
## Chapter 1: Change Comes to Kotzebue Sound

The rivers that flow into Kotzebue Sound wend their way out of mountains and along tundra lowlands like fingers of a colossal hand. The Noatak, the Kobuk, the Selawik, the Buckland, the Kiwalik, the Inmachuk and many lesser streams feed a complex ecosystem of estuaries and inlets that ultimately reach the Chukchi Sea and the Arctic Ocean. For human beings, these rivers serve as highways to Alaska's northern interior and provide convenient village sites and hunting opportunities to help them thrive in a challenging environment. People have lived in northwestern Alaska since the end of the last Ice Age, or roughly 15,000 years. At Cape Krusenstern, which juts into the Chukchi Sea at the mouth of Kotzebue Sound, gravel beach ridges laden with artifacts tell the story of human occupation stretching back five millennia and beyond. In the hills farther inland, collections of stone tools were discarded by people 8,000 years ago. At Onion Portage, an important hunting spot mid-way up the Kobuk River, vast herds of caribou pass through on annual migrations between Alaska's Arctic Slope and the Seward Peninsula. There archeological excavations show 10,000 years of occupation by caribou-hunting people.<sup>1</sup> In the Kotzebue

Sound region, human history is written in the land where one can see remnants of ancient dwellings and hunting camps; stone, bone, and antler tools; and other artifacts of daily life crafted from nature's raw materials.

The traditional homelands of Alaska's Inupiaq Eskimos stretch across northern Alaska from the Seward Peninsula to the coast of the Arctic Ocean and inland to the mountains of the Brooks Range. Kotzebue Sound lies in the center of this vast territory. To ensure their survival and prosperity, the Inupiat have always obeyed the demands of changing seasons and the dictates of ice and tide. They evolved masterful ways of traveling over frozen ocean and across tundra to follow food animals on a seasonal pattern or for family gatherings, trade fairs, and encounters with neighboring indigenous groups. The land and waters of Kotzebue Sound and the vast continental interior offer caribou, brown bear, Dall's sheep, birds, berries, roots, and greens, and the ocean offers bowhead whales, seals, walrus, and polar bear. The rivers, lakes, and ocean also supply fish that are critical to life in the Arctic. The Inupiat have a proud history of cultural adaptability as they blend traditional ways with the rapidly changing modern world.

"Portrait of the Inhabitants of Kotzebue Sound" from *Entdeckungs-Reise in de Süd See und nach der Berings-Strasse . . .* (Weimar: Hoffmann, 1821).



Today the Kotzebue Sound region is home to roughly 8,000 people living in the villages of Deering, Buckland, Kivalina, Selawik, Noorvik, Kiana, Ambler, Shungnak, Kobuk, and the largest community—Kotzebue.

The influence of outsiders came gradually to Kotzebue Sound and northwestern Alaska in general. Challenging weather patterns, expanses of sea ice, and a lack of natural harbors for large ships helped to keep the wider world at bay. The earliest attempts by foreigners to approach the Alaskan coast were initiated in the 1720s by Czar Peter I of Russia who sent Vitus Bering on missions to determine if Siberia, at its eastern extreme, connected with North America or if the gulf between them could be crossed by Russian trading vessels. These voyages resulted in

brief encounters with the Inupiaq inhabitants of the Diomed Islands in the middle of the Bering Strait. Although these early, tentative expeditions produced only fleeting contacts with outsiders, Russian trade goods were well known in Alaska because indigenous boatmen, using the skin-covered vessel known as an umiak, frequently crossed the dangerous waters between the two continents. Inupiaq people in Kotzebue Sound and all of western Alaska were therefore familiar with metal knives, cooking pots, tobacco, trade beads, and other items manufactured a world away. Russian interest in northwestern Alaska plummeted after 1741 when the fur hunters known as promyshlenniki discovered populations of sea otter in the Aleutian Islands to the south.<sup>2</sup>



In 1778 Captain James Cook of the British Royal Navy became the first European to conduct a detailed cartographic survey of Alaska's northwest coast during what was his third and final voyage around the world. Cook commanded the HMS *Resolution* and the HMS *Discovery* on a mission of scientific inquiry, which included a search along the American coast for evidence of the mythical Northwest Passage. During the late 1700s and early 1800s, the Russians, British, French, and Spanish all sent ships to the North Pacific searching for an ice-free waterway linking the Atlantic and Pacific. A channel linking the two oceans would allow European ships

easy access to Asian ports and would, they believed, make the discoverers fabulously wealthy. After skirting Alaska's southern coast and sailing through the Aleutian Islands, Cook's ships moved north through the Bering Strait and beyond Kotzebue Sound before a wall of Arctic pack ice blocked their way. After naming the nearest point of land Icy Cape and sending men to kill walrus on the ice floes, Cook ordered his ships to sail south once again before the ice could encircle the vessels and prevent their escape.<sup>3</sup>

The Russian government was alarmed by Cook's brazen excursion into a region they claimed by right of first discovery, but

Inupiaq group departing for the Noatak River in a skin-covered boat called an umiak, 1928. Alaska State Library, Edward Sheriff Curtis Collection (P49-3).

decades passed before they could muster a response. In 1816 Lieutenant Otto von Kotzebue, a Baltic German sailing for the Russian Imperial Navy, arrived along Alaska's northwest coast in command of the brig *Riurik*. Like Cook, Kotzebue was conducting a round-the-world voyage of discovery and was supposed to search for both the Northwest Passage and a similar route over the top of Siberia. He paused briefly at a village on the Seward Peninsula where well-armed Inupiaq men threatened to seize his ship. He then sailed north and east on August 3, 1816 into the large sound that he would name for himself. Adelbert von Chamisso was the artist and naturalist aboard the *Riurik* and wrote in his journal,

Kotzebue Sound is a deep bay which penetrates the American coast north of the strait and below the Arctic Circle. Its inner reaches, incidentally, lie one degree further north and at the same longitude as the inner reaches of Norton Sound, and it offers ships in the shelter of Chamisso Island a most secure anchorage and most magnificent harbor.<sup>4</sup>

Kotzebue and his crew stayed only long enough to trade with the locals, exchanging furs for beads, tobacco, and a small mirror. The influence of his visit can mostly be found, as Chamisso's quotation suggests, in the names Lt. Kotzebue added to European maps, including Shishmaref Inlet, Cape Krusenstern, Eschasholtz Bay, Cape Espenberg, Spafarief Bay, Goodhope Bay, and others.<sup>5</sup> More European ships would follow, but as with Kotzebue, their visits did little to change daily life for the Inupiat. Meanwhile, the Russian sphere of influence remained to the south in the Aleutian Islands, along the Yukon River, and at the settlements of St. Michael, Unalaska, Kodiak, and Sitka.

Profound changes came to Alaska's northern peoples beginning in 1848 when the whaling ship *Superior*, captained by Thomas Roys, cruised through the Aleutian Islands on a mission to investigate rumors that there were bowhead whales in the Bering Sea. What he found astonished him. Roys quickly captured eleven whales and filled the ship's hold with 1,600 barrels of oil and an ample supply of baleen. A year later fifty whaling ships were in the area and news of their success sparked a flurry of excitement among the world's whalers. Catches had been declining elsewhere in the Pacific, and within four years over 200 ships from whaling ports in the United States, Australia, Germany, Hawaii, and France arrived in Alaskan waters. After exhausting the hunting grounds in the Bering Sea, they entered the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas in pursuit of their prey. The whaling crews came in contact with Inupiaq villagers for a number of reasons—the whalers might stop for trading, their ships were occasionally trapped in the ice and crews were forced to overwinter on land, and whalers sometimes recruited Inupiaq men as sailors and harpooners.<sup>6</sup>

Energetic trade between coastal Alaskans and the whalers began immediately, augmenting the supply of trade goods that locals received from Russian fur traders and from visits to the Siberian coast. Loaves of bread, combs, needles and thread, cooking pots, knives, rum, and tobacco (called *towack* in the argot of the day) were popular among the Inupiat.<sup>7</sup> The introduction of alcohol to communities in northwestern Alaska has often been attributed to the whalers, but as the historian John Bockstoce points out, alcohol distilled in Siberia reached the Alaska coast throughout the 1700s and early 1800s. Even so, the enormous influx of whaling ships increased the trade in spirits, which at times threatened the health and stability of entire



villages. Another disastrous result of Arctic whaling was a steep decline in the sea mammals the indigenous people relied upon for food. In addition to killing whales, crews shot walrus, polar bears, and seals and this auxiliary harvest could lead to starvation in nearby villages. The introduction of chronic diseases like measles, influenza, and scarlet fever also disrupted traditional lifeways, even in inland areas far the ships and from coastal whaling camps.<sup>8</sup>

In 1867 Czar Alexander II of Russia sold his North American colony to the United States, and the ceded lands included everything from Alaska's west coast to the 141st meridian (the present-day border with Canada) and beyond to southeastern Alaska. Russian

fur trading and the spread of the Russian Orthodox Church had taken place primarily on Alaska's southern coast and in the Aleutian Islands, so it is unlikely that the residents of Kotzebue Sound were aware of this sudden transfer of sovereignty. However, they would have heard about the departure of Russians from the trading post of St. Michael near the mouth of the Yukon River and about the arrival of American traders who took their place in the 1870s and 1880s under the aegis of the Alaska Commercial Company. Kotzebue Sound residents would also have learned quickly which commodities the American traders valued most—furs and, increasingly, gold. During the Russian American era, czarist officials knew of some minor gold discoveries, but they focused

A Bering Sea whaler using a flensing knife to cut into a whale's tail, or flukes, ca. 1910. University of Washington, John N. Cobb Collection (UW27653).

instead on the reliable profits from furs and feared that a gold strike might spark an invasion by Canadian and American prospectors who would challenge Russian authority.<sup>9</sup>

By the 1880s, the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service (a precursor of the U.S. Coast Guard) was charged with rescuing whalers caught in the Arctic sea ice and with confiscating liquor from whaling ships to curb the negative effects of the trade on indigenous people. Both Revenue Cutter Service and U.S. Navy ships visited Alaska's northern waters, and although they had no specific orders to explore the interior, a friendly rivalry broke out between the Revenue Cutter Service commander Michael Healy and an equally energetic Navy lieutenant named George M. Stoney. One of the hazards of whaling in Arctic waters was the risk of being trapped by advancing pack ice late in the whale-hunting season, and both Healy and Stoney believed they could save lives by identifying an inland rescue route from Kotzebue Sound to the Arctic Ocean near Point Barrow. The key to this plan was mapping the Kobuk and Noatak rivers and understanding possible routes through the mountains of the Brooks Range. Stoney's interest in the Kobuk River began in 1883 when he spent two weeks examining Hotham Inlet and the lower course of the Kobuk. Meanwhile, Captain Healy asked for volunteers to explore Alaska's northern interior and the man who stepped forward was Lieutenant John Cantwell.<sup>10</sup>

Soon Stoney and Cantwell were making annual trips with steam-powered launches up the Kobuk River, each year pushing farther and mapping more of the watershed. Along the way they hired Inupiaq men as guides and interpreters and interacted with Kobuk River people at hunting and fishing camps. Each year the explorers asked permission from their superiors to continue their expeditions, and early on, as part of his request,

Stoney pointed out that he would be "the first white man to visit" the Kobuk River and that he believed the river to be "an excellent highway into the heart of Arctic Alaska."<sup>11</sup> In 1885 Cantwell decided that in addition to exploring the Kobuk, he would send men up the lesser-known Noatak River. For this job he selected Assistant Engineer Samuel McLennan. McLennan and another man traveled by kayak on a harrowing journey to the Noatak headwaters during which they began to starve and nearly succumbed to exposure and exhaustion. Thus far, Cantwell and Stoney had limited their trips to the summer months, but Stoney was making plans to overwinter and to take his Navy explorers deep into the Brooks Range in the heart of northern Alaska.

When Stoney launched his last and most ambitious endeavor, he selected three other officers, a surgeon, and thirteen enlisted men, all of whom advanced over 200 miles up the Kobuk River in late summer to build their headquarters in the vicinity of the present-day village of Shungnak. The team used a specially designed river steamer for transportation and carried their own portable sawmill to speed the construction of their base camp. Stoney would name the camp Fort Cosmos after the Cosmos Club, an exclusive social club in Washington, D.C. where most of his officers held memberships.<sup>12</sup> From Fort Cosmos, Stoney launched multiple long-distance excursions into the Brooks Range and even sent one man, Ensign William Howard, on a 96-day trek over the mountains and the vast tundra plain of the Arctic Slope to reach Point Barrow. The expeditions of the Navy and Revenue Cutter Service introduced the Inupiat of the Kobuk River and the Brooks Range to outsiders, although this contact happened only episodically over a few years.<sup>13</sup>

## Fort Cosmos—The U.S. Navy's Arctic Outpost

In the mid-1880s, when Alaska's northern interior was still a mystery to outsiders, Navy lieutenant George M. Stoney launched excursions up the Kobuk River and deep into the Brooks Range. He was engaged in a friendly rivalry with Lt. John Cantwell of the Revenue Cutter Service, and each summer both men tried to penetrate farther inland to map more territory. In 1885 Stoney hatched an even more ambitious plan—he and seventeen of his men would overwinter on the Kobuk River. He called his winter headquarters Fort Cosmos.

The camp Stoney's men built near the present-day village of Shungnak was named for the Cosmos Club, a social club in Washington, D.C. founded for the "advancement of its members in science, literature, and art." As Stoney specified in his report, the men were well behaved and seemed to enjoy life in the Arctic. They also had hardy appetites:

*We had fresh meat twice a week during the winter, and every day in the spring. This consisted of deer, ptarmigan, rabbits, and fish. Most of the deer-meat came from the Notoark [Noatak] valley—twenty-five hundred pounds of it were consumed. There were also eaten eighty ptarmigan and twenty-five rabbits, sixty-seven geese, seventy-six ducks and two sand-hill cranes. . . . It should be remarked that pork and beans held the leading place in the list of relished food; next in order came Philadelphia pepper-pot soup, and among desserts plum-duff with hard sauce surpassed all competition.*



Lt. George Stoney's men at Fort Cosmos, near the present-day village of Shungnak, ca. 1886. From George M. Stoney, *Explorations in Alaska* (1899).

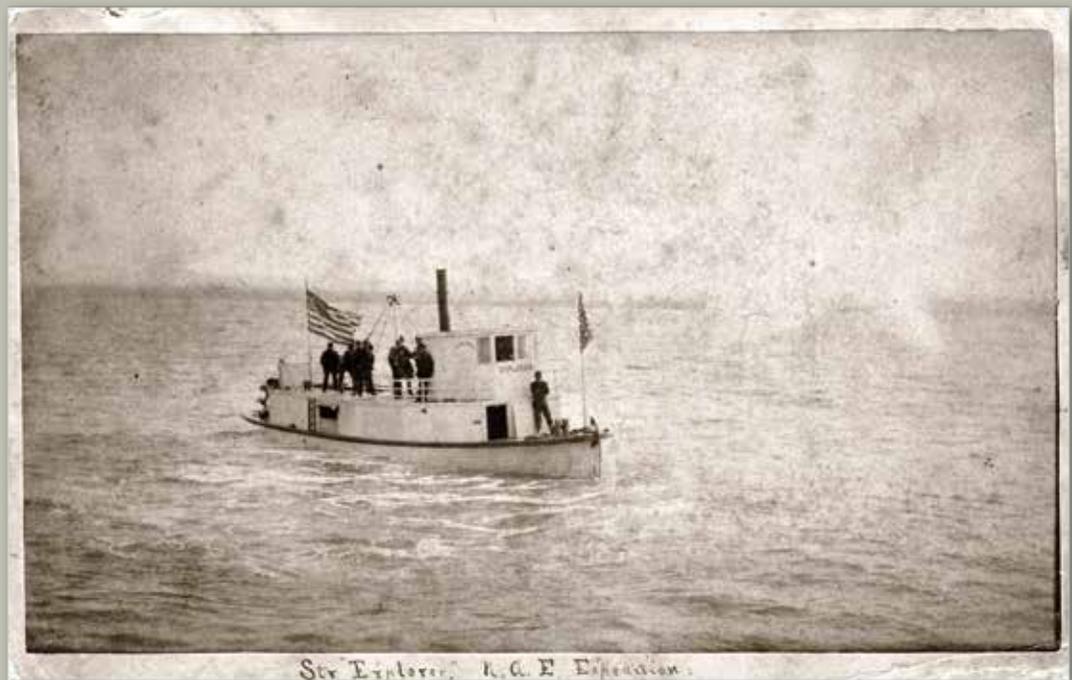


Lt. George Stoney posing in arctic costume after his successful excursions up the Kobuk River and into the Brooks Range, ca. 1886. From George M. Stoney, *Explorations in Alaska* (1899).

Fort Cosmos was abandoned in 1886, but a dozen years later stampedeers searching the Kobuk River for gold occupied the site and commented on its history. Joseph Grinnell reported that the local Inupiat, referring to the decrepit condition of Lt. Stoney's log barracks, called clothes or equipment like sleds "all same stoney-house" or simply "stoney-house" if they were torn or broken.



Occupants of Lt. George Stoney's camp at Hotham Inlet in Kotzebue Sound, 1886. The anemometer in the background measured wind speed. New Bedford Whaling Museum (1982.40.41).



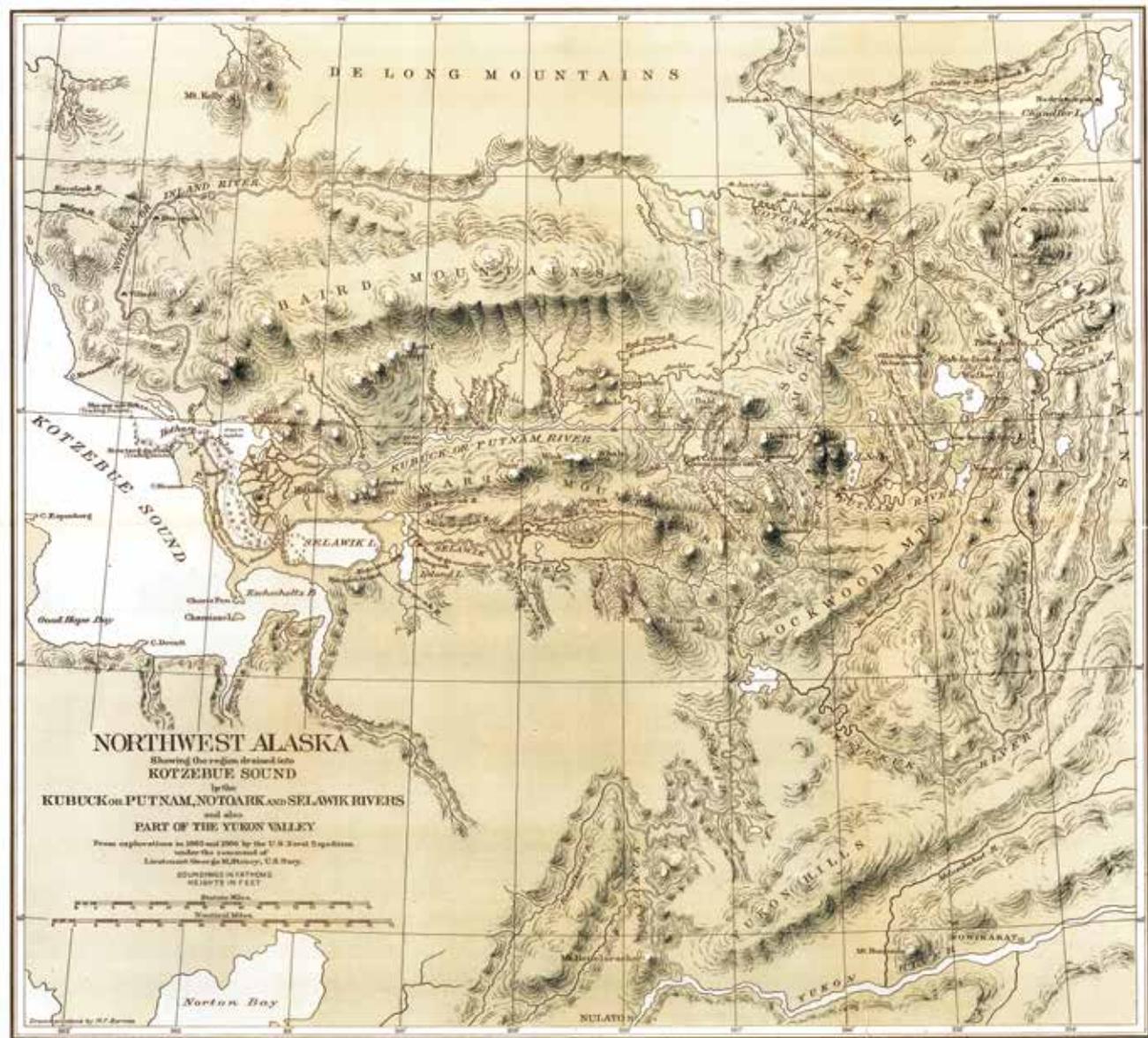
George Stoney's river steamer *Explorer* in Kotzebue Sound, 1886. Stoney used the Kobuk River as a launching point for exploration of the Brooks Range and interior Alaska. New Bedford Whaling Museum (1979.26.73).

More enduring change came with the establishment of religious missions in northwest Alaska, which introduced new beliefs and practices as well as Western forms of medical care and education. In 1885 the Presbyterian minister Sheldon Jackson was appointed General Agent for Education in Alaska, and almost immediately he began an ambitious plan to provide schools and convert indigenous Alaskans to Christianity. Because the United States government did not fund schools for Native children, Jackson decided to invite various religious denominations to begin work in Alaska. Jackson's strategy was to offer each church its own geographical zone of influence. He hoped that over time those churches and mission-schools would cover all of Alaska in a blanket of evangelical zeal. By 1890 missionaries had reached northern Alaska and had established churches in Utqiagvik, Point Hope, Wales, and Unalakleet. The gap in this chain of missions was Kotzebue Sound where hundreds of Inupiat lived and many more rendezvoused each year for fishing and trading.<sup>14</sup>

The effort to bring Christianity to Kotzebue Sound began in part with a young Inupiaq man named Uyaraq (meaning "rock") who was born on the Kobuk River. When he was a teenage boy, Uyaraq's father had been murdered and the Swedish missionary Axel Karlson adopted him. Uyaraq soon learned English and became Karlson's sled-driver and interpreter. He then became an accomplished traveling minister and joined forces with a white missionary named David Johnson. The two men traveled widely, preaching at Inupiaq settlements and trade fairs in northwestern Alaska. In the summer of 1896, the pair visited Kotzebue Sound to explore the possibility of establishing a mission and were encouraged by Sheldon Jack-

son. They then traveled by umiak to Port Clarence near the tip of the Seward Peninsula and boarded a steamship going south. After a journey of over a thousand miles, they arrived in southeast Alaska and brought their request for a mission to the Friends Church, also known as the Quakers, in the community of Douglas across Gastineau Channel from Juneau. The Quaker officials there immediately contacted the church's headquarters in California with a call for volunteers.<sup>15</sup>

The idea of establishing a mission in Kotzebue Sound appealed to thirty-two-year-old Robert Samms, a mechanic from Los Angeles. But there was a catch—the church's policy was that male missionaries needed to be married, so Samms asked nineteen-year-old Carrie Rowe to be his wife and the wedding took place two days later. Anna Hunnicutt, who was already in Alaska and active with the Friends Church in Douglas, also volunteered. In California, parishioners were asked for donations of cash, furniture, bedding and other items to aid the effort, and by July 1897 all three newly minted missionaries journeyed north aboard the sailing vessel *Volante* and were put ashore on the Baldwin Peninsula, a 65-mile-long finger of land extending across Kotzebue Sound. Robert Samms later recalled that when their ship landed, he found a summer trade fair in full swing and saw "natives gathered from all parts of this northern country—from as far south as what is now Nome, from Point Hope on the north, from Siberia on the west, and from Koyukuk on the east."<sup>16</sup> The Samms had originally planned to establish their mission on the Kobuk River but Uyaraq, who was on hand as an interpreter, persuaded them to stay right where they were. The tip of the narrow peninsula was strategically located for reaching people from all the nearby river systems including the Kobuk.<sup>17</sup>



Northwestern Alaska based on exploration of U.S. Army Lt. George Stoney in 1885-86. From George M. Stoney, *Explorations in Alaska* (1899).

The arrival of Quakers in Kotzebue Sound coincided with another significant event—the discovery of gold hundreds of miles to the east in what is today Yukon Territory. A prospector named George Carmack was fishing for salmon with two Tlingit-Tagish men—Skookum Jim and Tagish Charlie—when they found rich deposits of gold

on a Yukon River tributary called Tr'ondëk (which eventually evolved by spelling and pronunciation into Klondike). This discovery sparked a dramatic stampede rivaled only by the California gold rush of 1848. Within a year, Dawson City emerged along the Yukon's banks and mineral claims were staked on all the Klondike River tributaries and beyond.

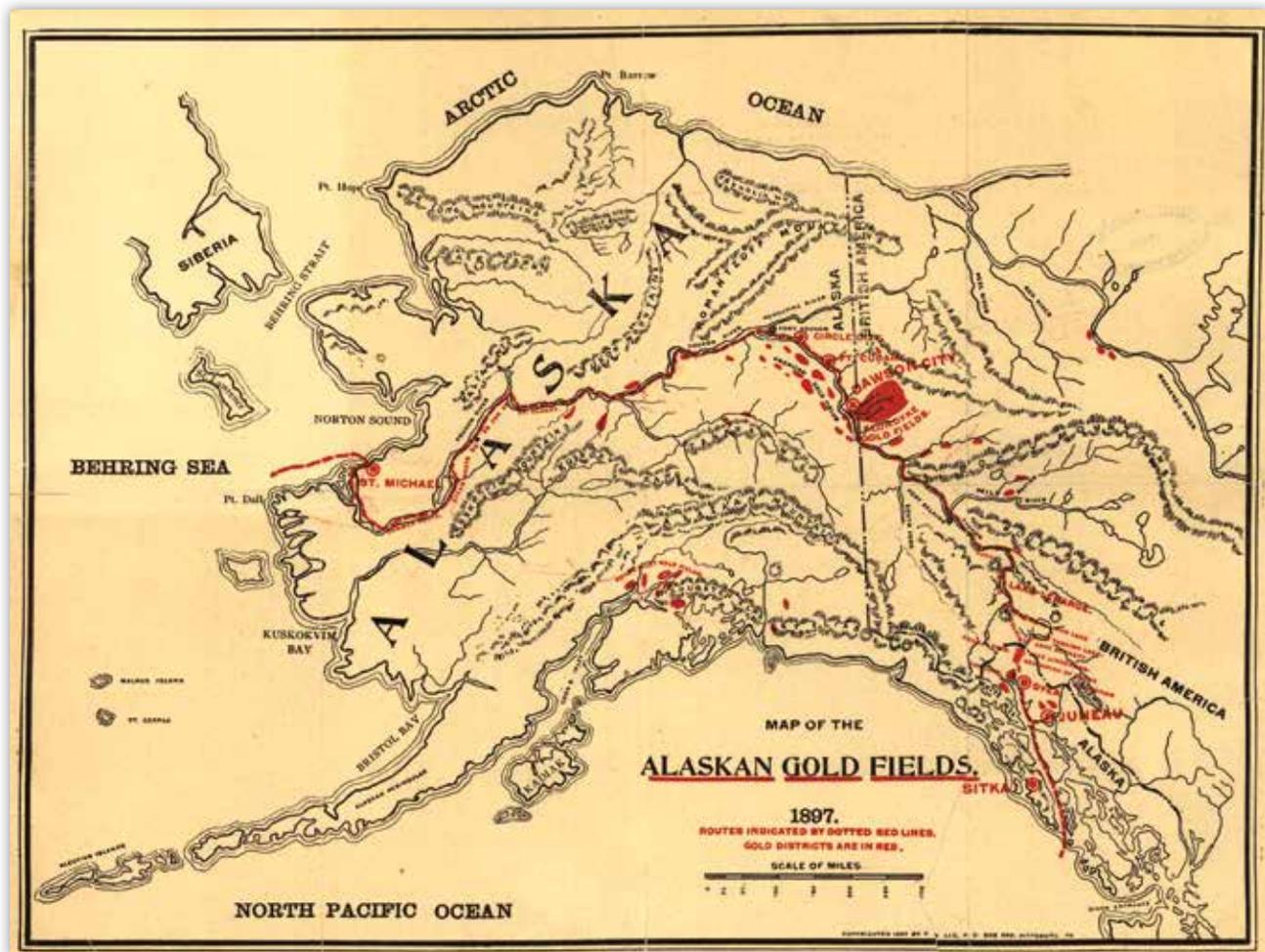


Clockwise from above left:

Robert Samms, Quaker missionary, ca. 1899.  
Wilmington College Archive, Martha E. Hadley  
Collection.

Carrie Samms, Quaker missionary, ca. 1899.  
Wilmington College Archive, Martha E. Hadley  
Collection.

Anna Hunnicutt Foster, Quaker missionary, ca. 1899.  
Wilmington College Archive, Martha E. Hadley  
Collection.



An 1897 map of Alaska with gold fields added the following year. Note that Kotzebue Sound is not marked in red as one of Alaska's gold fields. Library of Congress.

Meanwhile, the world heard the news and thousands of people were making their way north by various routes, including Chilkoot Pass and White Pass in southeast Alaska and the all-water route by way of the Bering Sea and the Yukon River. However, before many of the gold-hungry hordes could reach the Klondike gold fields, they heard that all the profitable claims had been staked and that the Canadian government had placed a ten percent tax on all Klondike gold, which struck many Americans as prohibitive or even tyrannical. As a result, many stampedeers decided to ignore the Klondike and to search for their

fortunes on the Alaskan side of the U.S.-Canada border.

After saying goodbye to their families and friends, most gold-seekers traveled west to Seattle, San Francisco, or Portland. Stampedeers crossing the continent by train reported that their carriages were filled with other people with the same idea. And once they arrived on the coast, they searched feverishly for someone to sell them a ticket for passage on any vessel that would take them. To assess the situation in Alaska and the Klondike, the United States government sent Josiah E. Spurr of the U.S. Geological Survey. His



report from January 1897 warned of the challenges of crossing the Chilkoot Pass, the high cost of food and supplies, and the hazards of harvesting placer gold along the Yukon River corridor. He also made an important observation about the allure of northern gold: “The placer mines are those which occupy the most prominent place in the popular mind, since they are remote from civilization and in a country about which little is known, and which is, on account of this uncertainty, dangerously attractive to the average man.” In essence, Spurr was saying that the more distant and mysterious the gold field, the more attractive it seemed. He concluded by writing, “My general advice to the average man

intending to go to the Yukon gold district is—to stay out.”<sup>18</sup>

Warnings like this did little to deter the gold-hungry masses. Nor did the traps set by charlatans and con artists who seized the growing opportunity to cheat stampedees out of their money. Many stampedees found themselves penniless and were forced to go home, while others pushed on, determined to participate in what was becoming the most popular adventure of its day. The full effect of Klondicitis on the mind can be seen in the story of three young men aboard a whaling vessel on its way to Arctic waters. In a desperate bid to reach the Klondike, they stole a five-gallon can of turpentine and, in the

Throng gather on a San Francisco wharf to watch the departure of the steamship *Excelsior* bound for Alaska, July 28, 1897. University of Washington Special Collections, Ships Subject File Collection (UW14504).



"The Klondike Fever"—Passengers and spectators crowd the steamship *Willamette* in Seattle before its departure for Alaska, August 7, 1897. University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle Photograph Collection (SEA2677).

middle of the Bering Sea, set fire to their own ship. As a newspaper reporter explained,

Crazed by their eager desire to acquire riches suddenly, brains on fire over the tales they heard of the wonderful wealth of the Klondike region, three youthful sailors on the whaling bark *John and Winthrop* set fire to her, with the expectation of having to put into an Alaskan port in small boats, where they could be free to gather in nuggets along with the rest.

These men succeeded in starting a small fire in the hold, but they utterly failed to achieve their goal, and even if they had reached land, they were still many hundreds of miles from any gold discoveries in Alaska or the Klondike. On that day, the alarm was sounded, the flames were extinguished, and the ship's captain ordered the conspirators clapped in irons for the rest of the voyage.<sup>19</sup>

In the beginning, eager gold-seekers trying to reach Alaska and the Klondike knew nothing of Kotzebue Sound. No one had ever heard of gold discoveries there and the region was far from the Yukon River where

the majority of stampeders were headed. This all changed because of the efforts of a whaling captain named Bernard “Barney” Cogan. Born in Ireland in 1835 and raised in Newark, New Jersey, Cogan went to sea for the first time as a deckhand at eighteen and within a few years was regularly whaling in Alaskan waters. In 1862 he was first mate and navigator aboard the whaler and trading vessel *Kobola* from Honolulu, Hawaii. The ship’s commander, Herman Brummerhoff, decided to spend the winter in St. Lawrence Bay, a convenient anchorage on Siberia’s easternmost tip that was frequented by whaling ships. His plan was to trade with the Siberians before sailing north to hunt whales the following summer. But things went wrong quickly. After a series of tragic events involving alcohol and the accidental drowning of a local man, Brummerhoff was set upon by irate family members and killed. As first mate, Cogan took charge of the vessel and defended it from angry locals for several months before the Arctic sea ice broke up and the whaling season began. After a successful hunt, he sailed the ship back to Honolulu and then to New Bedford, Massachusetts where he was given command of the *Kobola*. This was the beginning of a long career for Cogan as a whaling captain in northern waters.<sup>20</sup>

One of the perils of whaling in the Arctic was the threat of sea ice encircling ships, trapping them through the long, frigid winter. This happened with surprising frequency, and crewmen were known to go hungry when a ship’s stores ran out or to perish when their ships were crushed by shifting ice. Crews were often forced to cross miles of ice to reach land and were lucky if they found a village that could offer food and shelter. In 1897, eight whaling vessels were trapped in this way and six others managed to escape ice-choked waters and return southward. That year Co-

gan captained the whaling vessel *Thrasher* and was one of the lucky ones. After rescuing sixteen men from an ice floe after their ship sank, he sailed to San Francisco and reported what he saw. Because the season was too far along and the sea ice too thick to send rescue ships, the Revenue Cutter Service launched a 1,500-mile overland mission using dog teams and sleds pulled by reindeer from Sheldon Jackson’s Teller Reindeer Station near the tip of the Seward Peninsula. Reindeer herders on snowshoes and skis also guided nearly four hundred animals from Teller to Point Barrow to feed the whalers through the winter. This dramatic rescue became known as the Overland Relief Expedition.<sup>21</sup>

Even before the 1897 whaling season began, ship’s captains were having trouble with their crews deserting as news of the Klondike gold discoveries spread.<sup>22</sup> When the *Thrasher* docked in San Francisco, Cogan’s crew added to the excitement when his first mate, J.J. Thatcher, announced to reporters that he had stories to tell. First he described the death of a man (one of the whalers rescued by the *Thrasher*) who died after being struck in the head by a heavy tackle-block while helping to butcher a whale. Thatcher explained that a second man from the same vessel lost his mind and that ten men who refused to work were placed in irons during the return trip to California. But he saved his best story for last. According to Thatcher, something remarkable happened to the ship’s anchor when they paused on the Siberian coast before entering the Arctic Ocean: “When we took in our anchor at the north head of St. Lawrence Bay we found the palm of the bill plated with gold. We dragged some and the gold worked into the pores of the iron, and any one who doesn’t believe the yarn can see the yellow metal in the holes.” This account appeared in the *San Francisco Call* under the headline “Her Anchor Gold Plated.”<sup>23</sup>



Captain Bernard "Barney" Cogan has a chuckle with visitors from the Siberian coast aboard Cogan's whaling ship *Hunter*, 1887. New Bedford Whaling Museum (00.200.419.6).

Captain Cogan also had a story to tell about gold at high latitudes. He explained that when the *Thrasher* paused at Point Hope on Alaska's northwest coast he was approached by Inupiaq men (he called them "Indians") who showed him some small bags filled with gold. "The gold is about the size of guncaps and is worn smooth," explained Cogan, "There must be plenty of it, as one of the Indians showed me with his boat paddle how he scooped up what he had in a seal's bladder in a few

minutes." Cogan went on to speculate about the source of the gold, saying,

[It] is not found in the main rivers, but in the tributaries, and if the Indians are to be believed, it can be seen with the naked eye. I for one do not doubt them, as they were in absolute ignorance of the value of the stuff they brought in with them. I believe there is more gold there than has been or ever will be taken out of Klondike.



It is difficult to know if Cogan invented this encounter or perhaps he misunderstood what the men were saying because of the language gap. It is also possible, indeed likely, he was shown gold found hundreds of miles away on the Yukon or the Koyukuk River.

Whatever the case, when he arrived back in San Francisco, Cogan told anyone who would listen that Kotzebue Sound gold could be scooped up with a canoe paddle and that he would be returning there as soon as possible.<sup>24</sup>

*"An Anxious Time"—The Revenue Cutter Bear on a mission to rescue whalers trapped in the ice near Point Barrow, 1898. New Bedford Whaling Museum (2000.101.135).*

## *Bernard Cogan and his Patented Bomb-Lance*

*H*arpooners have long struggled to throw a lance with enough force to penetrate a whale's tough skin and blubber layer. To this end, the veteran whaling captain Bernard Cogan and the gun manufacturer Patrick Cunningham joined forces to design a gun and explosive projectile to kill whales with deadly precision. They received a patent for their "bomb-lance" in 1875 and began marketing the Cogan Breech-Loading Bomb Gun. According to advertisements, the powerful gun could be fired ten times in a minute and could even be discharged underwater if necessary.

### **Bomb Guns and Lances.**

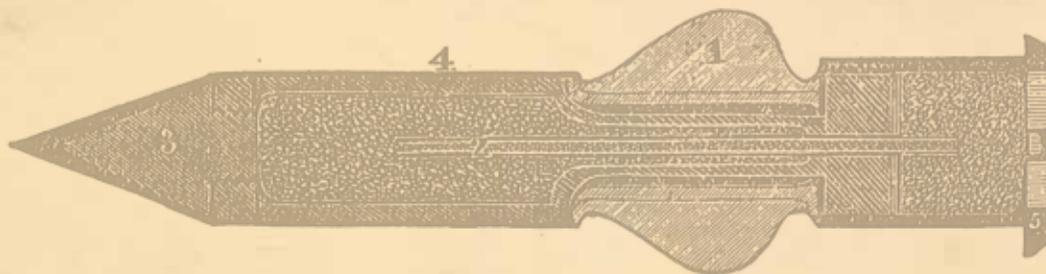


Cogan Breech-Loading Bomb Gun

**THE UNDERSIGNED HAS THE AGENCY AND OFFERS FOR SALE  
CUNNINGHAM & COGAN'S CELEBRATED PATENT  
BREECH-LOADING BOMB GUNS,**

— ALSO —

**BOMB LANCES AND CARTRIDGES COMBINED.**



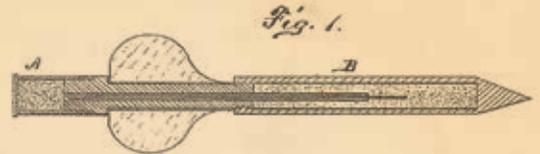
**These Guns and Lances are pronounced by all who have seen and examined them, to be SUPERIOR to all other kinds, and are recommended in the STRONGEST terms.**

**The Superiority of these Guns over all others, is that they can be Loaded and Discharged**

**TEN TIMES A MINUTE.**



Cabinet card portrait of Captain Bernard Cogan, ca. 1885. New Bedford Whaling Museum (2000.100.2630).



Detail: Patent drawing of bomb-lance.

As whale populations declined in Alaska's Arctic due to aggressive commercial hunting, the efficacy of the bomb-lance ensured that whalers could still return with barrels of oil, used as a lighting-fuel and for lubrication, and cargos of baleen, or "whalebone," used to manufacture goods from riding whips to fishing rods and the stays in womens' corsets. Cogan had traded with the indigenous people of the Arctic for decades and noted their suffering when whalers, having exhausted the whale hunt, began harvesting walrus for their blubber and ivory tusks. An 1879 report noted that 12,000 walrus were killed in Alaskan waters in one year, leading Cogan to limit his walrus hunt and to warn others that "for every 100 walruses taken a family is starved."



The open mouth of a whale killed in the Bering Strait, 1902. The whale was 78 feet long and the baleen was worth \$12,600. Anchorage Museum, Fred Henton Collection (b65-18-86).

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The name Onion Portage comes from the Inupiaq word *paatitaaq* meaning wild onion, a reference to the patches of wild onions or chives that grow throughout the site. See, Douglas D. Anderson, *Onion Portage: An Archaeological Site on the Kobuk River, Northwestern Alaska* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> Lydia T. Black, *Russians in Alaska, 1732-1867* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2004), 15-37; Chris Allan, "The Diomed Islands in the Early Exploration of Alaska," *Alaska Historical Society Proceedings*, Kodiak, Alaska, October 5-8, 2005, 161-177.

<sup>3</sup> James Cook, *Captain Cook's Voyages Round the World* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1897), 459.

<sup>4</sup> Adelbert von Chamisso, *The Alaska Diary of Adelbert von Chamisso, Naturalist on the Kotzebue Voyage, 1815-1818*, trans. by Robert Fortuine with ed. assistance of Eva R. Trautmann (Anchorage: Cook Inlet Historical Society, 1986), 14. See also, Adelbert von Chamisso, *A Voyage around the World with the Romanzov Exploring Expedition in the Years 1815-1818 . . .*, trans. and ed. by Henry Kratz (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), 79.

<sup>5</sup> Kotzebue named these locations for Lt. Glieb Shishmarev who served on the *Riurik*; Admiral Adam Johann von Krusenstern, the first Russian to circumnavigate the globe in 1803-04; Dr. Frederick Eschscholtz, the *Riurik*'s physician; Dr. Karl Espenberg, a surgeon who accompanied Admiral Krusenstern around the world; and the Russian Major General Leontiy Spafaryev. The full account of 1816 visit to northwestern Alaska can be found in Kotzebue's *A Voyage of Discovery into the South Sea and Beering's Straits . . .* (1821).

<sup>6</sup> Don C. Foote, "American Whalers in Northern Arctic Alaska," *Arctic Anthropology* 2 (1964), 16-17.

<sup>7</sup> "The Rum Traffic with Alaska Indians," *Santa Barbara Daily Press*, February 17, 1880, 2.

<sup>8</sup> John R. Bockstoce, *Whales, Ice & Men: The History of Whaling in the Western Arctic* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 21-26, 129-142; Clarence L. Andrews, "Alaska Whaling," *Washington Historical Quarterly* 9 (January 1918), 3-10; Jack Hadley, "Whaling Off the Alaskan Coast," *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* 47 (1915), 905-921; John R. Bockstoce and Daniel B. Botkin, "The Harvest of Pacific Walrus by the Pelagic Whaling Industry, 1848 to 1914," *Arctic and Alpine Research* 14 (1982), 183-188.

<sup>9</sup> Andrei V. Grinev, "The Gold of Russian America: The Gold Rush That Didn't Happen," trans. Richard L. Bland, *Alaska History* 21 (Spring 2006), 20-21.

<sup>10</sup> Truman R. Strobridge and Dennis L. Noble, *Alaska and the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service, 1867-1915* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1999), 82-97.

<sup>11</sup> George M. Stoney, *Explorations in Alaska*, U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings (September-December 1899), 535.

<sup>12</sup> The Cosmos Club was founded in 1878 by the famous explorer of the American West John Wesley Powell for the "advancement of its members in science, literature, and art."

<sup>13</sup> Stoney, *Explorations in Alaska*, 535; "A Narrative Account of the Exploration of the Kowak River, Alaska," in Michael A. Healy, *Report of the Cruise of the Revenue Marine Steamer Corwin in the Arctic Ocean in the Year 1884* (Washington: GPO, 1889), 26-46; Samuel B. McLenegan, "Exploration of the Noatak River, Alaska," in Michael A. Healy, *Report of the Cruise of the Revenue Marine Steamer Corwin in the Arctic Ocean in the Year 1884* (Washington: GPO, 1889), 58-73. For a detailed account of the expeditions of the U.S. Navy and Revenue Marine see, Chris Allan, *Arctic Citadel: A History of Exploration in the Brooks Range Region of Northern Alaska* (Fairbanks: National Park Service, 2013), 22-69.

<sup>14</sup> “Something of Kotzebue Sound,” *Seattle Daily Times*, May 28, 1900, 3. For more about hunting and trading in Kotzebue Sound see, John R. Bockstoce, *Furs and Frontiers in the Far North: The Contest among Native and Foreign Nations for the Bering Strait Fur Trade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Sheldon Jackson, *Report on Introduction of Domestic Reindeer into Alaska* (Washington: GPO, 1896), 28; “Quaker Missionaries to Work in Alaska,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 18, 1897, 4; *Los Angeles Herald*, May 19, 1897, 7; “Quakers Going to Alaska,” *Sunday-News* (Wilkes-Barre, PA), June 27, 1897, 10; *Los Angeles Herald*, October 5, 1897, 7; “Quaker Colony in the Far North,” *San Francisco Call*, September 10, 1899, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Ernest S. Burch, Jr., “The Inupiat and the Christianization of Arctic Alaska,” *Etudes/Inuit/Studies* 18 (1994), 87.

<sup>17</sup> “Quaker Colony in the Far North,” *San Francisco Call*, September 10, 1899, 4; Arthur O. Roberts, *Tomorrow Is Growing Old: Stories of the Quakers in Alaska* (Newberg: Barclay Press, 1978), 175; Anthony and Sally Urvina, *More Than God Demands: The Politics and Influence of Christian Missions in Northwest Alaska, 1897-1918* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2016), 35-38. For details about trading stations and the Inupiaq population levels see, Ernest S. Burch, Jr., *The Inupiaq Eskimo Nations of Northwest Alaska* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1998), 214-218. The location of modern Kotzebue was called Qikiqtaurok by the Inupiat and Rendezvous or Summer Rendezvous by western traders and whalers.

<sup>18</sup> “May Become the Wonder of the World,” *San Francisco Bulletin*, January 3, 1897, 25.

<sup>19</sup> “Crazed by the Yukon Gold Fever,” *San Francisco Call*, November 8, 1897, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Herbert L. Aldrich, *Arctic Alaska and Siberia or, Eight Months with the Arctic Whalemens* (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co., 1889), 220-234; “American Whales,” *Medina Tribune*, January 19, 1871, 2; “Arctic Whaling Fleet Abandoned,” *Daily Alta California*, November 1, 1871, 1; “Loss of the ‘Trident,’” *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, March 22, 1873, 3; “Hunting Whales with Gunpowder,” *Pacific Rural Press*, April 19, 1879, 265; “Starvation in the Arctic,” *Topeka State Journal*, October 13, 1879, 2; “Three Are Lost,” *San Francisco Call*, September 27, 1894, 9.

<sup>21</sup> “Suffering and Death Will Be the Portion of Imprisoned Whalers,” *San Francisco Call*, November 4, 1897, 1; “Reindeer Are Driven into Point Barrow,” *San Francisco Call*, July 18, 1898, 2. For more about the rescue mission see, John Taliaferro, *In a Far Country: The True Story of a Mission, a Marriage, a Murder, and the Remarkable Reindeer Rescue of 1898* (New York: Public Affairs, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> “Disaster, Desertion and Death,” *San Francisco Call*, October 27, 1897, 1; “Whalers Trapped Up North,” *San Francisco Call*, October 28, 1897, 7.

<sup>23</sup> “Her Anchor Gold Plated,” *San Francisco Call*, October 26, 1897, 12; “Whaling Fleet Lost,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, October 27, 1897, 3; “Terrors of the Navarch Wreck Described by the Captain’s Wife,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 10, 1897, 1; “Disaster, Desertion and Death,” *San Francisco Call*, October 27, 1897, 1.

<sup>24</sup> “Richer Fields Than Klondike,” *San Francisco Call*, October 29, 1897, 5. In his comparison of gold nuggets to “guncaps,” Cogan is referring to the small percussion caps used in the cartridges for breach-loading rifles.



"The Klondyke Face"—A cartoon from the *San Francisco Examiner*, July 29, 1897, illustrating the power of gold fever. Courtesy of Karl Gurcke, Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park.

## Chapter 2: On That Desolate Shore

The lust for northern gold rose steadily during the winter of 1897-1898 and much of this enthusiasm was fueled by newspapers. The *San Francisco Call* had sent the reporter Sam W. Hall to Skagway, which was the most popular launching-point for expeditions northward to Dawson City and the Klondike. He reported on the action under headlines like “Alaska’s Harvest of Gold” and “Hordes of Weary Treasure Seekers Camped at Dawson.”<sup>1</sup> Wall also described the threat of famine and alarming cases of scurvy among the Klondike stampeders, but this did little to dampen enthusiasm for the rush. The gold-seekers nurtured visions of filling their pockets with gold nuggets and they exhibited a combination of ignorance, gullibility, and obsession in equal measure. For many, Klondike fever manifested itself as the American Dream inverted—instead of aspiring to a steady job and freedom from want, the stampeders imagined a brief and highly lucrative summer of toil and then never having to work again. Meanwhile, this rising tide of humanity did not escape the notice of entrepreneurs looking to profit from transporting people and supplies northward.

Although he planned to continue whaling, Bernard Cogan quickly formulated a plan

to deliver gold-seekers not to Skagway or to the mouth of the Yukon for the river passage to the Klondike but to a location much farther to the north. Just a few weeks after announcing he had seen gold at Kotzebue Sound, Cogan purchased the three-masted barque *Alaska* and began outfitting the ship for whaling and for transporting two hundred paying passengers. In addition, he prepared an advertising leaflet called a broadside to attract customers. Broadside were displayed in shops and were distributed through ticket offices at the docks, and Cogan’s began by exclaiming, “Ho! For Kotzebue Sound.” He went on to announce,

Natives last year brought down quantities of nuggets to trade. Gold was found along the shores of the streams emptying into Kotzebue Sound. Capt. Wagner, of the Schooner ‘Premier,’ testifies to receiving a nugget weighing 1 7/8 ounces, from the natives of Kotzebue Sound. Two prospectors have just arrived at Portland with \$30,000 in gold, taken at Kotzebue Sound. Shortness of provisions forced them to come out.

The advertisement named a departure date (April 25) and also asserted that officials aboard the Revenue Marine cutter *Bear* had seen “nuggets as large as hickory nuts” and were paying Inupiaq men to “work the placer diggings.”

But Cogan’s sales pitch did not end here. For only \$200 customers could bring a ton and a half of baggage and freight, and he promised that at Kotzebue Sound his customers would face none of the challenges that slowed gold-seekers crossing the Chilkoot Trail and pushing overland toward the Klondike. “No mountain climbing; no long and tedious voyage, as on the Yukon River. Absolutely no obstacles to immediate working of mines,” declared the broadside. Cogan went on to explain that supply ships for the Teller Reindeer Station and for Christian missions would make regular calls at Kotzebue Sound and that a warehouse would be built “for use of passengers free of charge.” Finally, it assured readers that the gold fields were only one day’s travel up the Kobuk River and that a paddlewheel steamer would be provided to transport them upriver. Cogan also placed newspaper advertisements for the *Alaska* and before long other transportation companies began outfitting ships and advertising Kotzebue Sound as a sure-thing alternative to the Klondike.<sup>2</sup>

As Cogan launched his advertising campaign, several testimonials supporting his claims appeared in California newspapers. The aforementioned Captain Wagner of the *Premier* declared that he had a large gold nugget that “the Esquimaux raked from the river bed with a canoe paddle,” and Vene G. Gambell, a missionary working on St. Lawrence Island, told a reporter that “great quantities of gold are being found on Kotzebue Sound in the Arctic Ocean.”<sup>3</sup> These reports combined with news that several mining companies were forming to transport stam-

peders to northwest Alaska, chief among them was the Kotzebue Sound Mining and Trading Company. The vigorous advertising and dockside activity prompted the *San Francisco Call* to announce,

An exodus of gold-seekers to Kotzebue Sound next spring is now an assured fact. Hundreds of men who had decided upon starting for the Klondike next March have changed their minds and will make for the new El Dorado. A company has been formed in Chicago to dredge the streams which empty into the sound, and parties from all over the Union will make the Koo-Wak and Selwik rivers their objective points next year.<sup>4</sup>

Following Cogan’s lead, investors began purchasing retired whaling ships and any other vessels they could get their hands on. Cogan himself purchased a second vessel, the *Northern Light*, when he realized the *Alaska* would reach capacity, and by March of 1898 a ragtag Kotzebue Sound fleet was taking shape in San Francisco Bay. In fact, enthusiasm for Kotzebue Sound was so strong that whaling captains began using the stampede to their advantage. Instead of advertising for whalers (who were increasingly hard to recruit), the captains spread word that the easiest way to reach Kotzebue Sound was to join a whaling crew and then to jump ship. Thus the trap was set. As one reporter explained, “One thing is certain, and that is that any man who ships in this way will not see the gold fields this season, as the whalers never stop at Kotzebue Sound, but go straight through to Point Barrow, occasionally stopping at Point Hope.”<sup>5</sup>

HO! FOR

# KOTZEBUE SOUND

LATEST DISPATCH FROM KOTZEBUE SOUND  
PER U. S. STEAMER "BEAR," SAYS:

## "NUGGETS AS LARGE AS HICKORY NUTS"

THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS  
"ARE STAKING NATIVES TO WORK PLACER DIGGINGS."

Natives last year brought down quantities of nuggets to trade. Gold was found along the shores of the stream emptying into Kotzebue Sound. Capt. Wagner, of the Schooner "Premier," testifies to receiving a nugget weighing  $1\frac{1}{2}$  ounces, from the natives of Kotzebue Sound.

Two prospectors have just arrived at Portland with \$30,000 in gold, taken at Kotzebue Sound. Shortness of provisions forced them to come out.

## A1 Clipper Bark "ALASKA"

B. COGAN, Commanding.

340 Tons Reg.

WILL SAIL FOR KOTZEBUE SOUND  
GOLD FIELDS, ON OR ABOUT *April 25th, 1898.*

Accommodations for 200 passengers, each passenger allowed 3000 pounds of freight and baggage. Gold Fields only ONE DAY per stern-wheel steamer, which will be provided by the Company free of charge.

No mountain climbing; no long and tedious voyage, as on the Yukon River. Absolutely no obstacles to immediate working of mines.

United States Government Reindeer Station supply-ship, also missionary supply-ship, carrying all necessary provisions for Government employees and missionaries make a landing and delivery in Kotzebue Sound every year.

United States Government Officials report timber in plenty on rivers emptying into Kotzebue Sound.

Abundance of fish, especially salmon are found in all the streams. These fish can be traded from the natives at all times during the year at trifling cost. Kotzebue Sound is a great trading centre, and all necessary clothing for an Arctic winter can be purchased from the natives for trade goods.

A warehouse will be established at the head of Kotzebue Sound for use of passengers free of charge.

Any one not wishing to remain at Kotzebue Sound will be given a free passage to St. Michaels in Bark Alaska, latter part of August, 1898.

All passengers supplied with meals aboard vessel until departure of Steamer for up river at no additional expense.

Already one half of the accommodations have been taken. Those desiring to insure passage should apply without delay. Rate of passage \$200, which includes the carriage of 3000 lbs. baggage and freight from San Francisco to Kotzebue Sound.

Parties desiring passage can secure same by depositing \$50.00. Balance of passage money, \$150.00 payable on or before April 1st, 1898, otherwise the sum of \$50.00 will be forfeited. Tickets transferable at the office of the Company only.

Refer by permission to the TALLANT BANKING CO. of San Francisco.

Address all communications to

OR TO RESIDENCE:

531 32d Street, Oakland.

**CAPT. B. COGAN,**

**44 East Street, San Francisco.**

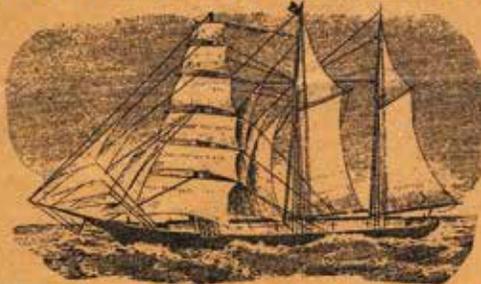
FROM THE PRESS OF THE WYSELL-RODINE CO., 12 CLAY, S. F.

# For Alaska Gold Fields

The Alaska & Kotzebue Sound Mining and Transportation Co.



Will Dispatch  
the Fast Sailing



A-1  
Clipper Bark



## CATHERINE SUDDEN

Under Command of CAPT. FRED GREEN, the well-known Arctic Whaler

ON OR ABOUT MAY 10th, 1898

DIRECT TO KOTZEBUE SOUND

FARE INCLUDING MEALS WHILE ON PASSAGE  
AND TEN DAYS AFTER ARRIVAL **\$200**

Accommodations for 160 Passengers

The Company will furnish a large and commodious House, to be erected as soon as landed, for the accommodation of passengers and their freight until they can establish themselves. A small steamer will be taken to tow boats up the rivers. Also a number of light draft boats will be taken for prospecting.

This vessel will remain at Kotzebue 60 days, so that anyone wishing to return can do so free of charge.

Passengers must furnish their own provisions on return passage.

3,000 lbs. freight and or baggage allowed each person. A deposit of \$50 will be required of each person on engaging passage and booking for same. Balance must be paid on 1st day of April; otherwise the sum of \$50 will be forfeited.

Passengers, with their freight and or baggage, will be taken up the river 300 miles to Gold Fields in ship's boat free of charge.

Latest dispatch from Kotzebue Sound per U. S. Steamer "Bear," says: The United States Government officials "are staking natives to work placer diggings."

Natives last year brought down quantities of nuggets to trade. Gold was found along the shores of the stream emptying into Kotzebue Sound. Capt. Wagner, of the Schooner "Premier," testifies to receiving a nugget weighing 1 7/8 ounces, from natives of Kotzebue Sound.

It is reported that two prospectors arrived at Portland with \$15,000 in gold, taken at Kotzebue Sound. Shortness of provisions forced them to come out. A large company is now getting ready a large dredging plant to operate on the streams leading into and in Kotzebue Sound.

Gold Fields only **four days' boating** from ship's landing; only **one day's towing**.

No mountain climbing; no long and tedious voyage as on the Yukon River. Absolutely no obstacles to immediate working of mines. Entire whaling fleet pass within hailing distance twice a year.

United States Government Reindeer Station supply-ship, also missionary supply-ship, carrying all necessary provisions for Government employees and missionaries, makes a landing and delivery in Kotzebue Sound every year.

Already one-half of the accommodations have been taken. Those desiring to insure passage should apply without delay. Address all communications to

**C. DICKEY, Agent, 34 California St., San Francisco**

J. W. DICKINSON, Agent, Armona, Cal.

G. W. LIBBEY, Agent, Minneapolis, Minn.

REV. F. B. GRIFFICE, Agent, P. O. Box 313, Garrett, Ind.

J. H. FLITNER, Agent, 200 Commercial St., Boston, Mass.

E. F. STAPLES, Agent, Stockton, Maine

GEO. L. CLAUSSENIUS CO., PRINTERS, 411 MARKET ST., S. F.

Broadside for the *Catherine Sudden* set to sail for Kotzebue Sound on May 10, 1898. This ship was one of several purchased by the newly formed Alaska & Kotzebue Sound Mining and Transportation Company. University of Alaska Fairbanks, Archives, Gold Rush Ephemera Collection.

During the mobilization for Kotzebue Sound, false and misleading information was the only information available, and this included a letter that appeared in the *San Francisco Call* from a mysterious figure named John Ross to the well-known San Francisco businessman and lawyer James A. Ralston. The newspaper printed the letter in its handwritten form and as a transcription, and in it Ross described his experiences on the Kobuk River:

A native who had been further up the stream hunting deer came back with plenty of fresh meat and a nugget that will weigh not less than twenty ounces. I gave him the last plug of tobacco I had for it. I hated to part with the last plug for gold was more plenty now than tobacco. We went on up the creek. The Natives led the way to a small riffle where he found it, and we commenced work and found it in such quantities as to make us almost crazy, often getting ten ounces to the pan. In ten days we washed out fifty thousand dollars. I remain your friend, John Ross.<sup>6</sup>

Fifty thousand dollars in ten days was precisely the dream that stampederers held in their hearts, but not everyone was taken in. The trade journal *Mining and Scientific Press* reprinted the letter but expressed deep skepticism as to its authenticity: "That is the kind of stuff that sends men pell-mell up there. The man who buys a lottery ticket is a model of sober business discretion compared with the one who is influenced by such statements to make a similar attempt to achieve such alleged success."<sup>7</sup>

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make us almost crazy

Often getting ten ounces to the  
pan in ten days we  
washed out - Fifty Thousand  
Dollars

remain your friend  
John Ross.

Too good to be true—A fragment of a letter from “John Ross” describing Kotzebue Sound as “the richest spot on earth.” *San Francisco Call*, March 31, 1898.

Others were more sanguine about the letter. For example, Edmund E. Van der Burgh of Fall River, Massachusetts was preparing to go north aboard the *Mermaid* and was fully convinced by what he had read both from Bernard Cogan and in the letter from John Ross. Referring to the Ross letter, Van der Burgh explained his sense that a conspiracy was under foot to hide the true scope of Kotzebue Sound’s potential:

This letter is the first one published from Kotzebue Sound, but I believe that others must have been received and kept secret. I don’t know how else

to explain the constantly accelerating boom we have seen since we reached San Francisco. When we left Fall River there was only one vessel booked to sail for Kotzebue Sound. Now there are eight and more to follow. The boom is not fanned by companies either, for all the vessels are owned by men who are going to prospect for themselves or who have staked others to do so for them.<sup>8</sup>

The John Ross letter was not the only letter crafted to boost Kotzebue Sound. During the same period, the *Seattle Daily Times* published a letter by a resident named Charles De Vine in which he explained,

The property I struck is on the Kowakie River, where you can get good panning anywhere from 5 cents up to 25 cents. We got \$10,000 for what we brought out. Now the higher up I went on this river the better the diggings were. The gold is 16-karat and nearly smooth and not very fine; the river beds are good working. . . . Bring two years' supplies, and if you can bring goats, and not dogs; they can live on the country and furnish you milk and butter. I have four big native goats bought from the Hudson Bay Fur Company; they cost me \$40. They can pack eighty pounds, but are stubborn to break . . ."<sup>9</sup>

The unusual spelling of Kowak and the suggestion that stampedeers buy goats for packing and milk may have seemed a bit

strange, but given how little reliable information was available, it was no doubt welcomed by those hungry for news. At this point, Kotzebue Sound needed no further promotion—what began as a flurry of interest in an obscure corner of Alaska had turned into a genuine stampede.

By April, newspapers in Seattle and San Francisco carried advertisements every day for ships preparing specifically for Kotzebue Sound. Some also offered a stop at St. Michael, the jumping-off point for journeys to Yukon River mining centers like Rampart, Circle City, and of course, Dawson City and the Klondike gold fields. The transportation companies advertising Kotzebue Sound were particularly liberal with their promises, often declaring the little-known Arctic locale to be the "Richest Gold Fields in Alaska!" and offering rides up the Kobuk River in a paddlewheel river steamer. The ships leaving San Francisco carried either the parts to construct their own steamers or fully assembled boats that were tested in San Francisco Bay before being chained to the deck of a larger vessel.<sup>10</sup> Joseph Grinnell's group was readying the yacht *Penelope* to leave San Pedro harbor. They would be the first to depart for what was Alaska's most unproven and unlikely gold mining region, sailing first to San Francisco—to purchase parts for a river steamer they christened *Helen*—and then turning toward Alaska.<sup>11</sup> In San Francisco a reporter noted, "While the rush to the Klondike is waning, that to Kotzebue Sound is gaining strength daily."<sup>12</sup>

When Bernard Cogan's *Alaska* set sail on April 28, reporters at the docks focused on some of the ship's more interesting passengers. Among them was forty-five-year-old John D. Tallant, president of the Tallant Banking Company which some were calling "the bulwark of San Francisco's financial fortress." Tallant was also the owner of a four-

FOR

# ALASKA GOLD FIELDS

The Kotzebue Sound Mining and Trading Co.  
WILL DISPATCH THE FAST SAILING BARK

## J. A. FALKENBURG

Under Command of CAPT. P. H. COOK, the Well-Known Arctic Whaler.

# ON MAY 10, 1898

Direct to KOTZEBUE SOUND

**FARE** including meals while on Passage and TEN DAYS after arrival. **\$200**  
Accommodations for 160 Passengers

The Company will furnish a large and commodious Bunk, to be started as soon as loaded, for the accommodation of passengers and their freight, until they can establish themselves. A small steamer will be taken to tow boats to the steers. Also  
A NUMBER OF LIGHT DRAFT BOATS WILL BE TAKEN FOR PROSPECTING

Mr. J. A. Hakston, who has been in this section for over two years and is thoroughly conversant with the country, natives and their language, will have charge of the expedition.  
This steamer will arrive at Kotzebue Sound on the 10th inst. and depart on the 15th inst. Accommodations for 160 passengers.  
\$200 the freight or baggage allowed each person. A deposit of \$50 will be required of each person on engaging passage and loading for same. Unserviceable will not be allowed.  
Passengers with their freight or baggage, will be taken up the ship to Gold Fields in ship's own tow boats.  
Landed Goods from Kotzebue Sound per U. S. Steamer "Bear" 1897. The United States Government officials have stated natives to work placer diggings.  
Bunk for passengers and their freight, until they can establish themselves. A small steamer will be taken to tow boats to the steers. Also  
A NUMBER OF LIGHT DRAFT BOATS WILL BE TAKEN FOR PROSPECTING

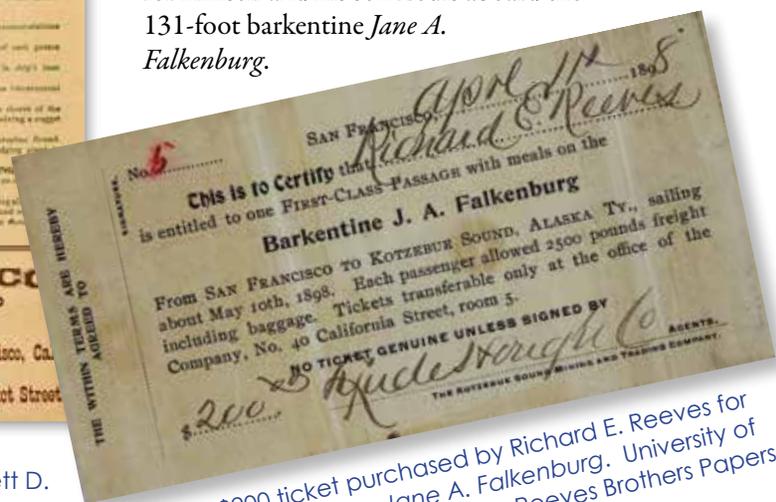
**LYNDE & HOUGH CO**  
40 California St., San Francisco  
General Agents and Ticket Office

ADDRESS ALL COMMUNICATIONS TO  
**A. H. HERRIMAN**, 201 Front St., San Francisco, Cal.  
GENERAL MANAGER  
**J. G. McCALL & CO**, Ticket Agents, 46 or 636 Market Street

Advertisement for the *Jane A. Falkenburg*. Newbery Library, Everett D. Graff Collection of Western Americana (2357).

masted trading schooner, named for himself, that transported cargos to South America, Hawaii, and Asia. Less than a year before northern gold caught his attention, Tallant had suffered a mental breakdown during a railway journey across the United States. When the train reached Iowa his behavior grew increasingly erratic and he was seen brandishing a revolver, throwing gold coins at his fellow passengers, and raving about efforts to “brand him as a notorious criminal.” Before long, train officials tackled him and Tallant was taken, struggling all the way, to a Chicago police station. After spending weeks in an insane asylum, he returned to San Francisco and, some months later, boarded the *Alaska* with his personal secretary and a large safe filled with cash. His plan, it was surmised, was to buy gold mining claims for a syndicate of financiers from Denver and New York.<sup>13</sup>

The banker was not the only wealthy man to book passage to Kotzebue Sound. The multi-millionaire Charles D. Lane was the head of a gold and silver mining consortium in California when he booked passage for himself and his son Louis aboard the 131-foot barkentine *Jane A. Falkenburg*.



A \$200 ticket purchased by Richard E. Reeves for passage on the *Jane A. Falkenburg*. University of Alaska Fairbanks, Archives, Reeves Brothers Papers.

## Kotzebue Sound Gold—A Get-Out-of-Jail-Free Card?

George T. Stevens was serving a ten-year sentence in Walla Walla Penitentiary when news of Klondike gold broke in the newspapers. A guard who inspected the prisoners' mail came upon a letter hinting that Stevens knew the location of a rich mine in Alaska and, when questioned, he also produced a crude map showing the location of the gold. This convinced prison officials that, even though he was a rowdy inmate, he could make them wealthy. In short order, they pooled their money to buy a ship (the *Loyal*), formed a mining company (the Loyal Mining Company), and persuaded Washington governor John R. Rogers to pardon Prisoner #1206.

CONVICT GEORGE T. STEVENS, PAR-  
DONED BY GOV. JOHN R. ROGERS.



THE above cut is a likeness of George T. Stevens, the Skagit county convict, whom, it is alleged, Governor Rogers pardoned out of the Walla Walla penitentiary in order that he might guide some of the governor's personal friends to an Alaska gold mine. The particulars of this case and of others in which Gov. Rogers' alleged unjustifiable use of the pardoning power has caused him to be excoriated by the press of this city are given in the *Post-Intelligencer*.

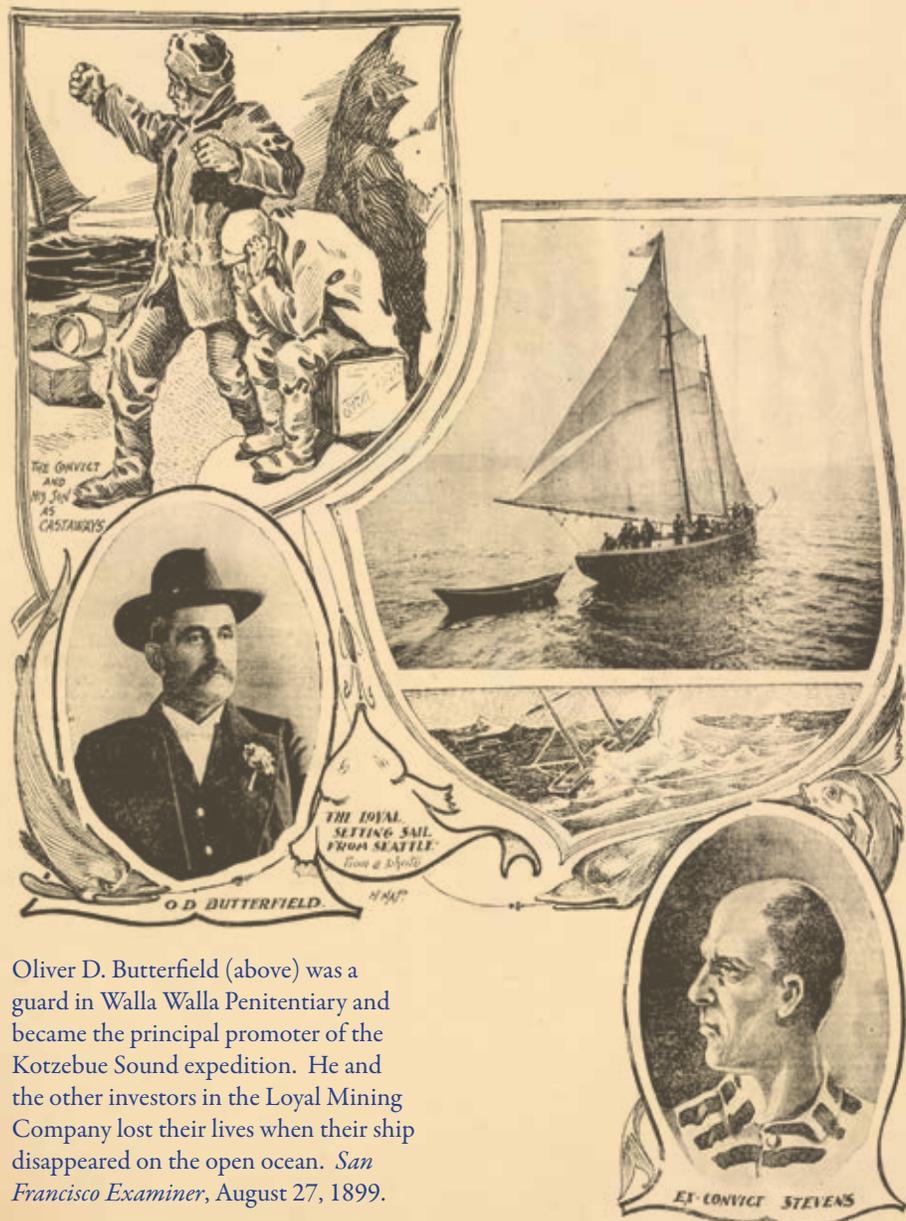
*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, August 23, 1898

On May 1, 1898, the *Loyal* left Seattle carrying Stevens and his 14-year-old son Edward as well as prison employees who were granted leave to seek gold in Alaska and enough sailors to navigate the ship. At sea Stevens proved to be as much trouble as he was on land. He was prone to pick fights and his belligerence led to a call to lock up all the guns on the *Loyal*. "Even then he was quarrelsome," explained one report. "A desire to kick up a disturbance, even mutiny, seemed to possess him." After arriving at Kotzebue Sound, the ship was damaged in a storm and the men did not like their odds of finding gold. They turned the ship around and passed through the Bering Strait for a second time.

Armed guards on tower at Walla Walla State Penitentiary, ca. 1900. Washington State Archives, State Library Photograph Collection.

Along the way, members of the Loyal Mining Company feared that Stevens might murder the crew and take control of the ship, so they marooned him and his son at Port Clarence, a narrow spit of land on the south side of the Seward Peninsula. From there, the ship reached St. Michael for more repairs and then set sail on October 1, 1898 for Dutch Harbor. The *Loyal* was never heard from again. Family and friends hoped the gold-seekers had perhaps sailed for the Philippines or had been caught in sea ice in Alaskan waters, but in time it became clear that all hands had been lost. In a strange twist of fate, the only survivors of this tragic story were Stevens and his son who made their way to Nome and settled in that gold rush boomtown.

—Special thanks to Sharon Morris, the great-granddaughter of Chief Turnkey James Addleman who lost his life when the *Loyal* disappeared. Sharon generously shared her research findings to benefit this study.



Oliver D. Butterfield (above) was a guard in Walla Walla Penitentiary and became the principal promoter of the Kotzebue Sound expedition. He and the other investors in the Loyal Mining Company lost their lives when their ship disappeared on the open ocean. *San Francisco Examiner*, August 27, 1899.

The Lanes brought with them ten men to act as a prospecting party and paid all expenses for passage and supplies with the understanding that the financial backers could claim “a one-third interest in whatever mines may be located by any of the party.” Charles Lane’s personal fortune began with his purchase of the Utica gold mine in Calaveras County, California at a time when the mine was thought to be “played out” or exhausted. However, Lane was a strong believer in the paranormal and employed a spirit medium named Mrs. Robinson to help him assess future profitability. On the strength of her recommendations, Lane became one of the wealthiest men in California and thereafter paid Mrs. Robinson \$1,000 for every successful bit of psychic advice she offered. His ability to pick productive properties led other miners to say, “Wherever Lucky Lane goes fortune surely follows.”<sup>14</sup>

Luck was not a friend to Charles W. Baumann, a San Francisco cigar-maker and vendor who boarded the *Alaska* with as much stealth as he could muster. A reporter described Baumann as “the handsome ex-dealer in prime Havanas” because he had hastily sold his business—the Pacific Coast Co-operative Cigar Manufacturing Company—to finance his trip to Kotzebue Sound. The reporter went on to explain that Baumann was being pursued by a woman who claimed to be his wife and the mother of his child. The woman in question, desperate to find the man she loved, burst into the harbor police-station asking for help. She explained that she and Baumann had been married for five years and that he was trying to desert the family. All that the authorities could say was that he had sailed on the *Alaska* three days earlier. Details of their stormy relationship soon emerged indicating that they were not married but were having an affair, that the child was not his, and that she was the wife of the manager

of a hotel where Baumann was lodging. This was only the first chapter of the story because, as reporters discovered, the woman was unwilling to let her lover slip away and managed to board another ship bound for Kotzebue Sound.<sup>15</sup>

In his diary, the stamperder Robert L. Dey described his departure from San Francisco Bay aboard the *Alaska*. As well-wishers waved and a tugboat towed the ship out to sea, Dey surveyed his surroundings and was unimpressed:

The ship was loaded rank [unevenly] by the stevedores, and the vessel listed to one side considerably. Vegetables of all kinds were strewn about in great confusion. Ropes, canvas, boxes, sails, etc. combined to make the decks both upper and lower, a mass of extreme untidiness. . . . Amidst all the confusion, the steward who had just signed [on to] the ship and waiter’s cook etc., were preparing our first meal. The meal consisted of fried liver, sloppy coffee, dirty potatoes with jackets on rice, bread, etc., altogether a very unpalatable mess, nevertheless it was eagerly gobbled up.

As soon as the ship entered the open ocean, it began to pitch and roll and, as Dey explained, “Almost everybody on board was sick, even the Captain.” The waves sent porcelain dishes in the pantry flying, and amidst the turmoil, the crew realized the ship’s hold contained an alarming amount of water. Captain Cogan kept the ship near the coast and employed bilge pumps. He soon discovered the source of the problem—it was not sea water coming in but a ruptured freshwater tank.<sup>16</sup>

A stamper named James H. Shotwell who sailed for Kotzebue Sound aboard the schooner *Louise J. Kenney* also wrote in his diary about his first days at sea. The *Kenney* first left Port Townsend, Washington and stopped in Seattle to take on gold-seekers and one hundred Saami reindeer herders from Norway that Sheldon Jackson was transporting to Alaska. The Saami had been hired to tend reindeer on the Seward Peninsula and to teach the Inupiat the fundamentals of herding until they could run a commercial operation of their own. Shotwell wrote detailed letters to his wife Margharete describing his feelings about the cramped quarters and unappetizing food:

Oh, if you could see and get one sniff of the place we eat you would wonder how we could eat at all and if you had to endure it I believe you would starve. There are some 35 passengers, some ten of which sleep in a three-cornered place about as big as your kitchen, besides in it sleep four of the sailors and all the cooking is done. Some are sea-sick and the rest smoke and chew. Oh, the horrors of it are past description. How I long for the simplest little meal with some show of cleanliness on land.<sup>17</sup>

Shotwell's experiences were common. The Alaska-bound ships were frequently crowded, the food left much to be desired, and many of the passengers, whether or not they had been to sea before, suffered terribly from seasickness.

In the opening pages of his diary, Joseph Grinnell noted that observers questioned their judgement when they saw the vessel

chosen by the members of the Long Beach and Alaska Mining & Trading Company. Grinnell noted that the *Penelope* had never been to the Arctic and that passers-by watching them load the vessel declared, "She will never reach her destination," "Impossible that she is built for a stormy coast," and "You may as well make your wills before you embark." Nonetheless, Grinnell remained optimistic. He worked as assistant to the ship's cook and in the first week at sea he formed a singing troupe called The Penelope Quartette. The group practiced every evening and, as he explained, "We have a yell, which is frequently to be heard, especially at getting-up time in the morning: *Penelope, Penelope*, zip, boom, bah! Going up to Kotzebue! Rah! Rah! Rah!"<sup>18</sup>

Once at sea, the stampedeers observed animals most had never seen before, like whales, dolphins, petrels, and the black-footed albatrosses the sailors called "goonies." Grinnell lured some of the enormous birds to the *Penelope* with food scraps and caught two but let them go because he had no suitable place to butcher the birds and store the skins as scientific specimens. Instead, he and his friends fastened a piece of canvas to the back of one bird with the name of their vessel, the date, and their latitude and longitude. Shotwell, on the deck of the *Louise J. Kenney*, wrote to his wife that the enormous birds "are to the Ocean what the buzzards are to the land" in that they scavenge their food and soar for long hours without rest. He also described breaching whales and how the Saami reindeer herders on his ship (who he calls Laplanders or Laps) caught albatrosses for food:

The Laps have taken three or four with a rope; they came so close to the ship that they lassoed them or caught them with a hook. The Laps eat them.



Two weeks out of San Francisco the men of the *Penelope* spotted the sailing vessel *Sintram* that was involved in the coal trade between British Columbia, Puget Sound, and San Francisco. Bancroft Library, Portraits of Joseph Grinnell's Family (1973.44).



Captain Robert G. Delano of the *Penelope* uses a sextant to judge his ship's position in the North Pacific. Bancroft Library, Portraits of Joseph Grinnell's Family (1973.44).

Joseph Grinnell called this group of California stampedes the "Crips' Union" because they were disabled by seasickness or otherwise too ill to do work aboard the *Penelope*. Bancroft Library, Samuel W. Fansher Collection (2015.79).



After the *Penelope* entered the Bering Sea, festivities began and Captain Robert G. Delano demonstrated clog dancing to a fife and harmonica accompaniment. According to Grinnell, "The captain's wand was a boat hook with a shining red onion on the tip and [he was] bearing a red pasteboard banner with the motto 'On to Kotzebue.'" National Park Service, Alaska Regional Curatorial Center, Karlene Leeper Collection (KOVA-73).





Joseph Grinnell (middle) and the *Penelope's* cook, June 7, 1898. Grinnell would later be elected as cook for his group of gold-seekers on the Kobuk River. Bancroft Library, Portraits of Joseph Grinnell's Family (1973.44).

Quite often we see a great whale, sometimes many. They go lazily along spouting the water high in the air when they come up to breathe. The other day we saw one behaving in a wild manner as if badly hurt; it would make great leaps in the air and when it struck the water would turn a great sheet of foam all about it.<sup>19</sup>

Although Shotwell, and many others, felt pangs of homesickness and apprehension, they also sensed that they were on the verge of a great adventure. As several days of stormy weather lifted and the *Penelope* neared its first landfall in the Aleutian Is-

lands, Grinnell noted a change in tone among his fellow stampedeers:

We saw several pieces of kelp this morning, which gives evidence of land not far off. This morning the sun came out several times, and everyone is feeling quite jolly, which makes even the sea-sick ones better. One of the most popular songs on deck these cloudy days has been the familiar one, 'Let a little sunshine in.'

Seizing the opportunity, the group's photographer, Clyde Baldwin, stepped forward to take pictures of the stampedeers who posed

according to their ship-board affiliations, or “unions.” Grinnell was part of the Cooks’ Union; the *Penelope’s* crew made up the Sailors’ Union; and there was the Dishwashers’ Union and the Crips’ Union—they were the men too incapacitated by seasickness to do any work. Meanwhile, aboard the *Kenney*, Shotwell remained less enthusiastic about his shipboard companions. He missed his wife and home, grumbled about the length of the voyage, and wrote at one point, “The passengers are made up of all kinds and conditions of men—some hogs, some gentlemen.”<sup>20</sup>

The journey through the vast North Pacific was dangerous and difficult, and it was made even more dangerous because unsound and antiquated vessels were being pressed into service to meet the demand. As one reporter explained,

The rush to the gold fields of the Yukon has brought joy to the hearts of ship-owners. Two years ago steamers, ships, barks, barkentines and schooners by the dozen were tied up in Oakland Creek waiting for something to turn up, now there is not an unchartered or unused craft in the bay. All have come out of retirement and in handling the rush to the Klondike are turning gold into the depleted treasuries of their owners.<sup>21</sup>

Retired whaling ships, still stinking from oil and entrails, and all sorts of other ships past their prime were sold to those who wanted a cut of the gold-seeking phenomenon. Some vessels were obviously unseaworthy, others were simply overloaded with passengers and supplies, but they were all dubbed in the press “coffin ships.” A lack of government inspectors to examine the vessels and the willingness of greedy investors to

risk lives made maritime disasters a persistent problem and prompted the *San Francisco Call* to issue this alert under the headline “Warnings to Klondikers”: “In due time the outfitting of coffin ships will be made a penal offense, but for the present those who go north must rely upon their own brains and look out for themselves.”<sup>22</sup>

The most notorious case of a ship sinking on its way to Alaska was that of the schooner *Jane Gray*, which departed Seattle on May 19, 1898. The ship had sixty-one people on board, most of whom were stampedeers hoping to reach Kotzebue Sound, and just three days out of port the vessel foundered in what was described as a “moderate gale.” The disaster occurred in darkness at two o’clock in the morning, and the panicked passengers had only ten minutes from the time the alarm was sounded to the point water washed across the decks. Remarkably, some level-headed individuals managed to launch a small riverboat called the *Kennoma* that the *Jane Gray* was carrying on deck. Twenty-seven people clambered aboard, but not all were so lucky. A second boat was launched and boarded, but a large wave smashed it against the *Jane Gray’s* mainmast and it sank. Vene C. Gambell—the missionary from St. Lawrence Island who, the previous year, passed along rumors of Kotzebue Sound gold—was traveling with his wife and baby back to Alaska. As the *Jane Gray* began to sink, Gambell was on deck and his family was below in their stateroom. Instead of hurrying to guide them to the *Kennoma*, he seemed to abandon all hope and shouted, “The vessel is doomed, and we will die together.” He then rushed to the stateroom and locked the door as the *Jane Gray* disappeared beneath the waves.<sup>23</sup>

The survivors aboard the *Kennoma* improvised a sail and paddles and spent thirty hours making their way eastward to a beach on Vancouver Island, British Columbia.

The *Penelope* becalmed in the Bering Sea. Most sea voyages to northwest Alaska took about a month, but storms and lack of wind could add days and weeks to the trip. Bancroft Library, Samuel W. Fansher Collection (2015.79).



Along the way they drank rainwater they collected with a tarp and ate the only food on board—sacks of prunes and turnips that had been thrown into the boat at the last minute. When they reached land, they roasted mussels on the beach and were discovered by a local man who informed them that the village of Kyuquot was only six miles away. Once they reached the village, they boarded a boat that took them to Victoria and then to Seattle. When the world learned that thirty-four people had drowned and that the cause was an overloaded and poorly outfitted ship, the news caused a scandal. Not only had prominent residents of Seattle perished, but the firm that owned the *Jane Gray*—the MacDougall-Southwick Company—was slow

to compensate the survivors who lost all of their food and supplies.<sup>24</sup>

If the Kotzebue Sound gold stampede and the sinking of the *Jane Gray* were a stage production, the play's most unlikely cast member would be Prince Luigi Amedeo of Savoy. In 1897, this young, energetic member of the Italian royal family resolved to be the first to climb Mount St. Elias, the 18,000 peak that marks the southern end of Alaska's U.S.-Canada border on the 141st meridian. His climbing team included prominent Italian alpinists and an American contingent led by Edward S. Ingraham of Seattle. After triumphing over the mountain on July 31, 1897, the team returned to sea-level and learned about the gold rush gaining momentum in Alaska and

the Klondike. Prince Luigi wanted to launch a gold-seeking effort immediately, but he was called home by his uncle, King Umberto I, who wanted him to lead an attempt to reach the North Pole. Instead of searching for gold in person, the prince wrote a check for \$10,000 to send Ingraham with a team that included six of the prince's Italian friends to Kotzebue Sound. The group had the misfortune to book passage on the *Jane Gray*. Three Italians died in the disaster along with several of Ingraham's American colleagues. Ingraham managed to survive and wasted no time in organizing a second attempt, this one also financed by Prince Luigi.<sup>25</sup>

The sinking of the *Jane Gray* was the not the only disaster in the fleet of ships going to Kotzebue Sound in 1898. When the schooner *Elsie* arrived in Alaskan waters in late April, the vessel's captain, Lawrence L. Larsen, suffered from what passengers later called "ignorance and incapacity." As a result, he ran the ship aground on Chirikof Island, a small rocky outcrop one hundred miles from the Alaska Peninsula and southwest of the Kodiak Archipelago. The stampedeers owned the *Elsie* outright and had promised to give it to their captain as payment for his services. However, doubts about his qualifications emerged immediately. As one reporter explained,

They were only fairly out of port when it became plain that Larsen knew nothing of navigation. He sailed entirely by dead reckoning and claimed that they were near Dutch Harbor [in the Aleutian Islands] when men who were familiar with the coast knew that they were in the vicinity of Kodiak Island.

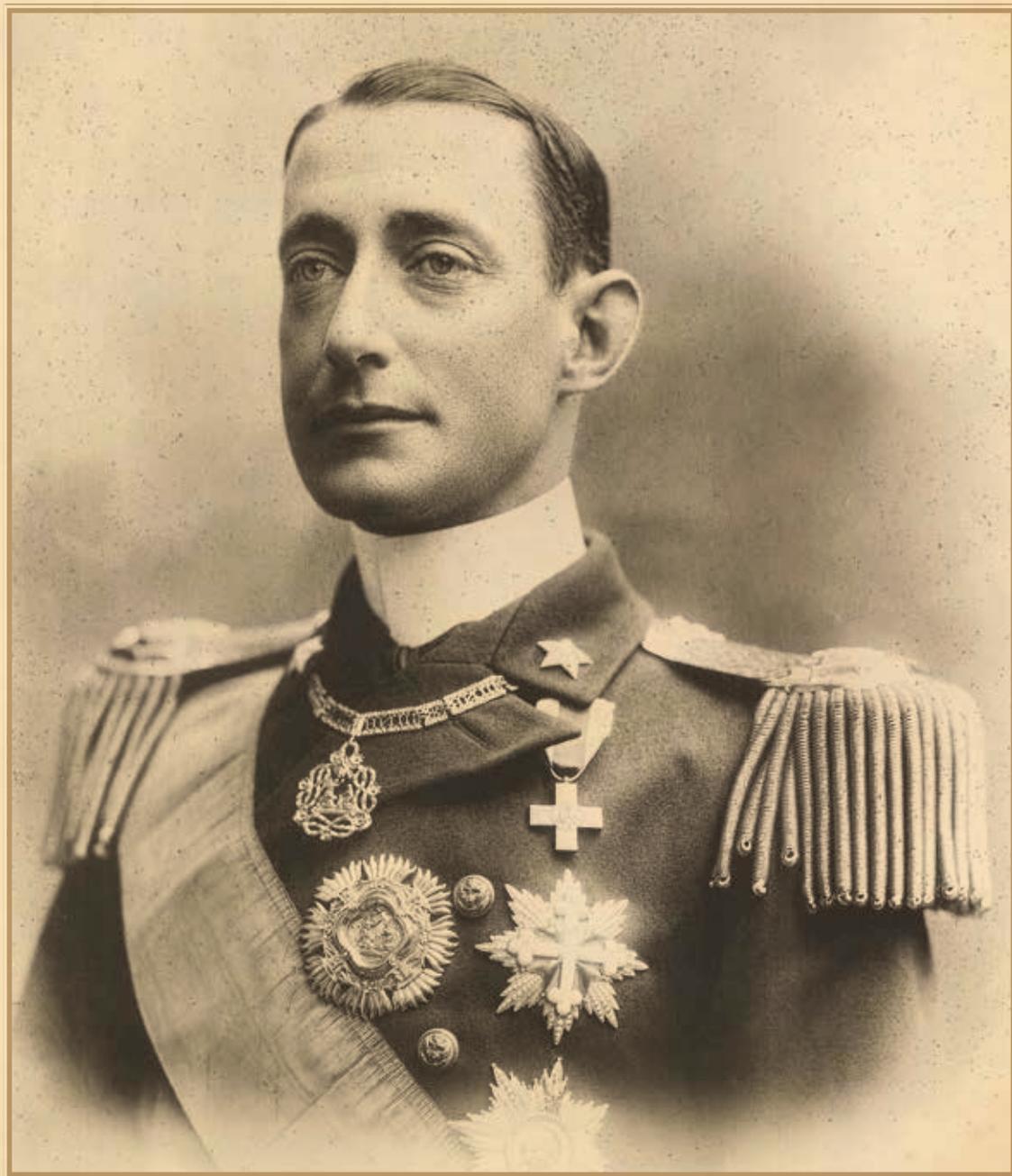
Around midnight, while navigating through a thick fog, they ran aground with

such force that it snapped the mainmast. Heavy surf forced the passengers into the rigging, where they waited for morning. When the sun rose, they found to their relief that they were stranded on the only strip of beach sand in sight and had avoided the otherwise rocky shore. The *Elsie's* thirty passengers managed to land much of their supplies and spent days trying to patch the schooner, only to watch it "crushed like an egg shell" by the next storm. The stampedeers spent forty-one miserable days marooned on the island before they were discovered by three fox trappers, who traveled to the island regularly and helped the castaways to signal passing ships until they were picked up and delivered to Dutch Harbor.<sup>26</sup>

While describing his first few weeks aboard the *Louise J. Kenney*, James Shotwell wrote about the captain's surprise at spotting a fully outfitted paddlewheel river steamer bobbing on the waves in the middle of the North Pacific. The flat-bottomed vessel was not built for ocean travel and Shotwell reached the logical conclusion: the owners of the steamer were trying to tow it behind a larger vessel for use on the Yukon River, but when its tow-lines broke in a storm, it was abandoned. Shotwell estimated that the steamer had probably cost between \$15,000 and \$20,000 in Seattle or San Francisco and noted, "Our captain hove to and sent a boat and three men to board her; they found no living thing on board except a few dozen chickens. There had been some 20 passengers and they had evidently left in great haste. Whether they were saved or not there was no means of knowing." The men sent to investigate also found what Shotwell described as "bedding, clothing, valises, trunks, guns, revolvers, and various things strewn about in the wildest confusion." They took what they could and left the damaged vessel to be swallowed by the waves.<sup>27</sup>

## *Partners in Adventure—Prince Luigi and Edward S. Ingraham*

The young, daring Prince Luigi Amedeo of Savoy made it his business to seek glory for the Kingdom of Italy, and this included being the first to summit the 18,000-foot peak of Mount St. Elias in 1897. But when he wanted to join the rush for Far North gold, he was thwarted by his uncle, King Umberto I, who called him back to Italy to prepare for an attempt to reach the North Pole. Before leaving the United States, Luigi wrote a \$10,000 check to Edward S. Ingraham, the American leader of his climbing expedition, to finance a gold hunting expedition to Kotzebue Sound.

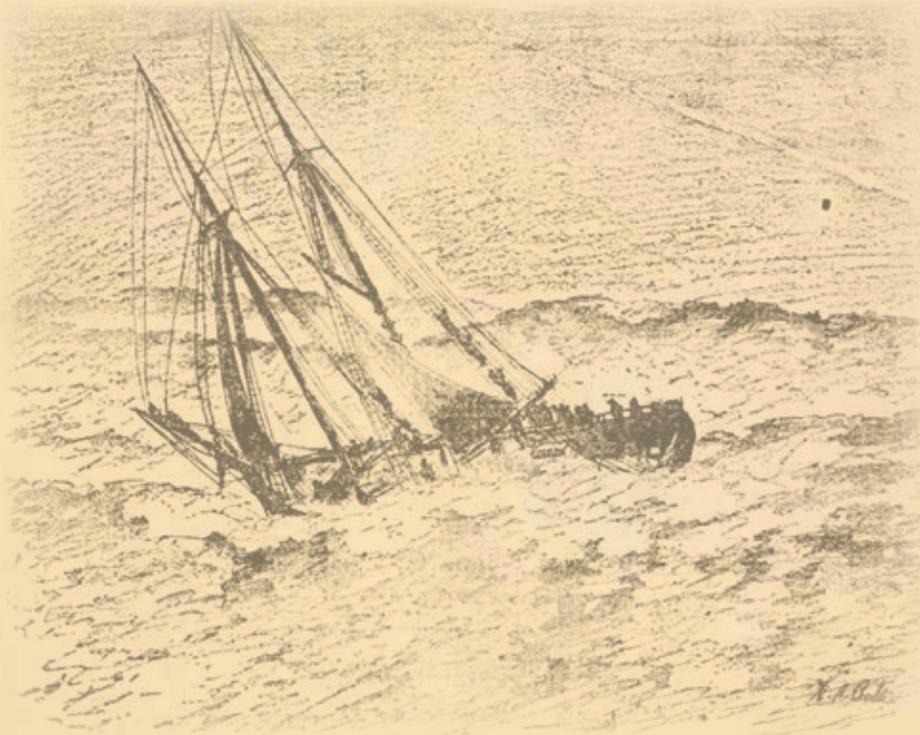


Prince Luigi Amedeo (also known as the Duke of the Abruzzi) was twenty-five in 1897 when he became the first man to ascend the peak of Mount St. Elias. He was also keen to search for gold in Alaska but instead financed others to reach the Kotzebue Sound. Courtesy of the author.



*I*ngraham was Seattle's superintendent of public schools at the time, but he jumped at the chance. He had the misfortune of booking passage for his prospecting crew—which included six Italians—on the schooner *Jane Gray*, which foundered and sank, drowning thirty-four people. Ingraham survived this disaster and lost no time in organizing a second expedition (also funded by the Italian prince) to reach Kotzebue Sound in the fall. During the winter of 1898, Ingraham led a group up the Selawik River to rescue stampedes with scurvy and later left for Nome where he sent for his family and stayed to mine gold until 1901.

Edward S. Ingraham. Museum of History & Industry, Seattle Historical Society (19268).



The foundered schooner *Jane Gray*. *San Francisco Call*, June 2, 1898.

By June, ships destined for Kotzebue Sound and for the mouth of the Yukon River were starting to pass through the Aleutian Islands. Just beyond the convenient gap in the island chain known as Unimak Pass were the twin settlements of Unalaska and Dutch Harbor, which together served as a coaling station and popular stop for whalers and government vessels passing into and out of the Bering Sea. Maurice A. Hartnett, twenty-one, was aboard the schooner *Moonlight* and commented in his journal about the gold-rush ships gathering at this geographical bottleneck. Weeks earlier, the *Moonlight* and the *Jane Gray* were towed out of San Francisco harbor by the same tugboat, and it is clear from his comments that he did not yet know about the disaster that befell that doomed ship or the marooning of the *Elsie's* passengers:

All hands were up at an early hour with the intention of once more setting foot on land and seeing the sights of Dutch Harbor and Unalaska. As we went on deck we found ourselves in the midst of a number of schooners and sloops, their destination nearly all being Kotzebue Sound. The ship *Elsie*, which left in March has not yet arrived and some anxiety is felt for her safety. We find our trip of 21 days is the quickest yet made. The *Jane Gray* and the *G.W. Watson* which were going to beat us so badly have not as yet made their appearance.

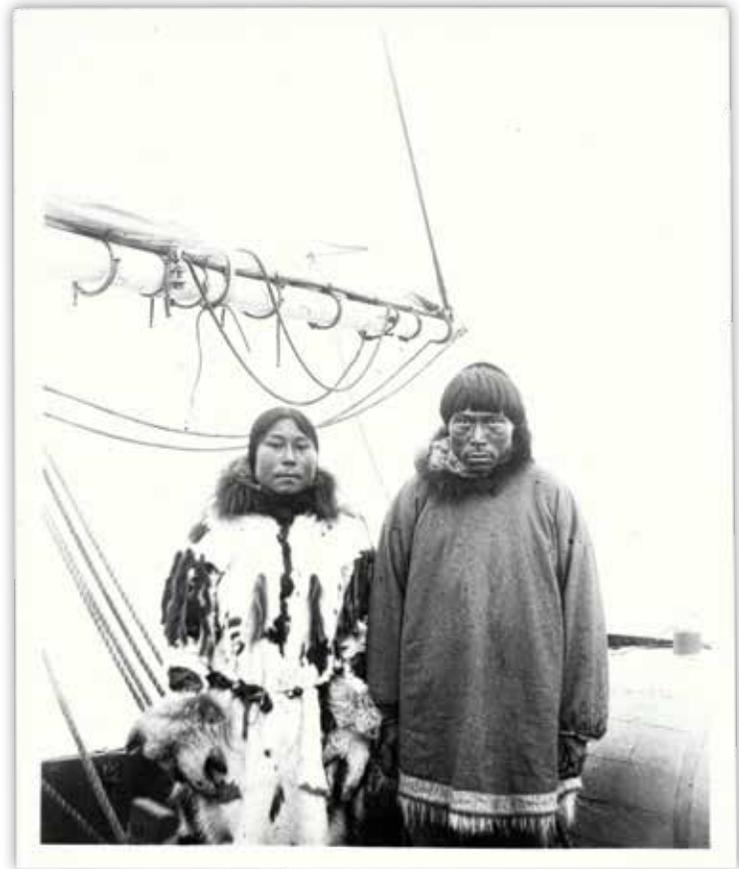


Inupiat men in Norton Sound arrive aboard a skin-covered umiak to trade with the crew of the *Penelope*. Bancroft Library, Portraits of Joseph Grinnell's Family (1973.44).

Hartnett described Unalaska's old Russian mission and school and a general store where his companions rushed in to buy nuts and candies. He also described paddlewheel steamers under construction that were destined for Alaskan rivers and a memorable restaurant meal:

We paid 50 cents for a meal which contained nothing but what we could have had aboard ship, but the way it was served, and the fact that we could once more sit at a table and take our time to eat, and be assured that we would get our food to our mouth without it being blown off the spoon by the wind, made the meal well worth the money.<sup>28</sup>

By early July many of the ships that Hartnett saw at Unalaska-Dutch Harbor had sailed north through the Bering Strait and were now offloading passengers and freight in Kotzebue Sound. The *Moonlight* was first to arrive, on July 2, 1898, with forty-two passengers. The ship had some difficulty anchoring and narrowly missed rocks after slipping around the tip of the Baldwin Peninsula and into the comparatively sheltered waters of Hotham Inlet.<sup>29</sup> The captain of the ship had turned away several Inupiaq men who offered their services as navigators and guides. Later ship captains and stampeders traveling the nearby rivers learned the value of these local experts.<sup>30</sup> The next ship to arrive was the *George W. Watson*, which had, days earlier, delivered eighty-five stampeders to St. Michael near the mouth of the Yukon River. The captain of the *Watson* described the difficulty he had reaching Kotzebue Sound because of broad patches of broken sea ice. Later a San Francisco reporter paraphrased the captain's description of how the ship,



picked her way through the narrow openings between ice packs, extending from four to fourteen feet above the water's surface and twenty to thirty feet below. . . . Observing that the ice was closing in on them, they beat their way toward open water, and kept in wider channels for two days. The barks *North-ern Light* and *Guardian*, the schooner *Charles Hanson* of San Francisco and three other vessels were last seen in the pack ice.<sup>31</sup>

"Young people we met at Cape Prince of Wales"—Grinnell and his fellow Californians met this mission-educated couple aboard the *Penelope*, 1898. Bancroft Library, Portraits of Joseph Grinnell's Family (1973.44).

Before long the ice retreated and ships began arriving in a steady stream. Mountains



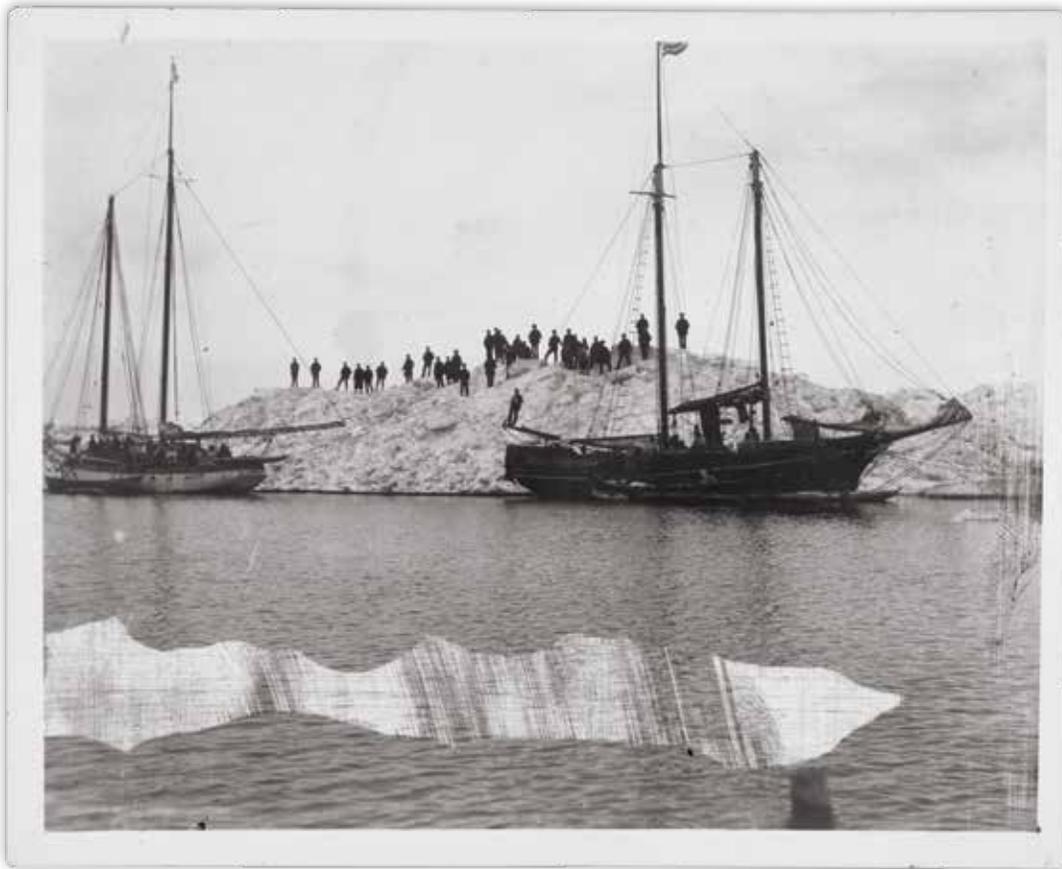
Stampeders and traders from St. Lawrence Island aboard the *Jane A. Falkenburg*, June 18, 1898. University of Alaska Fairbanks, Archives, Reeves Brothers Papers (1995-157-1).

of supplies—including mounds of canvas tents, lumber, barrels, food boxes, and engine parts to build river steamers—appeared on the beaches of the Baldwin Peninsula at a point they called Cape Blossom.<sup>32</sup>

Eventually thirty-three vessels from San Francisco, Seattle and other ports anchored near the peninsula, including the sailing ships *Latrel*, *Evelyn*, *Johnson*; the steam schooners *Elk* and *Grace Dollar*; the barkentines *Catherine Sudden*, *Leslie D.*, and *Jane A. Falkenburg*; and the barks *Northern Light*, *Mermaid*, and *Alaska*. The scene unfolding before him

prompted Grinnell to write, “There are so many vessels of every description here that it looks like a seaport harbor.”<sup>33</sup> Tents were erected by the dozens along the beach and an ad hoc community took shape that included roughly 1,500 men and at least sixteen women. As more ships arrived the stampeders could be seen wandering to and fro, adjusting to the exotic landscape and the sensation of being on terra firma.

After nearly fifty days at sea, James Shotwell was delighted to be on land and wrote in a letter, “Three cheers for all hands in general



“Anchored to a grounded iceberg”—The *Penelope* and another boat moored to sea ice while trying to enter Kotzebue Sound. Bancroft Library, Samuel W. Fansher Collection (2015.79).

and yours truly in particular, we are ashore.” Like many of the stampeder, he felt lucky to be alive after the arduous sea voyage, and his arrival on the Baldwin Peninsula was the first time in weeks that he could relax and, at the edge of the stampeder village, enjoy a look around. He wrote,

[August 9] has the appearance of another fine day. I am up early looking around; all about is the usual low flat country; a few mountains are to be seen far away. Kotzebue Sound lays before us calm and quiet, a rich growth of grass grows close down to the tideline. We have

set up our tents and are busy building our river boats. One of the boys is doing the cooking and proves to be quite an expert—what a pleasure it is to have some clean, well-cooked food once more.<sup>34</sup>

For Shotwell this was just the beginning of an adventure that he expected would last two years or more, but not all new arrivals felt the same. Within weeks, the ships that brought stampeder to Kotzebue Sound would be raising their anchors and anyone wishing to return to their port of origin could do so free of charge. The only stipulation was that they provide their own food. Some



The D.D.D. Camp (or 3 D's Camp) on the Baldwin Peninsula in Kotzebue Sound, August 1898. Hundreds of stampederers lived along this beach as they planned their next effort—launching small boats to reach the Kobuk and other nearby rivers. Bancroft Library, Alaskan Gold Rush Album (2000.23).

erstwhile gold-seekers took one look around and got cold feet. Others experienced two or three weeks of travel on the Kobuk or Selawik rivers and then changed their minds. Perhaps they grew tired of being cold and wet all day long or questioned their ability to survive the winter so far from home. In the end, close to half the stampeders lost their nerve and jumped at the opportunity to go

home. By contrast, Joseph Grinnell's schooner *Penelope* was owned by the California gold-seekers and would remain in Kotzebue Sound for the winter, frozen in the sea ice until spring came again. For the members of the Long Beach and Alaska Mining & Trading Company and around one thousand others, going home would soon become an impossible dream.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *San Francisco Call*, April 24, 1898, 24; *San Francisco Call*, July 19, 1898, 3.
- <sup>2</sup> "Ho! for Kotzebue Sound [advertisement], University of Alaska Fairbanks, Archives, Gold Rush Ephemera Collection; "Alaska Gold Fields!" [advertisement], *San Francisco Call*, January 23, 1898, 3; "Many Called, Few Chosen," *San Francisco Call*, January 20, 1898, 5. What the broadside did not say is that the passengers would be expected, before going prospecting, to assist with building the warehouse and assembling the river steamer *John Reilly*, named for a friend of Cogan's from Newark, New Jersey who invested in his Kotzebue Sound venture.
- <sup>3</sup> *Alaskan* [Sitka], November 20, 1897, 2.
- <sup>4</sup> "Gold Fever Spreading," *San Francisco Call*, November 13, 1897, 5; *Alaskan* [Sitka], November 20, 1897, 2; "Grubstaked a Clergyman," *San Francisco Call*, April 6, 1898, 3; "A New Mining Venture," *San Francisco Call*, January 11, 1898, 6; *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, January 14, 1898, 1.
- <sup>5</sup> "A New Way of Getting a Crew," *San Francisco Call*, March 6, 1898, 15; "Whalers Need Men Badly," *New York Sun*, March 7, 1898, 2.
- <sup>6</sup> "Kotzebue Richer Than Klondike," *San Francisco Call*, March 31, 1898, 1.
- <sup>7</sup> "The Klondike," *Mining and Scientific Press*, April 2, 1898, 374.
- <sup>8</sup> "Alaskan Affairs," *Fall River Evening News*, March 31, 1898, 12.
- <sup>9</sup> "Where King Midas Trod," *Seattle Daily Times*, April 23, 1898, 3; "Going Even to Far Kotzebue Sound," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, June 21, 1898, 25.
- <sup>10</sup> *San Francisco Call Bulletin*, May 21, 1898, 8.
- <sup>11</sup> "To Kotzebue Sound," *Los Angeles Times*, April 6, 1898, 10; "The Penelope Sails," *Los Angeles Herald*, April 7, 1898, 4.
- <sup>12</sup> "Putin Commission," *San Francisco Call*, April 15, 1898, 11.
- <sup>13</sup> "Grief Drove Tallant Mad," *San Francisco Call*, August 26, 1897, 2; "Rarefied Air," *Los Angeles Herald*, August 26, 1897, 3; "He Needed Rest," *San Francisco Call*, August 28, 1897, 3; "Left for Kotzebue's Goldfields," *San Francisco Call*, May 2, 1898, 8.
- <sup>14</sup> "Charles D. Lane," *Sacramento Daily Union*, May 15, 1898, 6; *San Francisco Call Bulletin*, May 16, 1898, 9; "Spirits Led Him on to Affluence," *San Francisco Call*, April 9, 1897, 2; F.B. Millard, "The Utica Gold Mine," *The Idler* (March 1902), 722-724. A biographical sketch of Lane can be found in Edward S. Harrison, *Nome and Seward Peninsula: History, Description, Biographies and Stories* (Seattle: Published by Author, 1905), 197-200.
- <sup>15</sup> "Start for the Kubuck River," *San Francisco Call*, April 28, 1898, 11; "Left for Kotzebue's Goldfields," *San Francisco Call*, May 2, 1898, 8; "Deserted, But Not His 'Wife,'" *San Francisco Call*, May 4, 1898, 12; "Followed Her Lover to the Frozen North," *San Francisco Call*, September 29, 1898, 14.
- <sup>16</sup> Robert L. Dey, "Diary of Trip to Kotzebue Sound, Alaska Per Bark *Alaska*, B. Cogan Captain, April 28, 1898," Dartmouth College Library, Papers of Robert L. Dey (MSS-24).
- <sup>17</sup> James H. Shotwell to his wife Margharete R. Shotwell, July 12, 1898, 4, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections Division (PNW00417). Hereafter called "Shotwell letters."
- <sup>18</sup> Joseph Grinnell, *Gold Hunting in Alaska*, edited by Elizabeth Grinnell (Chicago: David C. Cook Publishing, 1901), 5.
- <sup>19</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 5; Shotwell letters, July 12, 1898, 6.
- <sup>20</sup> Shotwell letters, July 12, 1898, 8. In his August 7, 1898 letter Shotwell wrote, "Among the passengers is a German doctor from Chicago who is also bound for the Kowak; he appears to me to be strangely out of place as he knows nothing of mining or camp life, but he is not the only one. There is a strange assortment of people going north."

<sup>21</sup> “Bound for the Gold Fields,” *San Francisco Call*, February 3, 1898, 5. See also, “In Any Old Ship,” *Plain Dealer*, August 13, 1897, 3 and “Where King Midas Trod,” *Seattle Daily Times*, April 23, 1898, 3.

<sup>22</sup> “Warnings to Klondikers,” *San Francisco Call*, March 26, 1898, 6; “Humanity and Rotten Ships,” *Los Angeles Herald*, May 16, 1898, 10.

<sup>23</sup> “Schooner Jane Gray Goes Down,” *San Francisco Call*, June 2, 1898, 1; “Alaska Schooner Lost,” *New York Times*, June 2, 1898, 7. For more about the sinking of the *Jane Gray* see, Michelle Merritt, *The Jane Gray: The Italian Prince and the Shipwreck That Forever Changed the History of Seattle* (self-published, 2013). For more about Vene Gambell and his family see, “Lost at Sea,” *Sacramento Daily Union*, June 4, 1898, 3. After the sinking of the *Jane Gray*, the village at the eastern end of St. Lawrence Island was renamed Gambell in memory of the missionary-teachers and their infant daughter.

<sup>24</sup> “The Jane Grey Victims,” *New York Times*, June 3, 1898, 1; “Jane Grey Survivors” and “Her Awful Deck Load,” *Seattle Daily Times*, June 6, 1898, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Prince Luigi was born on January 29, 1873 in Madrid during his father’s brief reign as King Amedeo of Spain. The prince’s full name was Luigi Amedeo Giuseppe Maria Ferdinando Francesco di Savoia di Aosta, and he was the Duke of the Abruzzi, a large province east of Rome with a coast on the Adriatic Sea. The prince’s attempt to be the first to the North Pole involved plans to overwinter at Franz Joseph Land in 1899-1900 and to reach the top of the world by dogsled across frozen seas. The prince lost two fingers to frostbite that winter and was not able to join his men who fell short of the pole but beat Fridtjof Nansen’s 1895 record by about twenty-five miles.

<sup>26</sup> “Gold Seekers Come to Grief,” *New York Sun*, July 17, 1898, 10; “Gold Hunters Cast Away,” *New York Times*, July 17, 1898, 21; “Mishaps of Gold Hunters,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 17, 1898, 16.

<sup>27</sup> Shotwell letters, July 12, 1898, 5-6.

<sup>28</sup> “Diary of M.A. Hartnett on Trip to Kotzebue Sound, Alaska, 1898,” 6-7, University of Washington Libraries, Manuscripts & University Archives Division (VF312B).

<sup>29</sup> Hotham Inlet is known locally as Kobuk Lake because it is almost entirely encircled by land and because its salt water is mixed with the fresh water flowing from the Kobuk River. The inlet was named for the lord of the British admiralty Sir Henry Hotham when Captain Frederick W. Beechey of the HMS *Blossom* visited Kotzebue Sound in 1826.

<sup>30</sup> Later a false news account circulated that the ship partially sank in the shallow inlet and that the passengers tore it apart to make rafts for floating the final twenty miles to their destination. The captain refuted the story and threatened to fight the man who spread the rumor. “The Moonlight a Wreck,” *Seattle Daily Times*, August 3, 1898, 3; “Record of Wrecks,” *Los Angeles Herald*, August 3, 1898, 3; “Moonlight Is in Port,” *Seattle Daily Times*, November 7, 1898, 8.

<sup>31</sup> “First Vessel to Reach the Kotzebue Sound,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 3, 1898, 5.

<sup>32</sup> The Quaker missionaries and gold stampedeers did not use the name Baldwin Peninsula. Instead they called the peninsula Cape Blossom, which today refers only to a point on the peninsula’s eastern coast. Cape Blossom was named by British naval officer and geographer Frederick W. Beechey for his ship, the HMS *Blossom*, when he sailed into Kotzebue Sound in 1826 on a mission to chart the coastline of northwestern Alaska. The location was a traditional gathering place for Inupiaq people from King Island, the Diomed Islands, Cape Prince of Wales, and the river systems of Kotzebue Sound. “Something of Kotzebue Sound,” *Seattle Daily Times*, May 28, 1900, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 14.

<sup>34</sup> Shotwell letters, Aug 8, 1898, 6-7.



Gold-seekers aboard the schooner *Pick River* entering Hotham Inlet, 1898. Bancroft Library, Alaskan Gold Rush Album (2000.23).

## Chapter 3: Up the Kobuk River

The stamper encampments taking shape on the Baldwin Peninsula existed, for the most part, as a confederacy of strangers drawn together by a lust for gold. But along the gravel beach passions of a different sort were unfolding. In San Francisco, Charles Baumann, the purveyor of Havana cigars, had slipped aboard Bernard Cogan's *Alaska* to escape the woman with whom he was having an affair. In Seattle, she had pleaded with Captain Joseph Whiteside of the *Northern Light*, but he denied her request for passage to Kotzebue Sound. But three days after the *Northern Light* sailed for Alaska, an investigation of the hold revealed a surprise: she was found "stowed away in a little nest" among the ship's cargo. As a reporter explained, the captain found himself in an impossible situation:

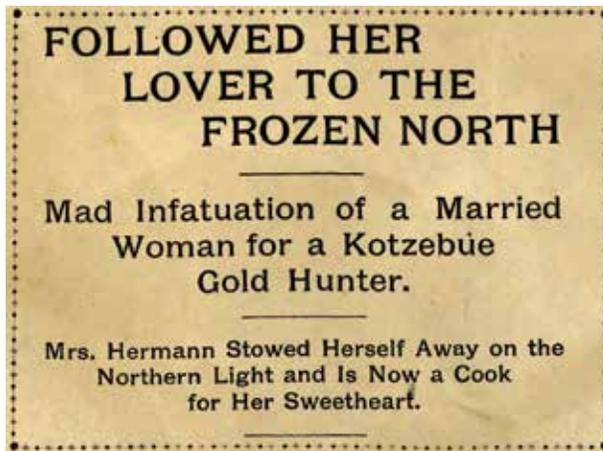
She told Captain Whiteside when brought on deck that she would kill herself if she was not taken along. Once when Baumann tried to discard her she nearly killed him, so she said, and twice she attempted suicide because he would not love her with all his heart and soul. Life held no pleasure for her apart from Charley,

so whether he liked it or not Captain Whiteside had to take her along.<sup>1</sup>

As it happened, Captain Cogan had decided on a stopover for the *Alaska* at St. Lawrence Island in order to build his river steamer and this delay allowed the *Northern Light* time to arrive at Kotzebue Sound ahead of the *Alaska*. As the stamper Robert L. Dey explained, this romantic drama had taken a dangerous turn:

The woman who stowed away on the *Northern Light*, and who swears to marry or kill a certain young man aboard the Bark *Alaska*, is now on shore and anxiously awaiting her spouse with her little gun. Captain Whiteside was going to send her back to San Francisco [aboard the] Revenue Cutter *Bear*, but she wouldn't have it and stole ashore in a whale boat one night at midnight. She is worthy of the man she loves.<sup>2</sup>

An episode that might have resulted in violence seems, however, to have ended peacefully. Observers noted that once Baumann arrived and recovered from his shock, the



One woman's pursuit of a Kotzebue Sound stamper became front-page news. *San Francisco Call*, September 29, 1898.

two lovers reached an accord. By the time the *Northern Light* sailed a month later, she was seen working as a cook in Charles Baumann's mining camp.

Soon after the *Penelope* arrived on the peninsula, Joseph Grinnell took part in a different sort of unexpected encounter. Three members of his mining company—the undertaker Charles Reynolds, the doctor William Coffin, and the group's photographer Clyde Baldwin—were all Quakers from Whittier, California and knew Robert and Carrie Samms from the Friends Church in that city. The men knew the Samms' missionary efforts were underway in Kotzebue Sound and hiked along the peninsula to pay an unannounced visit. As Grinnell explained, "We surprised these missionaries, who have been located at Cape Blossom [on the Baldwin Peninsula] some two years or more, and in that time have seen few fellow-countrymen. C.C. Reynolds and Clyde and Dr. Coffin were old acquaintances and waked them up one day all of a sudden." As the men approached the mission, which Grinnell described as "four frame houses and a hundred tents," they were surprised to see lettuce, radishes, and onions growing in garden boxes tucked against the sunny side of the main building. The Samms,

in turn, were startled to see familiar faces appearing before them in what seemed like the far edge of the world.<sup>3</sup>

Back at camp, Grinnell and his companions began the same work as many of the newly arrived stampedeers—building the steamboats that would take them up the Kobuk River. His group would build the steamer *Helen*, a compact vessel about 18 feet long with a boxy cabin and tiny pilot house. Unlike most other Kotzebue Sound river steamers, the *Helen* was not a paddlewheeler but instead relied on a propeller and was only large enough to carry the company members and a portion of their supplies. Grinnell described the scene,

I am sitting at the camp-table in the dining-tent near the new *Penelope* ship-yards, and the sounds that greet my ears are varied. The incessant pounding gives evidence of vigorous work on our river boat; the hum of the forge and the ring of the anvil where Casey and Stevenson are making fittings for the engine, the wash of the surf close at hand, and last, but not least, the low, irritating, depressing, measly whine of the mosquito . . .<sup>4</sup>

At their location above the Arctic Circle, the stampedeers were experiencing for the first time the legendary Midnight Sun when, in late July, the sun dipped below the horizon a mere four hours each day and even then it was light enough to see clearly. The boat-builders were working in shifts around the clock, and Grinnell had graduated from assistant cook aboard the *Penelope* to full-time chef for his fellow gold-seekers. To keep the men fed he and another cook served four meals daily. One day Grinnell traded ten gingersnap cookies to an Inupiaq man for three salmon, and he made meals from the ducks that he

shot to preserve their skins in the name of science. In his journal Grinnell wrote, “For supper to-night my menu is baked navy beans—Boston baked beans away up here at Kotzebue Sound!—corn bread, apple sauce, fricasseed salmon eggs, fried salmon, duck stew, tea, etc. It will be appreciated to the last crumb by the Arctic circle.”<sup>5</sup>

Although stampedeers wrote little about them, the local Inupiat and travelers from afar were gathering on the peninsula in large numbers, as they did every summer for fishing, trading, and cultural events, and the sudden influx of gold-seekers must have been a surprise that disrupted this traditional gathering. Some Inupiat men were taking jobs as guides and navigators and others began trading indigenous clothing like parkas and mukluks for Western foods like flour, bacon, tea and coffee. The stampedeers soon developed a reputation for offering alcohol in an effort to cheat locals in trade deals and for paying Inupiat women for sex. For his part, Grinnell explained that he was naturally sympathetic to Alaska Natives because he was born on the Kiowa, Comanche and Wichita reservation in Oklahoma and “I learned to love them before I could speak.” Most did not share his perspective and abuses were becoming common. Grinnell wrote,

Many of these gold-hunters that I hear of have already done more harm in a few days than the missionaries can make up for in years. I could write the history in detail, but desist. It will never all be written or told. The natives are worked up to the last point of endurance and will surely kill the whites. Whisky is doing its share of havoc, although a few of the faithful mission Indians are trying to keep the others quiet.

He put his confidence in Sheldon Jackson, who was scheduled to arrive soon, because, Grinnell reasoned, there were no legal authorities to prevent the sale of liquor to the local population and “[Jackson] is the man who will not be afraid to hunt out the rascals who are spoiling the natives.”<sup>6</sup> Grinnell’s comments describe the beginning of profound changes and hardship for the Inupiat of Kotzebue Sound and all of western Alaska.

The challenge now facing the newly arrived stampedeers was transporting themselves and their supplies from the Baldwin Peninsula to the mouth of the Kobuk River or to whatever river they chose to investigate first. This maneuver took multiple trips in a growing fleet of river steamers, sailing sloops, and the wooden skiffs called “whale boats” after the style of launches used by whalers to pursue their prey. Inupiat boatmen also ferried men and supplies in umiaks made with a wood frame and walrus-skin covering. On a map, the body of water they needed to cross—Hotham Inlet—appeared protected from the wind and waves of the open ocean. Looks however were deceiving. In the scramble to reach the Kobuk River, stormy weather and overloaded boats resulted in a startling number of swamped vessels and drownings. James Shotwell wrote in his letters home that “[Hotham] Inlet is a dangerous place; several men have lost their lives there. Some 40 or 50 tons of outfit was lost at one time.”<sup>7</sup> Another account offered an even more alarming death toll:

A boat from the bark *Mermaid*, containing six men, capsized, and the men were lost. A search party was sent out, but all that they recovered was the boat and some of the men’s clothing. Two men from the steamer *Grace Dollar* were making their way up the Kubuck River in a boat when





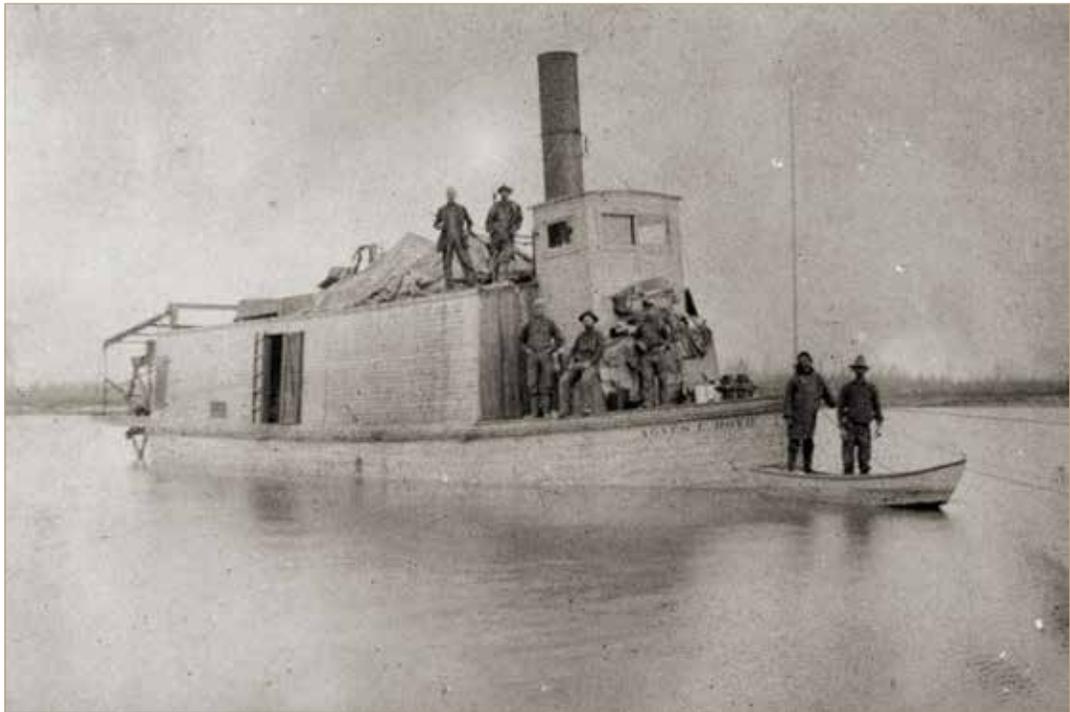
Clockwise from top, preceding page:

Quaker missionaries Carrie Samms, Robert Samms, and Anna Hunnicutt at the warehouse that would be their home for the winter of 1898-99. Wilmington College Archive, Martha E. Hadley Collection.

"Our nearest neighbor mending her net"—A small community of Inupiat gathered around the Quaker mission in its first year. Wilmington College Archive, Martha E. Hadley Collection.

Aooshook, Nahayownook, and their baby at the Quaker mission. Wilmington College Archive, Martha E. Hadley Collection.

The river steamer *Agnes E. Boyd* on the Kobuk River, 1898. Vessels like this one ferried stampedees and their supplies to the camps where they spent the winter. National Park Service, Alaska Regional Curatorial Center, Karlene Leeper Collection (KOVA-73).



a landslide came down and covered the small craft. One of the men escaped by jumping overboard, but the other was buried. One launch was run ashore and wrecked, another sank, and her boilers were pulled out in trying to raise her. Three or four were swamped owing to overloading, and in every instance the loss of the boat was attended with the loss of life.<sup>8</sup>

As the number of these accidents mounted, the wreckage washed up on the beaches of Hotham Inlet. Maurice Hartnett, who came north aboard the *Moonlight*, described salvaging a box that was undamaged by seawater and contained butter, cream, coffee, and spices. The box was labeled with the name of the owner and Hartnett resolved to return the goods, or what remained of them, should he turn up. Meanwhile, Hartnett and

his companions dined on hot biscuits with plenty of butter.<sup>9</sup>

By late July and early August, an astonishing array of vessels were in motion along the Kobuk River, and some stampedees who had been in the area for weeks were coming to the realization that the “gold fields” advertised to them in San Francisco were in fact a vast and bewildering wilderness of rivers, mountains, and tundra. Some had already prospected on the nearby Selawik and Buckland Rivers and returned to the Kobuk with sour news. As Shotwell explained, many were beginning to feel that they had been lied to and that finding gold would be much more difficult than they supposed. “Such a queer lot of boats—some of them make us laugh—all rushing and striving to get to the great gold fields that do not exist,” wrote Shotwell. “Meet many boats every day—same story. No strikes. Nothing. Nothing.”<sup>10</sup> In addition, the crowd gathering along the Kobuk

## Missionaries in Inupiaq Country

In 1885, the Presbyterian minister Sheldon Jackson was appointed Alaska's "General Agent of Education." In this position he developed a plan to establish mission run schools throughout the territory to educate Alaska Natives, teach them Christian values and indoctrinate them into the Christian lifestyle. Within just a few years, Jackson summoned the leaders of various churches—the Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, Moravians, and the Friends, or Quakers—to join the Presbyterians and Congregationalists in dividing up the territory. His strategy was to create "missionary centers" to provide maximum geographical coverage, but spread widely enough to avoid sectarian squabbles. In this way, the Yukon River was ceded to the Episcopalians; the Baptists would hold Kodiak Island and Cook Inlet; the Methodists spread their faith along the Aleutian Chain, and so on.



Carrie Samms plays the harpsichord for a church service on the beach near the Quaker mission founded by her, her husband Robert (at rear), and Anna Hunnicutt who is playing the violin, July 1899. Bancroft Library, Portraits of Joseph Grinnell's Family (1973.44).



Robert and Carrie Samms in their winter parkas while workers assemble the frame for their first home on the Baldwin Peninsula, 1897. Wilmington College Archive, Martha E. Hadley Collection.

On the western and northern coasts of Alaska, religious missions were established at Unalakleet, Wales, Point Hope, and Utqiagvik. But Kotzebue Sound was a gap in the chain filled by the Quaker volunteers Robert and Carrie Samms and Anna Hunnicutt, who held their first worship service on a gravel beach on the Baldwin Peninsula in July of 1897. The following summer, when the gold-seekers arrived, a surprising number were themselves Quakers. The legacy of Sheldon Jackson and missionary work in Alaska is a mixed one of both pride and pain for indigenous people who, in many cases, were forced to abandon their Native belief systems, language, and cultural practices such as dance and art. Today many of the Christian churches from the 19th century endure as integral parts of contemporary village life.



## *William Blood—Stampeder with an Artist's Eye*



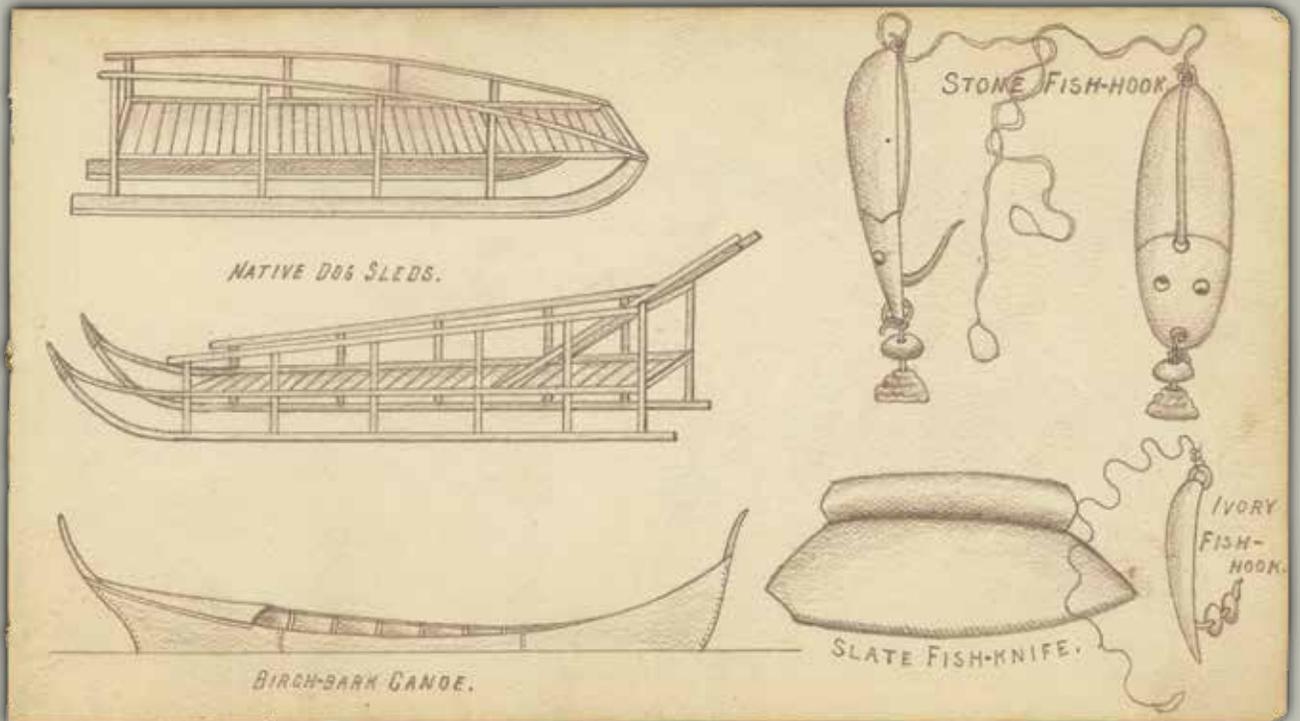
William Blood (left) posing with a friend in Seattle before departing for Kotzebue Sound, 1898. National Park Service, Alaska Regional Curatorial Center, William Blood Collection (KOVA-66).

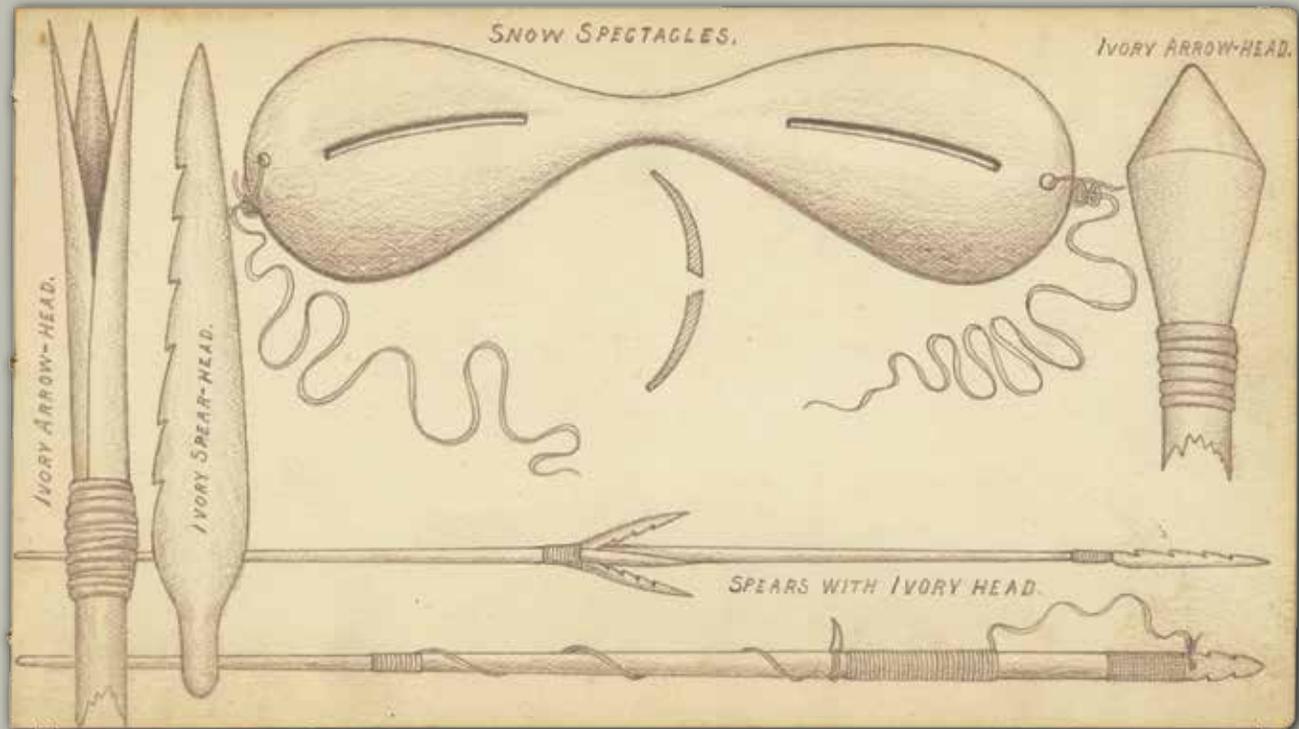
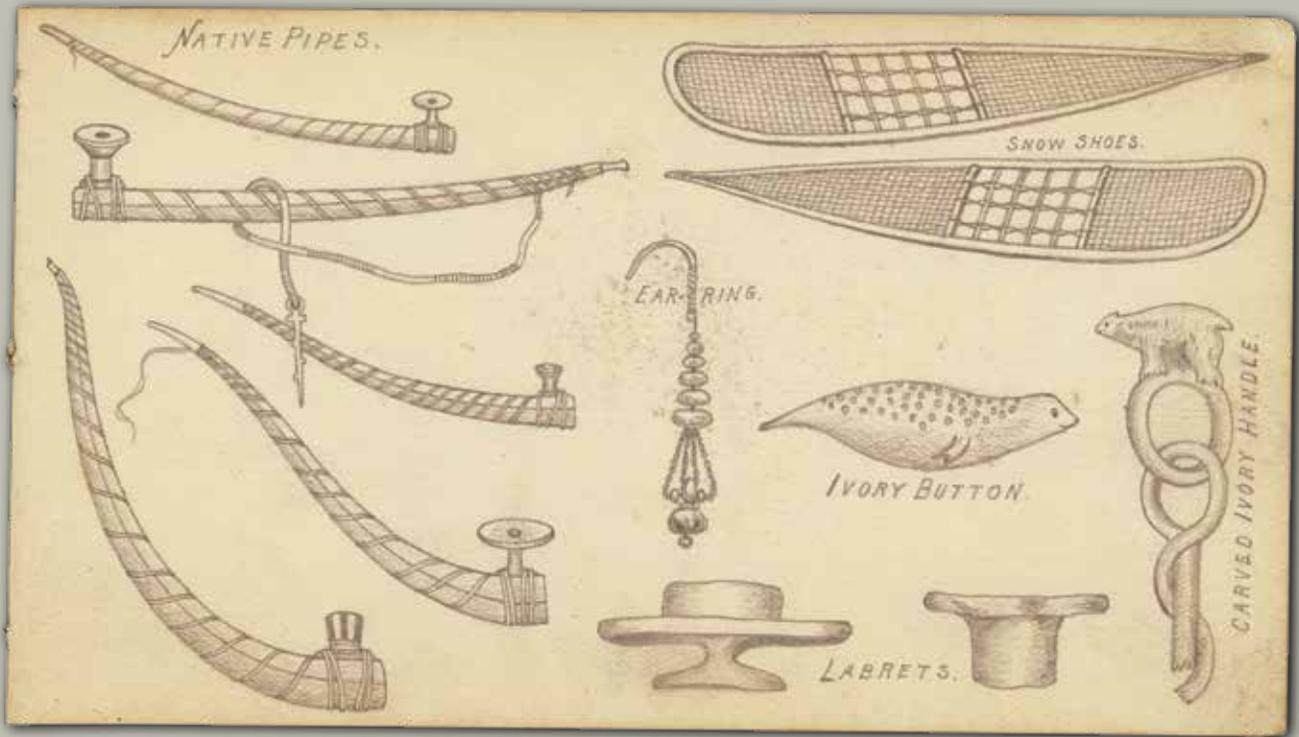
*W*hen he joined the rush to Alaska, William Blood traveled from his home in Nottingham, Ohio to Seattle where he boarded the *George W. Watson*. The schooner passed through the Bering Strait on July 2, 1898, but sea ice prevented it from entering Kotzebue Sound. Three days later, when the crew could finally sail into the protection of the sound, Blood wrote,

We dropped anchor at 9:25 A.M. about 3 miles from shore and commenced at once to get all our boats in the water so as to soak them up. Three canoes loaded with Indians came on board to trade furs, boots, parkas, etc. They were very friendly; we continued to unload the provisions after dinner and kept it up all night until the ship was unloaded; we were the 2nd ship in here—the *Moonlight* beat us by 1 day.

*B*lood was carrying a sketchbook and paid close attention to the trade goods that the Inupiat (who he called "Indians") brought with them. His pencil drawings of footwear, tobacco pipes, fish hooks, and hunting paraphernalia are carefully rendered, illustrating both the utility and artistry of the objects. When Blood returned to Ohio after his Alaska adventures, he found work as a commercial artist at the headquarters of General Electric's lighting division in Cleveland.

William Blood's daughter-in-law, Anna Blood, donated his diary, sketchbook, and photographs to Kobuk Valley National Park. The collection is held at the National Park Service's Alaska Regional Curatorial Center in Anchorage, Alaska.







Inupiaq boatmen transporting stampeders and supplies across Hotham Inlet, 1898. Bancroft Library, Alaskan Gold Rush Album (2000.23).

included some scoundrels who were willing to loot caches of supplies left near the mouth of the river. As Maurice Hartnett explained in his journal, one such incident resulted in a shootout:

We found Gene Graham watching his party's cache and it was lucky for us ours was near his as he had quite an experience. Two men tried to rob our cache and he had a shooting scrap with them, getting a bullet hole through his hat, but neither party getting hurt. The fellows got into their boat and hurried away and Graham emptied his rifle at them as they went.<sup>11</sup>

Depending on one's mode of transport, the process of ferrying supplies upriver could take weeks. The lucky stampeders had their own paddlewheel steamers and could offload two-year's worth of supplies at the very point they wanted to establish a winter camp. The steamers also towed strings of skiffs whose owners paid for the privilege. As Hartnett explained, even pushing upriver with the help of a steamer could be miserable work as they contended with sand bars and low water along the river's upper reaches:

We made about five miles today and managed to go all forenoon without getting wet, something unusual. But

Grinnell and his companions board the *Helen* for their first trip up the Kobuk River, 1898. The small, wood-burning sternwheeler had difficulty navigating against the river's current and at times the men needed to pull the vessel through shallows with tow ropes. National Park Service, Alaska Regional Curatorial Center, Karlene Leeper Collection (KOVA-73).



this afternoon in passing a sand bar we all had to get up to our waists in water. This kind of work is hard and makes a good many men sick of the job. Where we camp tonight two partners split because one refuses to go in the water any more. This all goes to make life on the Kowak so we must take it as it comes.<sup>12</sup>

River travel offered other challenges as well. George and Richard Reeves had journeyed all the way from Indiana and sailed to Alaska aboard the *Jane A. Falkenburg*, but when their party headed out in late July under the direction of a hired guide, he took a wrong turn and led them thirty miles up a Kobuk tributary called Squirrel River. Many river

guides were Inupiaq men, who had lifetimes of experience upon which to draw, but the Reeves brothers had hired James Ralston of San Francisco. This was the same man who allegedly received the "John Ross" letter that shamelessly promoted Kotzebue Sound as a paradise of overnight wealth. The Reeves found that he was incompetent as a guide and next to useless as an interpreter. "He knows as much about the language as one can pick up in an hour," wrote George. Frustration mounted over the loss of valuable time on Squirrel River and the conspicuous lack of any sign of gold, and the brothers' journal mentions a "gun shoved under Ralston's nose." Near the same time a member of their group committed suicide by slashing his wrist with an ax and another suffered internal injuries



"The steamer towing us up the Kowak River"—The view from a skiff pulled behind the steamer *Arctic Bird*, 1898. Albert G. Kingsbury. San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, Albert G. Kingsbury Lantern Slide Collection.



"Being towed up the Kowak River"—The view to the rear of a string of boats towed by the *Arctic Bird* up the Kobuk River, 1898. San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, Albert G. Kingsbury Lantern Slide Collection.

and a broken leg when a stove aboard their steamer exploded. The cause of the explosion was not known.<sup>13</sup>

As the stampeders were beginning to understand, the voyage up the Kobuk River was not the convenient one-day affair that Bernard Cogan described in his advertisements and the river steamers were only able to navigate a portion of the 350-mile river.<sup>14</sup> Many were having a tough time with rain, high water, sand bars, and winds that had a tendency to spin the flat-bottomed steamers sideways in the current. Often the only way to proceed was for men to walk along the riverbank, "lining" their smallest boats with ropes around their waists or shoulders. As Grinnell explained, the work was demoralizing and for some the future looked grim:

Hundreds are toiling up in the rain, towing their loaded skiffs mile after mile along muddy banks. . . . We passed thirty of these parties in one day towing their provisions, while many lost their boats. There must inevitably be great suffering here this winter. Men had not realized what a long winter it will be and are poorly provisioned.<sup>15</sup>

James Shotwell echoed the same after describing a landscape he called "lakes and tundra [with] everlasting ice or frozen ground within a foot or two of the surface." He found berries in abundance and geese and ducks on the lakes, but as he explained, the traveling cross-country was a serious challenge:

When one first gets to the edge of the timber [and] one looks out, it may be as far as the eye can reach on a beautiful meadow-like land. Take a few steps into this apparently level ground—how different it is.

Just simply a collection of knobs; the grass grows on knobs that are from 8 to 10 inches higher than the moss and mud below. In walking you try to keep on top of the knobs [but] few of them will hold you, so you go slipping, sliding, backwards, forwards, right and left, never sure of your footing. When one slips between the knobs one goes in to the knee. A few miles of this kind of walking will tire out the best of them.

Shotwell was describing tussock mounds and concluded that they were "the terror and dread of every footman." In addition to being cold, wet, and fatigued, Shotwell and his fellow stampeders faced mortal danger from collapsing riverbanks. As they advanced, he described places where the river's current undercut "great ice and sand cliffs," some of which rose above their heads one hundred feet or more. As he explained, "The water gradually undermines them [and] thousands of tons cave into the river with a mighty splash and a roar that can be heard for miles. One of these caves, a small one, upset a man's boat; he was drowned before anyone could rescue him."<sup>16</sup>

Shotwell reported that his group prospected as they advanced up the Kobuk, but they also spoke to men who said they had already been to the Kobuk headwaters and came up empty. This unwelcome reality convinced Shotwell and his companions to return to the confluence of the Ambler River where other stampeders were gathering and to begin establishing a winter camp. The leader of his group was Edward S. Ingraham, the man who accompanied Italy's Prince Luigi to the peak of Mount St. Elias and who survived the sinking of the *Jane Gray*. However, Ingraham (who everyone called "the

Major”) had been prospecting elsewhere and had not reunited with the rest of his team. As Shotwell explained,

The Major has not arrived yet, so for days and days in the rain we wade in water or push through willows as tough as hazel brush until at last we are compelled to stop on the account of high water. The current is too swift to row against and the banks are mostly overgrown. We made camp at the mouth of the Ambler River. Many others were camped there; most of them were putting up cabins for winter quarters. Not knowing what better to do we concluded to build a cabin also.

Within a few days, Ingraham did appear aboard the *Kenmoma*, the same steam launch that had saved him and many others when the *Jane Gray* sank. Shotwell and his companions raced down to the landing to meet the prospecting party, but the news they brought was not encouraging. “The Major brings no news from anywhere,” wrote Shotwell. “Men who have been up other rivers report no gold.”<sup>17</sup>

All along the Kobuk River, stamper camps were taking shape, sometimes representing a single mining company or emerging as a diminutive village with a hodgepodge of residents thrown together by circumstance. Photographs of the period show piles of boxes and bundles lining the riverbanks and, at popular locations, dozens of canvas wall tents providing shelter to the new arrivals. Mid-August was a critical moment for the many stampedees whose confidence might have been shaken by their first weeks in Alaska. If they chose to, they still had a chance to return home if they could return to the ship that brought them. If they hesitated, the arrival

of winter would make the decision for them. James Shotwell noted that some of the gold-seekers were women and wrote, “While on the way we have passed several women. They didn’t look to me to be very happy; heard since that some of them turned back.” They were not alone—every day stampedees who had traveled all the way to Kotzebue Sound were changing their minds and returning to vessels preparing for the return voyage to Seattle or San Francisco.<sup>18</sup>

Joseph Grinnell and the other members of the Long Beach and Alaska Mining & Trading Company were resolved to stay even though the steamer *Helen* had difficulty pushing against the river’s current and showed an alarming tendency to swing sideways and drift in the wrong direction. Volunteers took turns standing on the vessel’s bow with a long pole to track the depth of the water and to warn of rocks and sand bars. Once his group recognized how many round-trips would be necessary to ferry their supplies, they voted to halt after about 130 miles and to select a site on the south side of the Kobuk opposite the mouth of the Hunt River. They called their new headquarters Penelope Camp. They also decided, like many other mining companies, to split up, sending eight men farther upriver to augment their chances of finding gold. These eight established a headquarters six miles up a Kobuk tributary called Kogoluktuk River.<sup>19</sup> At Penelope Camp work began immediately as men cut spruce trees for cabin logs and others built scaffolds to begin whipsawing logs to create lumber for doors, window frames, benches, and furniture. As Grinnell explained, within a week they had finished walls for a 25- by 30-foot cabin and by September 7 were ready to move in.

The cabin was much larger and better furnished than most being built on the Kobuk. It had double beds with spring-pole slats, pegs in the walls to hang clothes, bookshelves,

## *A Durable Map for Hard Traveling*



In 1898, the stamper Frank C. Nichols of Fall River, Massachusetts drew this map on cotton cloth, which made it more durable and portable for gold-seeking excursions. Nichols reached Kotzebue Sound aboard the bark *Mermaid* and began his hunt for gold along with nearly two thousand others. His map shows the length of the Kobuk River (which he spells "Koowak") from its mouth to "Lake Car-loog-ah-lock-tah," the large lake in the foothills of the Brooks Range that today is called Walker Lake. Along the way, he locates tributaries like Squirrel River, Ambler River (or Nuck-vuck-to-ark), Pah River, and Ark-o-sherwik River, which is now known as Beaver Creek. Dotted lines indicate winter trails used by the Inupiat and the portages used by gold-seekers and indigenous traders to reach the Koyukuk River to the east. Alaska State Library, Frank C. Nichols Papers (MS13-2-5).

[The map measures 22 inches long and roughly 5 inches wide.]



Men and women, surrounded by supplies, disembark from the steamer *John Reilly* to build their new homes on the Kobuk River, August 30, 1898. Bancroft Library, Alaskan Gold Rush Album (2000.23).



cupboards, and a floor made of whipsawed planks. The moss covering the forest floor served as chinking between the logs, and bedroom carpets were improvised with gunnysacks filled with dry moss. Once construction was nearly done, woodcutting crews were dispatched to harvest firewood to keep the cabin warm. Floyd C. Foote of Penelope Camp reported cutting thirty-five cords.<sup>20</sup> The same was happening up and down the Kobuk in dozens of camps. The stampeder slept in canvas tents while they worked on shelters that would protect them from hostile winter weather. Often the only tools they had were a knife, an axe, a saw, and an auger for placing wooden pegs to reinforce log walls and joints. And not everyone knew how to build a traditional log cabin and instead

ended up with A-frame structures with soil piled to the roofline. Others showed signs of frontier elegance with framed glass windows, doors, and gabled roofs covered in tar-paper. For the most part, the stampeder cabins were dark and drafty and the occupants had to get used to cramped quarters. James Shorwell reported seeing as many as fifty such cabins at Reilly Camp that was named after Bernard Cogan's river steamer the *John Reilly*. This was the largest community of gold-seekers and was located far up the Kobuk near the confluence of the Pick River.<sup>21</sup>

Those stampeder who were not building cabins or cutting firewood were out looking for gold or simply investigating their surroundings. Few had any mining experience and even fewer knew what placer



Stampedeers unload supplies at what became known as Reilly Camp between the present-day communities of Kobuk and Shungnak, August 30, 1898. Bancroft Library, Alaskan Gold Rush Album (2000.23).

gold might look like. Prospecting with a gold pan involved scooping up sand, gravel, and water and swirling the slurry until the rocky material spilled away over the lip of the pan. This process, repeated many times while sitting in a crouched position at the water's edge, was designed to capture the much heavier gold dust, flakes, and nuggets. However, to the untrained eye, dark sand can be mistaken for tiny particles of gold. Flakes of mica or tiny fragments of iron pyrite might also cause premature celebration. Veteran placer miners were aware that deposits of gold dust and nuggets are rarely found on the surface but instead reside deep under stream gravels in a layer on or just above bedrock. Any serious placer mining enterprise also involved thawing because in

many places permafrost locked the sand and gravel in an icy embrace.

Prospecting for gold with a pan was tedious, frustrating work that usually produced nothing more than aching backs and fingers cracked and stiff from hours in cold water. Digging mining shafts down to bedrock however was even worse. The process was called "burning down" because wood fires were used to thaw frozen mud and gravel so that the material could be excavated. The miners could only hope to thaw roughly one foot per day, so weeks could pass before reaching the bedrock level. Even then chances were excellent of coming up empty. For men who had never wielded a pick, a shovel or a gold pan before, the allure quickly faded, particularly as discouraging reports

Stampedeers erect tents at Reilly Camp to protect themselves from fall rains, August 30, 1898. Bancroft Library, Alaskan Gold Rush Album (2000.23).



A mining camp emerges along the bank of the Kobuk River with Bernard Cogan's steamer *John Reilly* in the background, August 30, 1898. Bancroft Library, Alaskan Gold Rush Album (2000.23).





Stampedeers and Inupiaq locals watch as men whipsaw logs into lumber for use in their cabins, 1898. Bancroft Library, Samuel W. Fansher Collection (2015.79).

mounted and the realization set in that there might be no gold to find. As James Shotwell explained in letters to his wife, the grim daily reality allowed for only a flicker of hope: “All report the same; nothing on the Kowak. All reports of rich strikes [or] great finds are all lies. Plenty more rain [and] we plug along over sand bars, through swamps and brush early and late, steadily up river. Can’t turn back, must go on, maybe they overlooked it [and] we may strike it.”<sup>22</sup>

A group of eight stampedeers had the courage and grit to spend a month ascending the most northerly river that empties into Kotzebue Sound—the Noatak—and returned to report plenty of wild berries, waterfowl, and ptarmigan but “no trace of gold worth mentioning.”<sup>23</sup> Others left

their camps on the Kobuk to explore river systems to the south like the Selawik and Buckland, but the results were the same. According to Grinnell and other stampede chroniclers, many gold-seekers appear to have given up quickly and turned to other pursuits to pass the time. Shotwell, for example, spent many days sightseeing and offered this note of pessimism:

While at our upper camp I climbed one of the highest mountains in reach. At the top, what a grand view lay before me—valleys, rivers, lakes, lakes everywhere. A new land that is, new to the sight, most of it no white man had ever even looked upon. A wonderful country



Joseph Grinnell and eight others spent the winter in this log cabin near the mouth of Hunt River. National Park Service, Karlene Leeper Collection (KOVA-73).

for ducks and geese. For man it is a dreary useless waste.<sup>24</sup>

Others did not agree and went on record saying that some people were simply too soft to find gold in the vicinity of Kotzebue Sound. For example, Captain Jones of the *Moonlight*, who remained anchored in the sound for several weeks after dropping off stampedees, thought the region showed real promise and accused others of giving up too easily:

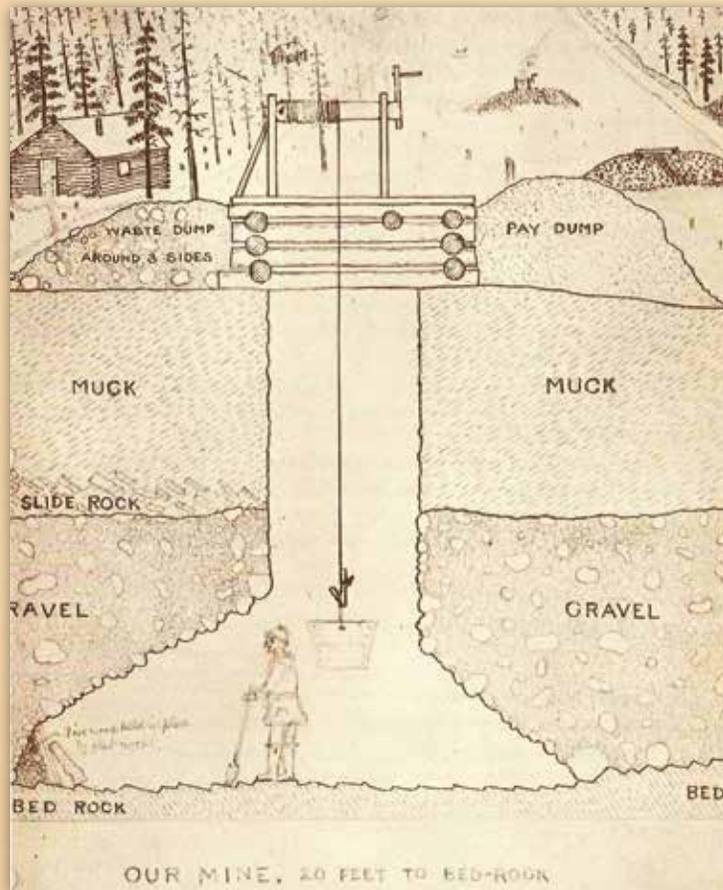
It is a great place, but I suppose it has been given a black eye by the tenderest of tenderfeet that ever went out to dig gold. I've seen crowds land from a boat, go on shore with their outfits, lay around for a day or two and then go back on board, saying 'There is no gold here.' Those who come back with stories of no gold are men who did not try.<sup>25</sup>

## Placer Gold Mining in a Frozen Land

Unlike lode mining, which exploits veins of metal in solid rock, placer mining is the practice of separating heavily eroded gold from sand and gravel—the word *placer* has its origins in Spanish and Catalan meaning a shoal or sand bar. Gold-seekers rushing to the Far North in 1898 hoped to find nuggets lying in plain view. A lucky few did find rich surface deposits or exposed bedrock where gold was lodged in rocky crevices, but most placer mining involved digging—and digging usually required thawing.



Stampederers panning for signs of gold on a Kobuk River tributary called the Mauneluk that flows south out of the Brooks Range. Alaska State Library, Frank C. Nichols Photograph Collection (p256-16).



Permafrost was a serious obstacle to miners who needed to dig many feet down to reach streaks of gold where, over the eons, gravity had deposited them just above bedrock. Excavating frozen ground with hand tools was nearly impossible, so miners developed a technique called “burning down” that involved building bonfires each day and then removing the thawed gravel from the shaft with a winch and bucket. Such work was best done in winter so that the shaft walls and tunnels did not warm, melt, and collapse. In the case of the Kobuk River and elsewhere in the Kotzebue Sound region, signs of gold were so scarce that the only thing most stampederers harvested were blisters and sore muscles.

This diagram illustrates the difficult and dangerous work of drift miners who thawed permafrost with fire and excavated to bedrock before digging horizontally (the “drift”) to collect gold-rich gravels. Drawn by Basil Austin, a Klondiker whose journals were published as *The Diary of a Ninety-Eighter* (J. Cumming, 1968).



Kobuk River stampeders at their newly completed cabin just upriver from Reilly Camp, 1898. Bancroft Library, Alaskan Gold Rush Album (2000.23).

Grinnell echoed the same in his journal and wrote, “Hundreds are going back down the river every day, spreading defeat and failure in their path, and yet they have done no actual prospecting. This is a large country and a year is none too long to hunt; but with many parties the result is that after panning out a little sand the job is thrown up.”<sup>26</sup>

Kotzebue Sound’s reputation as an alternative to the Klondike had risen quickly, and now, as reports began to trickle back from Alaska, that reputation was taking a beating in the press. One of the first to express grave

doubts about the stampede was the prospector Cy Mulkey who sent a letter to the *San Francisco Call* that began, “All the reports of the discovery of gold in Kotzebue Sound are false” and went on to say that Mulkey had spoken to the missionary William T. Lopp who operated a school at Cape Prince of Wales at the tip of the Seward Peninsula. According to Lopp, there were no reliable reports of gold, and furthermore, his own Inupiaq guides scoffed at the idea of gold in the area. Instead, they said, the gold that Bernard Cogan saw “was got from Indians on the



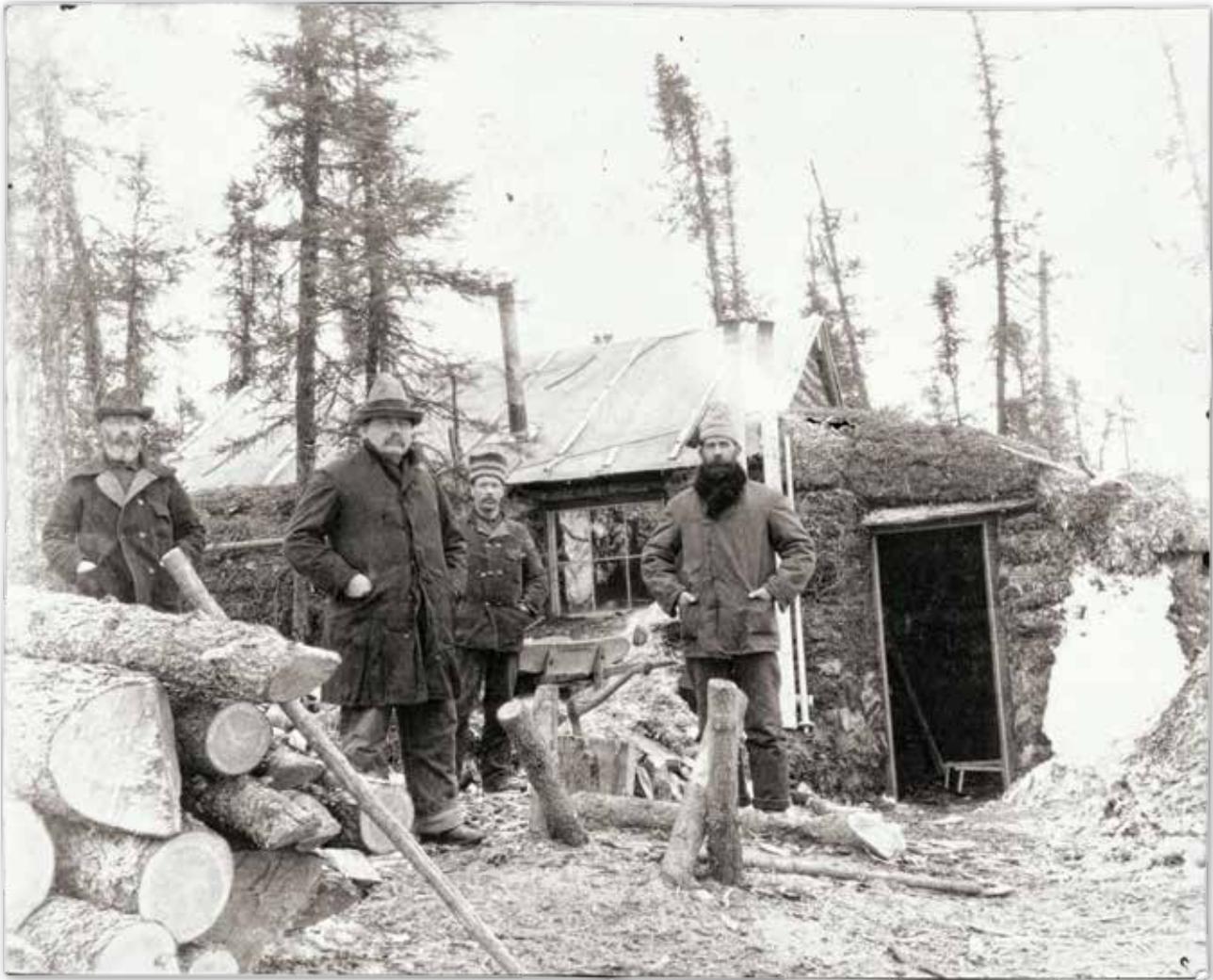
Yukon River.” Mulkey went on. He had also spoken to Cogan, who appeared to be retreating from his earlier claims. “He tells me that he did not get any gold from the Indians, but that an Indian showed him about \$3 worth of gold dust that he claimed to have taken out of a small tributary of the Kowak River,” explained Mulkey before concluding, “My opinion is that there has been no discovery of gold of any importance made on any river emptying into Kotzebue Sound. My advice to friends and acquaintances is to leave this

country alone until there is something more definite known of it.”<sup>27</sup>

Three weeks after Mulkey’s letter, a second letter appeared, this one in the *Boston Globe* and written by Charles Gordon, the son of a prominent Boston businessman. In it Gordon explained that he spent several weeks in the Kotzebue Sound area and then declared,

I am once more in the land of the living, and among civilized people,

The Bray Brothers near Reilly Camp on the Kobuk River, 1898. Bancroft Library, Alaskan Gold Rush Album (2000.23).



Hansen's camp  
upriver from Reilly  
Camp, 1898.  
Bancroft Library,  
Alaskan Gold Rush  
Album (2000.23).

although more than once my hopes were very slim of ever reaching civilization again. Words can't describe the perilous positions that I was in with my fellow prospectors. Twenty-two lives have been sacrificed on Hotham Inlet and the Kowak river, and as many more that will never be heard from. And all this for the beautiful golden nugget that never was, and never will be found in the Kowak river country. It is without doubt the biggest fake that was ever put before the public.

The young man went on to describe instances of "salting," the practice of planting gold in order to fool the unwary into believing that rich deposits are under foot. In this case, Gordon describes "Mr. H" as a schemer in the transportation industry who orchestrated the fraud:

The nugget that was found by him after boring into the ground was put there by himself, as the soil he bored through was nothing but mica, sand and flint pebbles, and it is all con-



trary to nature to find gold in such soil. You can't have any idea how many tricks were played on the poor miners. Small nuggets, also brass filings, and even filings off a \$10 gold piece, have been put in the sand and gravel dug up by themselves to convince the miners that gold existed in the country.

Although Gordon complained bitterly of the petty hoaxes perpetrated upon Kotzebue Sound gold-seekers, he knew pre-

cisely where the lion's share of the blame lay—at Captain Bernard Cogan's doorstep. On this topic he wrote,

It is a lucky thing for Capt. Cogan of the whaler *Alaska* that some of the miners didn't get ahold of him, as they would have shot him on sight. He is the one that started the boom to the North Pole. He claimed to have brought out a miner last winter from the Kowak river with \$45,000 of gold nuggets

The Lutch, Hamilton, and Steltzner cabin at Reilly Camp, 1898. Bancroft Library, Alaskan Gold Rush Album (2000.23).

and was himself going in there gold hunting, and knew just where it was. The result was that a good many followed in his tracks. He is now whaling, after filling his pockets with gold from the men, many of whom spent their last dollar to get into the country and will leave their bones to rot.<sup>28</sup>

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> “Followed Her Lover to the Frozen North,” *San Francisco Call*, September 29, 1898, 14.
- <sup>2</sup> Robert L. Dey, “Diary of Trip to Kotzebue Sound, Alaska Per Bark *Alaska*, B. Cogan Captain, April 28, 1898,” 21, Dartmouth College Library, Papers of Robert L. Dey (MSS-24); “Scores of Lives Imperiled by the Work of a Fiend,” *San Francisco Call*, September 6, 1898, 8.
- <sup>3</sup> Joseph Grinnell, *Gold Hunting in Alaska*, edited by Elizabeth Grinnell (Chicago: David C. Cook Publishing, 1901), 13-14.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, 16.
- <sup>7</sup> James H. Shotwell to his wife Margharete R. Shotwell, November 9, 1898, 3, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections Division (PNW00417). Hereafter called “Shotwell letters.”
- <sup>8</sup> “Followed Her Lover to the Frozen North,” *San Francisco Call*, September 29, 1898, 14. See also, “Hapless Prospectors,” *Los Angeles Herald*, September 30, 1898, 3.
- <sup>9</sup> “Diary of M.A. Hartnett on Trip to Kotzebue Sound, Alaska, 1898,” 15-17, University of Washington Libraries, Manuscripts & University Archives Division (VF312B). Hereafter called “Hartnett diary.”
- <sup>10</sup> Shotwell letters, November 9, 1898, 6.
- <sup>11</sup> Hartnett diary, July 31, 1898, 17.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.
- <sup>13</sup> George I. Reeves, et al., eds., “Alaska: The Gold Rush as Seen by the Reeves Brothers, 1898-1900” (1995), 20-22, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Alaska & Polar Regions Collections & Archives, Reeves Brothers Papers.
- <sup>14</sup> “Grace Dollar’s Dollars,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 17, 1898, 8.
- <sup>15</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 21.
- <sup>16</sup> Shotwell letters, November 9, 1898, 4-5.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.
- <sup>19</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 18-19; “The Alaska Gold Hunters Heard From,” *Los Angeles Herald*, November 10, 1898, 2.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22; “News from Gold-Hunters from Kotzebue Sound,” unattributed newspaper article based on a letter written January 9, 1899, Bancroft Library, Joseph Grinnell Papers.
- <sup>21</sup> Shotwell letters, November 9, 1898, 12.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>23</sup> “Up the Noatak River,” *Aberdeen Herald*, October 20, 1898, 3.
- <sup>24</sup> Shotwell letters, November 9, 1898, 11-12.
- <sup>25</sup> “Moonlight Is in Port,” *Seattle Daily Times*, November 7, 1898, 3.
- <sup>26</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 19.
- <sup>27</sup> “No Gold at Kotzebue Sound,” *San Francisco Call*, August 17, 1898, 10.
- <sup>28</sup> “Seeking for Nuggets,” *Boston Daily Globe*, October 9, 1898, 16.



Joseph Grinnell and Clyde Baldwin pose near Penelope Camp. National Park Service, Alaska Regional Curatorial Center, Karlene Leeper Collection (KOVA-73).

## Chapter 4: Time and Plenty of It

As the stampeders throughout the Kotzebue Sound region were putting finishing touches on their log cabins, temperatures at night began to drop below freezing. Through September, the low-lying tundra plants produced reds, oranges and yellows before transitioning to brown as a dusting of early snow appeared on the mountaintops. On October 15, Joseph Grinnell noted a serious chill in the air and wrote,

Seven degrees above zero this morning. The north wind is blowing and makes one's ears tingle. All standing water is frozen and the Kowak has begun to show patches of ice floating down with the current. The great river is choking. It is being filled with ice which can move but slowly, grinding and crunching and piling up into ridges where opposing fields meet.<sup>1</sup>

Those who had spent time in the Arctic knew how important it was to pull small boats onto land and to position river steamers where they could be protected from the pressure of ice on their hulls. Within a few days the river would be solid enough that lo-

cal Inupiat began chopping holes for placing fishing nets under the ice and soon dog sleds would be in use along this icy highway.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, James Shotwell was visiting the Quaker mission at the end of the Baldwin Peninsula and noted that nearly all of the ships that had delivered stampeders were now gone. He described the slow-motion drama of an ocean succumbing to winter's embrace:

Floating ice has made its appearance, filling up the Sound rapidly. It is a grand sight to see the ice piling up along the beach. The wind and tide drives it with irresistible force high on the beach with a crash and roar; it breaks, folds over and piles up again. Cold continues to grow more severe; there is but little open water to be seen. Ducks and geese have all disappeared.

He also noted, “[we have] no way to get away from here however much one would like to.”<sup>3</sup> As for Joseph Grinnell, he had no desire to leave. Penelope Camp was well supplied with food and the cabin was as warm and well-appointed as any in the area. As soon as he escaped his duties as cook, when the group's leader Charles



"We receive visitors"—Inupiaq locals arrive at Penelope Camp near the mouth of Hunt River, 1898. National Park Service, Alaska Regional Curatorial Center, Karlene Leeper Collection (KOVA-73).





Inupiaq women monitor a fish trap constructed of nets and saplings positioned under the Kobuk River ice, 1899. Bancroft Library, Samuel W. Fansher Collection (2015.79).

Reynolds took over, Grinnell resumed his favorite pastime: preparing scientific specimens. At first his habit of skinning birds at the cabin's main table drove his companions to threaten violence, but soon a friend built him a special table and chair for the work and such passions cooled. Eventually his mind turned to mammals, including the red-backed voles so common in northern Alaska, and he wrote,

I am skinning mice now, little red-backed fellows which swarm in the

woods and around the houses. I set my traps every night. This morning I had a dozen. Wolverines and foxes are common around here, but they are too cute for me and decline to be caught in the steel traps which I keep constantly set for them.

Grinnell was also fascinated by the Inupiaq technique of capturing fish under the ice with nets and with the practice of catching larger fish on lines without hooks. In place of hooks, he explained,



Two men whipsawing lumber on the banks of the Kobuk River, 1899. Bancroft Library, Alaskan Gold Rush Album (2000.23).

they baited a “short, slender stick” that turned sideways in the fish’s stomach when it was swallowed. Meanwhile, Grinnell’s friend Clyde Baldwin used his Kodak box camera to take pictures of interesting moments in the life of the camp, including the Inupiaq women at the fish trap even though they told him to leave because taking pictures would bring bad luck.<sup>4</sup>

Around Penelope Camp, language lessons were the order of the day. Grinnell began compiling an Inupiaq word list and practiced pronunciation each day. A local boy named Lyabukh was taking lessons in English and spending time at the stamper camp. As Grinnell explained, “I am at work upon a small vocabulary of the Eskimo language, and

already have two hundred words. The language has many guttural sounds, and is hard to express with letters, but I am learning it rapidly, and getting the words written as accurately as possible under difficulties.” In addition, Charles Reynolds acted as the group’s preacher and began holding Quaker services every Sunday which included stamperders and some of their Inupiaq neighbors. According to Grinnell, Penelope Camp was becoming a hub of some importance:

[On Sundays] we go out to gather in all the Indians of the village and the white men in the vicinity. Four parties of three white men each have put up winter quarters within a mile



of us, so we have quite a community. Besides these, there are some twenty prospectors six miles below us and five above us. All have built snug winter cabins. About a mile above us, back in the woods, twenty Eskimos have established their village for the winter, and built their dug-outs, or igloos. There is seldom an hour in the day when two or more natives are not in our cabin, and, with a little encouragement, such as C.C. [Reynolds], with his missionary instincts, gives them, they have become very persistent visitors.

Because of the interest in religious meetings and in language lessons, Grinnell, Reynolds, and the rest of their group voted to begin construction of a log-cabin church at a sheltered place in the woods that would also serve as a school-room, lecture-room, and town hall. When it came to teaching English to Inupiaq children in the neighborhood, Grinnell asked rhetorically, “We have seven months before us to occupy in some manner, and why not this?”<sup>5</sup>

The stampeders at Penelope Camp were not alone for long in their evangelical efforts. Having been invited to visit, Robert and Carrie Samms traveled from the Baldwin Peninsula to ascend the Kobuk River and they found a warm reception in most of the new mining camps. As Guy H. Salisbury of Hanson Camp explained, the missionaries joined Sunday services at the new log church and attempted to overcome the language barrier between them and their indigenous parishioners:

Mr. Samms and his wife came up the river this winter to visit the natives, instructing them in English and preaching to them the ‘word

“Our Sitting Room”—The interior of Joseph Grinnell’s cabin at Penelope Camp near the mouth of Hunt River, 1898. The men made birch-sapling chairs and display a dulcimer, a dart board, a banjo, snowshoes, and a wicker fishing creel. National Park Service, Alaska Regional Curatorial Center, Karlene Leeper Collection (KOVA-73).

of God.' At a meeting at Penelope [Camp] we were interestingly entertained by the talking of Mr. and Mrs. Samms who addressed the natives in their language. The natives, led by Mrs. Samms, sang 'Sweet By and By,' 'Gathering in the Sheaves,' and other familiar hymns in a very acceptable manner. Mr. Samms says the natives must coin words to express the love of Christ, and that in the absence of such words he finds it often very difficult to make them understand.

Salisbury was particularly impressed by Carrie Samms' "plucky walk" through 200 miles of ice and snow to reach the half-way point of the Kobuk River. There she stayed several weeks at Penelope Camp while her husband went further upriver in search of Inupiaq settlements and potential converts. Meanwhile, Anna Hunnicutt was in charge of the mission and met and married a young stamper named Edward Foster.<sup>6</sup>

Another way Grinnell and his companions passed the time was with lengthy excursions, and in late October he described a six-day trip up the Hunt River. Before leaving, Grinnell and his travel companion, Clyde Baldwin, promised that they would return with bear, caribou, and other game, but in his journal he confessed that his goals were purely ornithological: "To tell the honest truth, I wanted to get some chickadees and butcher birds." To transport their supplies, they borrowed a sled from an Inupiaq neighbor that had birch runners, a light spruce-bough frame, and lashings of rawhide thong. Every morning before loading the sled, the men tipped it on its side and poured water on the runners to create what Grinnell called an "ice shoe." Because they were traveling on a frozen river, this ice-on-ice scenario allowed them to pull 300 pounds of gear with little ef-

fort. The hard work came when blowing sand covered the river ice and the grit slowed their progress considerably.

For traction on the ice, Grinnell and Baldwin wore "creepers" on their footwear, a conical pointed spike screwed into the boot-sole, three into the heel and four towards the toe. Without these spikes in place, walking on the ice was treacherous. As Grinnell explained, "In traveling, one of us pulled the sled, with the rope over his shoulder, while the other pushed. Across the rear of the sled were two sticks projecting backwards and upwards, with a cross-piece to push against, baby-carriage fashion." This system allowed the pair to hike twenty-five miles in a day and work their way into the southern foothills of the Brooks Range, the imposing mountains that cross 700 miles of northern Alaska. On their first night, Grinnell left camp to chop a hole in the river ice for drinking water and managed to fall through and soak himself when the air temperature was a dangerous zero degrees. After surviving that ordeal, he made the mistake of stepping onto the icy river without his spiked boots. Before he knew it, his feet flew out from under him and his body spiraled away from the shore because the slippery ice slanted toward the river's middle. Feeling like "a mouse in a tin basin," he finally managed to work his way downriver to a place where he could pull himself up with overhanging willow branches.<sup>7</sup>

Although Grinnell pulled his own sled most of the time, stampedeers on the Kobuk River and elsewhere frequently purchased dogs from Inupiaq neighbors to help with cross-country travel. Most of the gold-seekers had experience driving horses or mules but no knowledge at all of working dogs. As William A. Hayne, Jr. explained, using dog teams on a frozen river worked well but traveling through mountains or in soft snow was much more difficult:



These dogs hardly seem like our civilized dogs. They never bark at anyone; in fact, seem to have no bark, only a long-drawn howl. They look more like a wolf than a dog, and when they are hitched up drawing a sled, one must trot all day to keep up, as they never walk; generally a lively fight is going on, and they do tear each other like everything. A general tangle up then occurs—harness

twisted in every imaginable shape. I would rather be without a dog team.<sup>8</sup>

Life above the Arctic Circle, where temperatures rarely rose above zero in the winter, offered many challenges to the uninitiated. One of these was the need to collect water for drinking and washing. As the stampedeers soon found, cutting a hole in river ice with an ax was difficult, but keeping that hole ice-free on a daily basis was even

Winter travel on the Kobuk River, 1899. Bancroft Library, Samuel W. Fansher Collection (2015.79).



Hauling firewood to warm cabins at Penelope Camp, 1899. National Park Service, Alaska Regional Curatorial Center, Karlene Leeper Collection (KOVA-73).

more laborious because it required chopping at fresh ice in the bottom of the hole and dipping it out with a wire ladle. Eventually they settled on a new approach. William K. McKee, a forty-year-old stamperder from Alameda, California, was living near the mouth of the Ambler River when he wrote to his wife about his method of storing water in an array of carefully arranged frozen slabs:

This ice must be cut out of the river and stacked on its banks to be used for water. By stacked I mean each piece must be stood on end and not flat against another piece or else they will freeze together, so when the ice was 8 inches thick we went to work. First we chop a hole large enough

to work a whipsaw. Then saw a cut about 20 feet long and then chop another hole and saw at right angles about 20 feet, then chop another hole and saw again at right angles and parallel to the first cut. . . .

By harvesting these 8-inch slabs and placing them close at hand, the stamperders could crack off a convenient portion of ice to melt for water over the stoves in their cabins.

McKee had a healthy respect for the cold that seemed to dominate his every waking moment. He noted that from his camp alone the cold had killed one stamperder from Oregon and a young man who set out with medicine he planned to deliver to his father



who was prospecting on the Selawik River. The young man never reached his destination. In fact, in McKee's mind the cold adopted its own personality and disembodied voice. He wrote,

This cold is very enticing. It seems to invite one out with a cordial invitation, Do come out and feel me. I am not so bad as painted. Some say I hurt them but I'm not so cold as

that. If you try me and you think, 'pshaw, this ain't very cold' and go out and feel exuberant and feel, 'isn't this glorious,' but wait, the cold thinks, 'Now I have him,' and it wraps you in a cold embrace and there you are . . . trapped.<sup>9</sup>

One of the ways to fight the cold was cutting firewood and many embraced this activity because it could be undertaken close

"Showing our soirée relations"—Joseph Grinnell (left) and Clyde Baldwin pose with two Inupiaq friends after a dinner party in Penelope Camp, 1898. Bancroft Library, Portraits of Joseph Grinnell's Family (1973.44).

to home and because it was easier than venturing out to prospect for gold. As William A. Hayne, Jr. explained:

Wherever there is a cabin it is surprising to see how much timber has been cut—not to build with, but to keep up the constant fire all winter. In winter a fire is kept going both night and day, and even this does not prevent the frost from showing on the inside of the logs. My blankets have often been frozen to the walls where they touched the logs in my bunk.<sup>10</sup>

In the first week of November a remarkable figure appeared in the mining camps on the Kobuk River. He was Carl von Knobelsdorff of Germany and when he arrived at Penelope Camp he was sporting a backpack with a sleeping roll strapped on top, checkered knee-high socks, and a pistol and hunting knife on his belt. A wool cap, sweater, and gloves kept him warm, and on his feet he wore heavy boots equipped with ice skates that buckled into place. He also carried a long pole with a sharp metal tip for propulsion and stability on the frozen surface of the river. Knobelsdorff had recently left the mouth of the Kobuk and was visiting every stamper camp along the river, offering to carry letters on his return trip to the Quaker mission for one dollar a piece. The possibility of a winter mail route was enticing to the homesick stampedees even though their letters might take eight months to reach their families and any mail arriving on the Kobuk was guaranteed to be at least five months old. The stampedees affectionately dubbed the intrepid skating mailman “The Flying Dutchman.”<sup>11</sup>

Knobelsdorff was not the only ice-skater in the area. Many of the stampedees took

advantage of the smooth river ice and frozen lakes to practice their skating skills. Maurice Hartnett noted in his diary that as soon as the Kobuk froze over, his fellow miners fashioned skates out of dulled whipsaw blades, presumably using a hammer, chisel, and file to cut and shape the metal. They then began sprinting from camp to camp. Floyd C. Foote of Penelope Camp wrote, “We see some beautiful sights in the aurora borealis. It sends colored flashes across the sky, and looks like hundreds of searchlights. I think I have traveled nearly eight hundred miles on my skates since I came here.” This means of travel would remain popular until the first snowfall ruined their fun and snowshoeing and dogsledding took over.<sup>12</sup>

Fun and gold prospecting did not mix well, it seems, and Grinnell was unwilling to ignore the obvious—a majority of the gold-seekers were neglecting their mission. Instead of digging holes in frozen ground day after day, they were writing letters, playing cards, visiting neighbors, or spending long hours tucked into their bunks. “I should not be surprised if three-fourths of the people on this river are idle, waiting for the others to dig,” he wrote:

I know that our camp has done practically nothing, as may be seen from the reports which I have made, when I myself was supposed to be one of the prospectors. We are all equally guilty. It seems that people expected to find mines all ready to work, and, since none are visible, sit down and give it up. Our company, as well as many another, is something of a farce when it comes to being a ‘mining company.’ We are doing nothing.

For Grinnell, this departure from their original purpose was not a problem—he had

## *The Flying Dutchman—Carl von Knobelsdorff*

Little is known about Carl von Knobelsdorff except that he was German, he made his living as a mailman, and the Kotzebue Sound stampeders nicknamed him 'The Flying Dutchman.' In 1898, Knobelsdorff took advantage of the frozen Kobuk River to travel on ice skates from camp to camp with a backpack full of mail. He charged \$1 per letter which was pricey, but high postage rates were the norm in the Far North. Joseph Grinnell wrote of Knobelsdorff, "He is a 'rustler,' and will make it pay under any circumstances. He has more grit than all the rest of the men on the Kowak."



Once snow made skating impossible, Knobelsdorff traded his skates for a dog sled and traveled along 300 miles of the Kobuk River. In addition to letters and newspapers he delivered rumors. He was one of the first to suggest crossing the mountains to the east to prospect on the Koyukuk River—and many took his advice. Later he brought news of gold strikes at Nome. On December 10, 1899, he and his partner Charles Campbell traveled nearly 2,000 miles from Nome to the Yukon River and Dawson City. From there they reached Skagway and took a ship to Seattle and San Francisco where Knobelsdorff gave lectures on Nome's golden riches.



Carl von Knobelsdorff, nicknamed the "The Flying Dutchman," was one of the most popular men on the Kobuk River because he traveled hundreds of miles on ice skates, delivering news and personal letters. Bancroft Library, Samuel W. Fansher Collection (2015.79).

always admitted that he was just along for the birds. As long as he was not obligated to go on gold-prospecting trips (or to cook for those who did), he was free to follow his own interests. As he explained, "I am doing exactly what I want to do, and work here is original work of which I shall be glad in time to come. I would be nowhere else in the world than right here now. One cannot take a stroll in the Arctics every day." For an aspiring bird expert, this failed gold-seeking adventure was proving a paradise. "Everything delights me," he wrote,

from the hoar frost on my somewhat scanty though growing beard, to the ice-locked Kowak and its border of

silver-laden spruces. And the ptarmigans! What beautiful birds! Part and parcel in color and endurance of this frozen world. And the winter is not half over. What revelations when spring knocks at the barred doors! How alert the awakening landscape I can as yet only partially realize.<sup>13</sup>

For others, the fact that the winter was nearly half over was a disheartening reality. The Klondike had made men rich and ships carrying millions of dollars in nuggets and dust demonstrated this to the world. And where were they?—half-frozen and idle in a corner of Alaska far from the action. Howev-

Joseph Grinnell and Dr. William Coffin display the results from their ptarmigan hunt, 1899. For Grinnell, hunting birds was both a source of food and an essential part of his ornithological studies. National Park Service, Alaska Regional Curatorial Center, Karlene Leeper Collection (KOVA-73).



er, by mid-November, Carl von Knobelsdorff was on his return trip down the Kobuk and brought exciting news. He had abandoned his skates for a dogsled and was carrying information about another gold stampede occurring on the Koyukuk River, a tributary of the Yukon that emerged from the Brooks Range to the east. As Grinnell explained, “He brings us good news, such news as makes the heart of a gold-hunter in the Arctics palpitate with emotion.” The nearest Koyukuk tributary—the Alatna River—was only about seventy-five miles away, across the mountains from the Kobuk River headwaters. Even though the weather was dangerously cold, many stampedeers were willing to take the risk of crossing the route known today as the Alatna Portage to reach the Koyukuk country. As James Shotwell explained, members of Edward Ingraham’s cadre were keen to begin the journey:

A man just came in from the mouth of the Par [Pah] River on the Kowak bring[ing] letters and report of a rich strike on the Al-lash-ook River [Alatna]. A letter from Packard to the Major states that they are making all haste to cross the portage to the new find hoping to be in time to make locations [that is, stake claims] should the report prove true. The new camp is called Beaver City . . .

In many ways the activity on the Koyukuk River was a mirror image of the Kotzebue Sound stampede. The river system was elaborate and stretched north of the Arctic Circle; many mining syndicates had their own river steamers and cabin villages; and the miners on the Koyukuk were increasingly restless and depressed about their prospects. Beaver City was a small cluster of cabins along the Alatna River and the stampedeers there were

not finding gold in encouraging quantities. This last point, it seems, was not part of Knobelsdorff’s assessment. For his part, Shotwell was wary of the news. Men from his mining company had recently returned from the Buckland River, a similar distance away, with frostbitten cheeks and noses and no gold, and he wrote to his wife, “Personally I have not much faith in the report.”<sup>14</sup>

Given their utter lack of gold discoveries thus far, Grinnell’s fellow Californians who established Upper Penelope Camp on the Kogoluktuk River decided they could not afford to pass up even this slim chance at a gold strike. Six of them left immediately with heavily loaded sleds. At the lower Penelope Camp, Grinnell and his cabinmates prepared sleds for the long journey but waited for news from upriver that the Koyukuk news was authentic. “This news, if true, changes the whole aspect of things,” wrote Grinnell,

We have heretofore had no assurance that gold had been found in the country, and we believed ourselves to be the victims of ‘fake’ stories. What a change of feeling in our camp! Although this report may also be fake, we will enjoy these happy expectations until further developments. One thing is true, and that is that our boys above here have started a party to the head of the Koyukuk, and must have learned something favorable.

Grinnell described how his fellow gold-hunters, intoxicated by the idea of a potential discovery, held a party at which they yelled, danced, played banjo and autoharp, and had “a high old time.” One of the songs they belted out was improvised for the occasion, and Grinnell recorded it in his journal:



*The Flying Dutchman came round the bend,  
 Good-by, old Kowak, good-by;  
 Shouting the news to all the men,  
 Good-by, old Kowak, good-by;  
 Gold is found on the Koyukuk,  
 The people here will be piechuck. (Eskimo for 'gone')  
 The Penelope gang have made a sleigh,  
 And part are now upon the way,  
 If you get there before I do,  
 Stake a claim there for me, too.  
 We'll start right now with spade and shovel,  
 And dig out gold to beat the devil.*

Within a few days more news came from upriver, and the reality of the risks involved began to sink in along with a sober assessment of the chances of success. As Grinnell explained,

Dr. Coffin has little faith in the news. He fears it is an unfounded rumor like many another. Moreover our doctor thinks it is foolhardy and dangerous to start on such a trip, and he is anxious about the boys who have gone. None of them have had any experience with cold weather, being California boys. Casey, in fact, was never outside Los Angeles county, until this trip, and none of the crowd are dressed for severe weather.

Their recent jubilation regarding the Koyukuk faded fast, their comrades on the Koyukuk would not return for weeks, and Grinnell noted, "We sing no more impromptu songs."<sup>15</sup> Dr. James S. Stone of San Francisco had much the same to say about the search for gold in Koyukuk country. One hundred men from his camp at the mouth of the Mauneluk River left heading east and only later did they realize they had fallen victim to yet another hoax:

An expedition towing heavy sleds leaves Upper Penelope Camp for the Koyukuk River, 1899. The steamer *Helen* lies frozen in river ice in the background. National Park Service, Alaska Regional Curatorial Center, Karlene Leeper Collection (KOVA-73).



After sixteen days of hard work, cutting trails and pulling sleds with a load of 250 pounds, with the thermometer from 45 to 60 below zero, these men arrived at Beaver City, a city of seven cabins on the Allashook [Alatna], to find all these reports false. They had been started by two men, one a merchant who had supplies to sell and the other a recorder of claims, who hoped to cause a rush to record claims and sell supplies. All these men have returned and state that the prospects there are even worse than here.<sup>16</sup>

By mid-winter only a few stampeders remained earnest about pursuing gold on Kobuk River tributaries. Those who did might find a bit of dust or some gold flakes—such discoveries were possible throughout the region—but such minute amounts were only temporary diversions. Increasingly, the stampeders simply did not see the point in exhausting themselves for gold that could not fill a thimble. As Grinnell explained,

The gold-hunters up the river are mostly doing nothing, waiting for spring to open so they can go home. A few are sinking shafts in favorable localities, but as yet without success, though there are some 'indications,' whatever these are. It is a great undertaking to dig a hole in frozen ground. Fires are built and kept burning for some time and then removed, and the thawed dirt and gravel taken out. This process is repeated again and again, and the result is dreadfully slow. Frozen ground is tougher than rock to dig in.<sup>17</sup>

Over the course of the winter, the more active stampeders had managed to dig a thousand prospecting holes, or at least this was the estimate from Dr. Stone. He also named the twelve Kobuk River tributaries that had been investigated for gold: the Squirrel, Salmon, Labret (or Tutuksuk), Hunt, Ambler, Shungnak, Cosmos, Pick, Mauneluk, Pah, Reed, and Noatak. But, as Stone explained, in some areas subterranean water could make excavating a shaft and keeping it open exceedingly difficult and even in victory there was defeat:

Frequently the prospect hole is thirty-five feet deep, with no bedrock and no colors. After removing the surface moss and six or seven feet of muck or gravel, you often strike a warm spring of water that immediately fills up the hole and runs over. After this freezes you chop out the ice, fire again to thaw the underlying ground, and after digging a few feet, another spring breaks forth with like results and treatment. Finally, bedrock is reached and in the majority of instances not a single color is found.<sup>18</sup>

When Grinnell was not out on excursions to collect bird specimens he was in camp and frequently interacting with visiting Inupiaq families. He described an occasion when Inupiaq attendance of the Sunday churches had dropped conspicuously and a representative from Penelope Camp went to the nearby village to inquire. It turned out that the villagers were all playing poker (with cards provided by the stampeders) and that the stakes included bullet-lead, rifle cartridges, and tobacco. A game called Crokinole, with similarities to curling or shuffleboard but played on a table-sized circular board, was also proving popular. As Grinnell explained,

A couple of young men got hold of our croconole [sic] board, starting in at ten in the morning and playing without a stop until ten at night. And they can play well, too; better than we can. We found they were playing for tobacco, and that in the house of a half-way missionary outfit who have just completed a chapel for the regeneration of the natives!

Grinnell was also interested in the religious beliefs of the Kobuk River people, although most stampedeers regarded them as nothing more than absurd superstitions. On one occasion a group of six or eight Inupiaq men and one woman were visiting during mealtime and were offered beans and a bowl of gravy prepared with bear grease. After eating for a time, one of the men stopped and demanded if there was any bear meat in the meal. Grinnell explained,

C.C. [Reynolds] said at first there was not, but the Indian tasted it again and looked suspiciously at C.C., who suddenly remembered the bear juice and admitted there was 'a little.' The woman at once threw down her food and the men fell to talking earnestly. They said that bear meat would kill a woman if she ate it, but it was perfectly safe for men.

Grinnell noted that the woman died two weeks later, but he doubted it had anything to do with the bear meat taboo. He also noted an occasion when the women of the village were prohibited from sewing because a man was ill and wrote, "Should they dare to sew it might cause his death."<sup>19</sup>

Ill fortune had come to many indigenous residents of the Kotzebue Sound region since the arrival of the gold-seekers. Mumps,

pneumonia, and other diseases weakened and killed an increasing number of local people. However, there was little evidence of fear or mistrust on the part of the Inupiat as their lives became interwoven with those of the newcomers. The stampedeers at Penelope Camp, and one assumes at other mining camps, were visited by their Inupiaq neighbors on an almost daily basis. On one occasion, Charles Reynolds received a gift from a local woman that caused a minor sensation in Penelope Camp. As Grinnell explained, "An old Eskimo woman from the village brought C.C. a pail of what she considered a rare delicacy, a gift expressive of her motherly consideration. It was a concoction of wild cranberries and seal oil." Reynolds baked the mixture into a pie, as the stampedeers were accustomed to eating pies nearly every day. Grinnell had learned to enjoy "Eskimo ice cream" in Sitka where he ate cranberries in oil, but others in the cabin were unsure about the smell of the seal oil. "We ate every bit of it—that is, three of us did; the rest wouldn't touch it," explained Grinnell.

On another day, after fresh snow fell, Grinnell and several Inupiaq children began a lively snowball fight. Soon two young women—Kalhak and Aggi-chuck—joined in. Grinnell wrote, "[They] did not hesitate to give us a return snowball or a face full of the same. They were strong, too, and several times I found myself sprawling on the ice and covered in snow, to the great amusement of everyone." By spending time with his Inupiaq neighbors, Grinnell began to relate to them on a personal level, in spite of cultural differences, and to appreciate their *joie de vie*. He wrote, "After all that may be said of this strange people, they derive a sort of very human satisfaction from their cold and narrow life, and I shall always think of them as finding some happiness in the long winter along with the aurora and the moonlight."<sup>20</sup>



Church-goers pose after Sunday worship at Penelope Camp, 1899. The weekly services were attended by local Inupiaq families and often included concerts with the autoharp, violin, clarinet, and banjo. National Park Service, Alaska Regional Curatorial Center, Karlene Leeper Collection (KOVA-73).





Stamperders with two Inupiaq neighbors. National Park Service, Alaska Regional Curatorial Center, Karlene Leeper Collection (KOVA-73).

Keeping one's spirits up was becoming increasingly difficult for many in the gold camps. The darkness and a yearning to see loved ones weighed heavily on stamperders like James Shotwell who wrote about the increasing seasonal darkness, "The sun sets a little before three. He will cut his visits shorter and shorter until within less than a month and a half he will just barely appear above the horizon for an hour or two in the 24." For Shotwell, the howls of sled dogs echoing through the forest accentuated his emotional response to the darkness and to the

idea of being away from his family. In a letter he wrote,

It is Sunday, am thinking of you dear, wondering how you are all getting along. How I would like to hear from you. It makes me so lonesome when I think it will be 3 or 4 months yet before your letters can reach me. There has been no word received by anyone from the outside world since arriving here. Would not mind the lack of other news if I knew that all is well at home.<sup>21</sup>

Both Joseph Grinnell and Maurice Hartnett wrote about the dances and musical performances held in cabins as a means of keeping morale high. As Grinnell explained, “This afternoon we had a regular concert. The violin, autoharp and banjo make fine harmony in this noiseless atmosphere, and we were soon expressing our feelings in jumping and dancing. . . . and it was no dull time in the Penelope Camp.”<sup>22</sup>

In order to keep cabin fever at bay, they also founded what they called the Literary Society, which involved weekly guest speakers and encouraged debate on various topics. The first lecturer in Penelope Camp was Guy Salisbury who spoke on the topic of “The Practical Value of Art.” As the weeks passed, the Literary Society also sponsored lectures on “The Art of Printing,” “Reminiscences of an Undertaker” (by Charles Reynolds, of course), “The Hawaiian Islands,” and “On the Eye” by a medical doctor named Charles Gleaves. There was a lecture on the spiritualist notions of the Theosophists and one on a more practical matter—“How to Care for a Frost Bite.” Grinnell’s first lecture was called “What Birds Eat,” which he predicted would be popular given that his companions were obsessed with eating. “Butter Making and Creamery Methods” and “Bacteria Which Assist in the Making of Cheese and Butter” also held the crowd’s attention. In true Progressive-era style, the group also debated whether slums could be eradicated and the merits of capital punishment. Grinnell reported that singing was also a part of the Society’s meetings. A.J. Casey sang two comic songs—*The Irish Jubilee* and *Put Me Off at Buffalo*—and C.C. Miller sang *Just Behind the Times* and *The Queen’s Hussars*.<sup>23</sup>

When Thanksgiving arrived the stampedeers brought out their best foods. On that special morning, nine members of Penelope Camp assembled on the ice in front of their

camp and were marched three miles downstream to the Hanson Camp by Harry Reynolds, who was elected captain for the occasion and wore a red, white, and blue streamer over his shoulder. “We were all dressed exactly alike in our brown Mackinaw suits, seal-skin muckluks and hoods,” wrote Grinnell. When the parade of partiers arrived at the first cabin they lined up and sang *Marching Through Georgia* and other songs. Their hosts had written the menu for the evening on birch-bark and decorated it with a sketch of a typical stampeder cabin. As they sat down to eat, each man signed the back side of the menu. Grinnell recorded in his journal the scope of the holiday spread—split pea soup, wafers, roast ptarmigan, jelly, turkey pot pie, sweet potato, baked potato, sweet corn, sago pudding, mince pie, jelly tarts, olives, pickles, coffee, cocoa—and he noted that the feasting was so enthusiastic that the revelers needed to rest for two hours on bunks before they were revived enough for speeches, jokes, and singing into the evening. Finally he declared it “the most gratifying Thanksgiving, as far as the gastronomic and social celebrations are considered, that I have experienced.”<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, James Shotwell was visiting at the Quaker mission and described an equally pleasant party in the company of the Samms and their guests. He mentioned a husband and wife named Calderwood who came to Kotzebue Sound aboard the *Alaska* and others present for the festivities:

The missionary people gave an entertainment—all were there. In speaking of the ladies in camp [I] forgot to mention a Mrs. Calderwood, she was there dressed in furs from head to feet. Most of the men were dressed in reindeer skin parkeys and seal skin trousers. The Major [Edward S. Ingraham] told in a very entertaining

way of his trip to Mt. St. Elias and read an original poem of our flag which was enthusiastically received. Songs were sung. Chocolate and cake was passed around, then ice cream and walnuts.<sup>25</sup>

Carrie Samms, the host of the evening, told Shotwell that he should describe in his letter home “their great ice cream freezer.” As he explained, “You see all they have to do is to mix the things for the cream, put it out doors and stir it once and a while. The result is a beautifully frozen cream.”<sup>26</sup>

Through the long winter months, the lives of the Inupiat locals and those of the stamperders were growing increasingly intertwined. In addition to making social visits and attending Sunday church services, the Inupiat on the Kobuk and elsewhere sold stamperders winter clothing, dog sleds, snowshoes, and foods like fish and caribou meat. The stamperders offered Western goods including cotton clothing, sewing needles and thread, and rifle cartridges as well as the staples of the stamperder diet that appealed to the Inupiat: flour, bacon, and beans. In early December, a more intimate exchange occurred at Penelope Camp between the Californians and the family of an Inupiat shaman who the stamperders called Indian Charley. Grinnell described hearing a frightening moan coming from outside his cabin and soon discovered the source—Charley was “groaning and sobbing” at the door and was accompanied by family members in a similar state of distress.

Grinnell soon learned that one of Charley’s two wives had died at their camp about four miles away and that one of his daughters had also succumbed to exposure. Because of taboos about remaining in a dwelling after a death, the whole family had moved out and was exposed to the cold.<sup>27</sup> Charley was

suffering from a serious case of pneumonia and was asking for help. Grinnell wrote, “Of course we warmed and fed all of them, and the doctor attended upon Charley, who was too sick to object to another medicine man’s treatment.” The Californians stoked the fireplace in the cabin they used as a church and transformed it into an improvised hospital. They watched over Charley, who coughed violently throughout the night, by placing a hot water bottle on his chest and feeding him ptarmigan broth with broken bits of crackers floating in it. By morning Charley had begun to recover and Grinnell speculated about how many lives might be saved if trained nurses, linked to a mission, were available on the Kobuk River.

Next the stamperders decided they should retrieve the body of the child from Charley’s home, an act which launched an awkward cross-cultural exchange. Because back in California Charles Reynolds was a professional undertaker, he leapt into action: “As if by instinct he scented a resurrection of his neglected business, and it was with little difficulty that he persuaded Charley to let him give it [the child] a Christian burial.” However, when they went to investigate, they found that villagers had already performed burial ceremonies and that the child’s body was resting on a traditional Inupiat grave scaffold. Grinnell was familiar with Inupiat funeral practices because he had observed them some months earlier when a man died of pneumonia. As he explained,

They had taken the dead man and all his personal belongings over to the bank of the river opposite the village, to a little knoll, where they built a platform on some poles leaned against each other for support. The body was wrapped in tent cloth and laid on this platform, which was

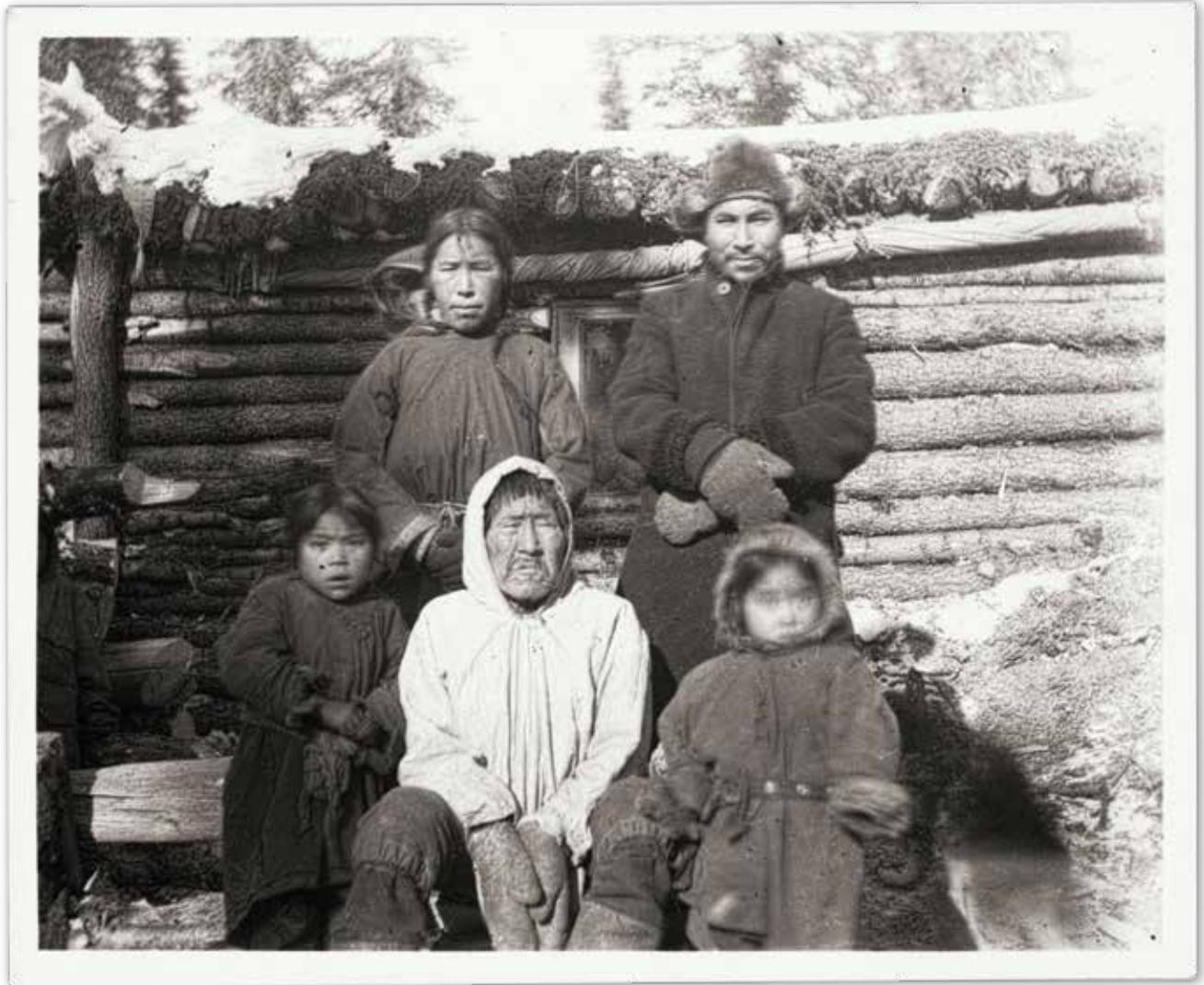
about five feet above the ground—as high as the men could conveniently reach. After this the whole was firmly lashed together with walrus thong, so the winds and the dogs cannot tear it down.

At the base of the platform, Grinnell noted, were placed “two nice reindeer skins, his clothes, mittens, muckluks, handkerchief, tin cup, etc.” To Grinnell, the abandonment

of the man’s belongings seemed like a terrible waste, given that the reindeer hides, in particular, were sorely needed by the man’s family. However, he noted that the custom was “no worse than what occurs among Christians, when all available and unavailable funds are used to defray the expenses of an ostentatious funeral, leaving the family in destitution.”<sup>28</sup>

In this case, Reynolds would not be deterred. Because Indian Charley had given permission for a Christian funeral service

Indian Charley (rear right), his wife, father, and children, 1899. Bancroft Library, Portraits of Joseph Grinnell’s Family (1973.44).



and burial, Reynolds and others took the child's body down from its resting place and orchestrated their own ceremony. As Grinnell explained, "They made a coffin of boards, sawed at our mill, and brought the corpse down to Penelope Camp. [Joseph] Jury as coroner and C.C. [Reynolds] as funeral director. The hearse was a sled and the black horses a couple of dogs." The stampedeers managed to dig a grave in the frozen ground, and then lined up, along with Charley's young children, to form the funeral cortege. A photograph by Clyde Baldwin on the day shows a line of mourners shuffling in the snow. Reynolds suggested, in lieu of flowers, that each person as they passed the grave toss in a bough harvested from a nearby spruce tree. Charley was still too weak to attend the funeral service, but his wife came and watched the proceedings. As Grinnell noted, "She objected to nothing in any way when told that was the way white men buried their dead." Even so, she insisted that before the grave was filled in that she be allowed to place porcelain plates and tea cups and a 25-pound sack of flour in the hole next to the coffin.

After Charley's wife placed her spruce bough in the grave of her child, the ceremony came to a close, the crowd dispersed, and the coffin was covered with earth. Grinnell noted that except for Charley's wife and surviving children "not a single Eskimo attended" even though they were especially asked to come. And after it was over, Grinnell and Reynolds perpetrated an act of profound callousness. They were uncomfortable with the idea that so much "good flour" would be buried with the coffin and, in their minds, would go to waste when the family was in danger of starvation. What unfolded was a clear case of grave robbery and deception. "We went out as if for a stroll, as was our frequent custom," explained Grinnell,

And dug into the grave, removing the buried sack of flour. We very carefully filled in the grave and left all as it had been before. The snow which was falling at the time soon covered our footprints . . . and no Eskimo will ever suspect our subtle deed. We put the flour into a new clean sack and presented it to Charley as a mutual gift. This was Kowak philanthropy, though, if the natives had found us out, we might have had to suffer. The doctor and I congratulated ourselves on doing a real good deed in a naughty world.<sup>29</sup>

Weeks later, when Charley had fully recovered, he visited his child's grave and began cutting the brush and trees from the area, explaining that he did this so that Kobuk River people might see his little girl's grave. From the downed trees he fashioned poles and placed them in the style of a teepee over the grave "so the dogs and wolves cannot dig in." He left several of the taller trees around the grave after climbing to their tops and trimming the branches as he came down. He then fastened flags made from canvas, handkerchiefs, and food sacks to the treetops. Grinnell and others admonished him, explaining that white people do not put flags over their graves, but he insisted that he wanted the location to be conspicuous so that every traveler along the river would notice. In the end, Reynolds, the erstwhile undertaker and funeral director, and the group's photographer Clyde Baldwin contributed to the effort by fashioning a weather-vane with four-foot blades and a tailfin to help it turn into the wind. "It was well made, and took Clyde two whole days to finish," wrote Grinnell. "Charley was very much pleased with it, and it was promptly lashed to the top of the tallest tree, whence resound its mournful creaks whenever the wind blows."<sup>30</sup>



During an Arctic winter, when darkness cloaks the land and cold convinces people to remain indoors, some of the Kobuk River stampedeers retreated into themselves while others celebrated. As a natural optimist, Grinnell found his surroundings endlessly diverting, and when he was not studying books of science and philosophy he was outside appreciating what still seemed an alien atmosphere. For example, he found that as temperatures dropped, the ice on the Kobuk cracked and groaned and the snow squeaked

under his feet. “At one place when I stepped off from a drift of packed snow on to the bare ice,” he wrote,

There came a series of thundering reports like cannon shots, and then a succession of sharp reports and creaks and other awful sounds, that finally died away into the dead silence of Arctic darkness. . . . Sometimes a faint crack will start others like it all around, and these in turn

Indian Charley's elaborate grave markings at the burial site of his child, 1899. Bancroft Library, Portraits of Joseph Grinnell's Family (1973.44).

will give rise to a rapid fusillade extended hundreds of yards up and down the river. And there are the crunch and crackle of the dry snow under one's muckluks, emitting various modulations of sound, from the sharp bark of a dog to the squeak of a mouse. . . . Oh, it is all so enjoyable and fascinating to me!<sup>31</sup>

William A. Hayne, Jr., wrote to his hometown Santa Barbara newspaper about the wonder he felt standing outside his cabin in the dark with the Aurora Borealis dancing overhead. At his camp near the mouth of the Pick River he wrote,

Its magical beauty is something wonderful. When night covers the snowclad earth and the stars glimmer in the heavens, you suddenly see a broad and clear bow of light span the horizon. This bow sometimes remains for several hours, waving to and fro, and then suddenly sends forth streams of light. These brilliant waves are constantly changing their position. The gorgeous lights are red, green and yellow. It is not often that the aurora sends forth these beautiful colors. Generally all that can be seen is a silvery light, very beautiful, it is true. We have always noticed that when we see the aurora it is a sign of colder weather.<sup>32</sup>

On Christmas eve at Penelope Camp, stampedes and their Inupiat neighbors gathered for what Grinnell called "a big feed" and afterward they stood outside admiring a well-adorned Christmas tree and "the venerable Santa Claus" while participants contributed toys and treats for the children. Grinnell de-

scribed the scene that included twenty-eight Inupiat and thirty-three stampedes:

There were dolls, tops, whistles, jumping-jacks, cooky people [gingerbread men], nuts, candy, etc. It would take a whole note book to describe this part of the Christmas festivities on the Kowak—how the old people awkwardly tried to use knives and forks in eating, and how Santa Claus was greeted, and the wooden dolls, and all the rest. . . . After the tree the natives danced, the girls in a graceful manner, and the boys representing fights or something of the kind, all while being accompanied by a beating of tin cans, stamping and monotonous singing.

Guy Salisbury and his companions from Hanson Camp were also on hand for the preparations, and he described the improvised factory they created that to the casual observer must have resembled another Far North workshop. As he explained,

We, the 'San Jose Crew,' assisted in many ways. A. Normandin made a wood lathe, of very unique design, using the grindstone for a drive wheel, and Jack Messing as 'motor;' the tools were forged out of old files by Normandin, who also did all of the turning, turning out of dry spruce doll bodies and tops to adorn the tree. He also turned out some very neat cuts from birch, three inches long by one and a half through, leaving about one and a half inches of the birch bark, a very pretty memento. These were given to each person at the table on Christmas Day. . . . Joe Jury represented



Christmas table settings in Penelope Camp, 1898. The stampedeers and Inupiaq guests had a traditional American celebration with a Santa Claus, decorated tree, and toys for the children. Bancroft Library, Samuel W. Fansher Collection (2015.79).

Santa Claus. He gave a little bag of nuts and candy to each native present, besides a present from off the tree. Many gifts were useful, boxes, dolls, etc.<sup>33</sup>

The following day, after most of the guests had departed, Reynolds stayed up the entire night “cooking and compounding” to prepare another holiday meal. A holiday table was set once again and guests arrived from the neighboring camp. As Grinnell explained,

The ten Hanson boys and Mr. Van Dyke dined with us. The table was twenty feet long, covered with a snow-white cloth, and lighted by

two candelabra of eight candles each. These beautiful articles of use and ornament were made by Clyde [Baldwin] from a many branched birch, and the effect in lighting our large cabin was brilliant. The menu card was gotten up by [Thomas J.] Rivers. It was a sketch of the landscape around our cabin artistically done in India ink on thin leaves of birch bark, and would have graced any table in New York.<sup>34</sup>

For the stampedeers in the Kotzebue Sound region, holiday festivities were but a brief distraction from what continued to be a profoundly disappointing reality—the search for gold had turned up nothing. They were

aware that across the mountains to the east gold-seekers were investigating the Koyukuk, but no solid evidence of discoveries had come from that direction either. Likewise, the prospectors on the Buckland and Selawik had found nothing. There were rumors of gold on the southern coast of the Seward Peninsula at Golovnin Bay, but that was far away and most doubted the authenticity of the reports. In a letter home, a resident of Marion Camp named William A. Walker emphasized this obvious and verifiable lack of gold:

But, Tyre, I want to tell you and I want you to publish it as much as possible so that any and all who may have intention of coming into this country will do so with the truth ringing in their ears, and that is up to this date there has never been one-quarter of an ounce of gold taken out of this country. When I say this country, I mean the Koowak, Noatak, the Selawik rivers and their tributaries.<sup>35</sup>

In spite of widespread dismay and frustration, some stamperders still saw tantalizing possibility in distant northern rivers. James Shotwell was one of those determined to investigate rumors of gold on the Noatak River, which flowed out of the Brooks Range and curved southward to empty into Kotzebue Sound. After starting out on December 10, he faced weeks of hard travel and wrote in a letter to his wife, “[I] have just returned from a prospecting trip so full of hardships and suffering from the cold, it is hard to describe it. For a month we did not see the sun.” With dog teams and Inupiaq guides, they had pushed up the river, stopping at times to begin “burning down” to bedrock. Along the way, Shotwell explained, the men needed to wear three or four pairs of socks as well as

skin mukluks (he called them “moccasins”) and that this footwear offered no support for his injured ankle, which, he said, “pained me dreadfully.” Shotwell’s letters offer a rare glimpse into the daily lives of prospectors at the northern limits of gold rush activity in Alaska:

For days and days we toiled up stream that was all ice, many times after getting up into the mountains we had to drag our sleds for miles over gravel bars. We had a tent and stove when night came on (there was daylight although the sun was out of sight). We would pitch our tent then take watch and watch all night to keep the fire going, it was too cold to sleep without. We prospected the creeks and gulches, many of which looked very promising, built fires to thaw down to bedrock but all for nothing. We found no gold in all the trip.

During the Noatak excursion, frostbite was common and Shotwell explained, “we only laid by one day on account of the cold.” Otherwise they kept moving. He also offered snippets of conversation between the gold-seekers as they trudged through a frozen landscape with some members pulling the sleds with ropes to help the dogs in harness:

As we traveled along our conversation would be something like this, ‘Erens, your nose is frozen.’ ‘Clare, your cheek is turning white, better rub it with snow at once to take the frost out.’ ‘Hi there Gay, your nose and cheek is frozen.’ ‘Hello there Shotwell, the end of your nose is all white.’ Another would sing out ‘My feet are freezing,’ then he would let



Travel on the frozen Kobuk River would have been impossible without strong backs and “ice creepers” installed in the soles of the stampedeers’ boots. Bancroft Library, Samuel W. Fansher Collection (2015.79).

go the tow line, run around up and down like a dog that has lost his master, stamping his feet meanwhile on the ice to bring back the circulation. So it would go on, day after day.<sup>36</sup>

One member of their party fell ill with what the group later diagnosed as scurvy. They brought him back to his camp in a semi-conscious state, and Shotwell wrote, “He could not walk and came near dying one day on the way. He has been bed sick ever since [and] is better but not out of danger.” He also noted that elsewhere in the region two men died from freezing to death.<sup>37</sup>

For most of the stampedeers, frostbite was a threat they had never faced before and

many theories circulated about the best ways to treat a frozen body part. Guy Salisbury found the topic so interesting that he wrote in detail to his family, including the need to apply an oil-based liniment, or in its absence, kerosene, which he referred to as “coal oil.” As he explained,

The part that is frozen—it will look white, there will be no mistake about it—cover it up and keep as warm as possible to prevent the frost from spreading; hasten to a cabin, get some snow and rub the frozen part briskly; and friction will assist in drawing out and dissolving the frost. Then rub patiently and briskly the



A dog team leaving a mining company warehouse on the lower section of the Kobuk River. National Park Service, Alaska Regional Curatorial Center, Karlene Leeper Collection (KOVA-73).

frozen part with liniment; if no liniment is at hand use coal oil. Keep the part warm—not hot; the object being to restore circulation to the frozen parts as quickly as possible.

However, if these preliminary efforts failed, Salisbury explained, the issue could quickly become a matter of life and death:

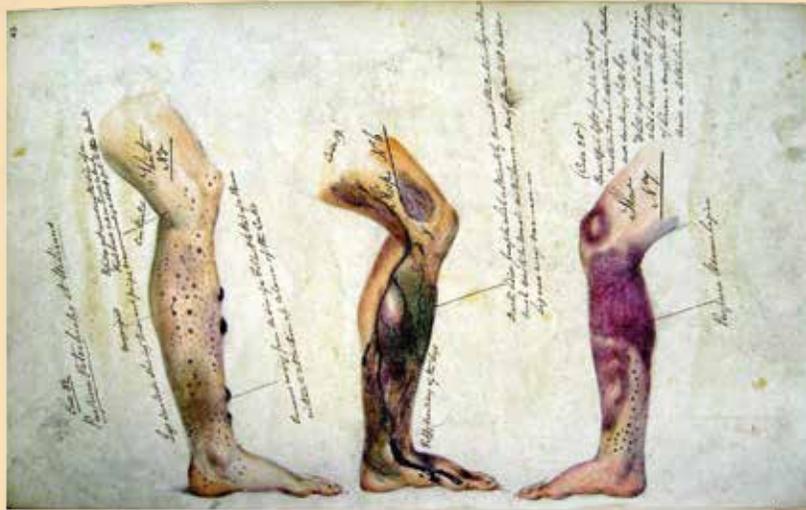
Should the part be frozen past recovery, and the line of demarcation between the frozen part and the

healthy part commence to form, be sure and send for a doctor, for the dead part must be taken off. Should you be out of reach of a doctor some one must perform the operation; it may mean death in either event, but the chances are much in favor of the patient with the dead part severed.<sup>38</sup>

When December 31, 1898 finally arrived, Maurice Hartnett reported that his camp “celebrated the arrival of the New Year in true mining camp style” by going outside

## The Miner's Plague—Scurvy

When purchasing provisions for their trip to Alaska, few stampedeers understood the threat of scurvy. To prevent the disease, the diet must contain vitamin C (ascorbic acid) such as that found in citrus fruit. A miner's daily meal of favored camp foods—bacon, beans, and bread—contained none. Scurvy first presented itself with symptoms such as listlessness, irritability, and aches and pains. Minor wounds healed slowly and eventually hemorrhages appeared around hair follicles of the legs. These later blossomed into large purplish patches on the skin. The gums became swollen, painful, and discolored, and teeth loosened in their sockets. Death followed soon after.



From the journal of Henry Walsh Mahon showing the effects of scurvy on the victim's legs from his time aboard the convict ship HMS *Barrosa* sailing from England to Australia, 1842. National Archives, United Kingdom.

During the Kotzebue Sound gold stampede, the gold-seekers called this affliction “miner’s black-leg” or “black-leg fever” because of the discoloration of the legs. Some understood it to be scurvy, while others seemed to view it as a separate and unrelated disease. Throughout history, scurvy was a rare and mysterious ailment that most often struck sailors on long voyages. During the Klondike-Alaska gold rush, some stampedeers understood that fruits, vegetables, and fresh meat would prevent the affliction. Others blamed it on a lack of hygiene or exercise. Meanwhile, Alaska Natives avoided scurvy by eating vitamin c-rich fish, berries, and fresh game that staved off the illness.

and emptying their revolvers into the night sky.<sup>39</sup> But increasingly the stampedeers were finding little reason to celebrate. Much of the sense of adventure they felt when they arrived had worn away and morale was low for men who felt trapped and unlucky in the fortune-hunting game. Disease was also emerging as a fact of life. For the Inupiat, mumps and pneumonia had arrived months earlier and were now reaching epidemic levels in their settlements. Among the stampedeers, cases of scurvy were increasing at an alarming rate. In the 1890s, the public's understanding of the cause and symptoms of scurvy was uneven—some were aware that it was brought on by poor nutrition, while others were either ignorant of the cause or misinformed about possible treatments.

At the time, scurvy went by several names when it appeared in mining camps, including “black-leg fever” and “miner's black-leg,” and it emerged wherever people were deprived of ascorbic acid, or vitamin C, for an extended period of time. Joseph Grinnell's description of the scene on the Kobuk River is similar to other comments in the journals and letters of stampedeers:

Scurvy and 'black-leg' are getting common up the river. One man at the Jesse Lou Camp has died of the latter. The 'black-leg' is what the doctors call phlebitis. Black patches appear on the lower limbs, which swell and become very painful. Many are affected and at some of the camps above us they have instituted regular 'scurvy trails,' five and ten miles long, which they tramp every day. . . . Those who are suffering have been confined to their cabins so long, eating pork and beans and baking-powder bread, to the exclusion of fruit and fresh meats, that their cases are almost hopeless.<sup>40</sup>

Grinnell's description illustrates that he had a proper understanding of the cause—a lack of fruit, vegetables, and fresh meat—but vigorous exercise would most likely exacerbate a disease caused by nutritional deficiency. William McKee, writing from his camp near the Ambler River, described the disease in a letter to his wife Sally:

Many are sick with the scurvy or Black Leg as it is called. It is a singular disease, or more properly stated, a peculiar malady that attacks the lower limbs and gradually crawls upward and affects the heart. It weakens and saps the strength and is lingering and slow and when once it takes hold, it's hard to eradicate or hard to evict from the system. It clogs and retards the circulation and breaks out in black blotches and sometimes the whole leg and body becomes black. It causes heart failure. Thank God I have escaped it.<sup>41</sup>

Scurvy was a terrible affliction that could kill quickly or linger for months, and it was not the only killer. Cold weather and the hazards of the trail continued to pick off stampedeers. George Reeves explained in his diary that Charles A. Leonard, who was traveling toward Kotzebue Sound from a camp on Pick River, spent two nights outside with only a sleeping bag and “died of exhaustion and heart trouble besides freezing a little.”<sup>42</sup> His funeral took place at Stoney Camp on January 2, 1899.

Not all was gloomy however. There were moments when spirits soared, like in early January when the missionary Robert Samms and a man known as Uncle S. came through Penelope Camp with a bags of mail. As Grinnell explained, the Californians were desperate for news from home:

When Cox and I got in with the mail, all the neighbors crowded into our cabin and there was general excitement until the sacks were gone through and the fate of each determined. Nearly everyone got letters. The latest news was dated August 22, and we had full accounts as to the probable closing of the [Spanish-American] war. I received six letters. Down at Kotzebue Camp I opened only one of these, the one of the latest date, and found it so bright and jolly that my spirits were at the highest pitch all the way home.<sup>43</sup>

But letters from loved ones could also make the yearning for home more acute and the long, cold winter more oppressive. As Grinnell explained,

Several of the boys are growing desperately homesick. Time drags for them, and they are counting the days to next July when they can get out of the Kowak Valley and start for home. . . . Enthusiasm is a myth. It was less than a year ago that, 'No matter what happens, we will push on into the interior and explore the unknown mountains until we strike gold.' Now it is, 'How soon can we get home?' Such is human nature.<sup>44</sup>

Grinnell even overheard men talk about attempting the difficult 500-mile trek southward to the town of St. Michael near the Yukon River mouth in order to be ready to board the first ship home in the spring. Thoughts of spring were impossible to ignore.

In February, the peripatetic Carl von Knobelsdorff conducted a census of the Koyuk and its tributaries that revealed nearly 800 male and 16 female stampedeers occupy-



ing 260 cabins. Thirty-seven cabins were unoccupied, presumably because the occupants left for the Koyukuk River or because they were away on prospecting trips nearer to home. What could not be reflected in the census was the restlessness that was nearly universal in the camps. Grinnell kept busy compiling his ornithology notes and packing stuffed bird skins into crates. Clyde Baldwin continued to take photographs of his fellow stampedeers and some Inupiaq neighbors. But, most camp-dwellers lacked such organized activities and fidgeted with advanced-stage cabin fever. Grinnell quipped, "Time, and plenty of it, seems to be an antidote for enthusiasm."<sup>45</sup> On a Sunday morning in mid-February, Grinnell took time after breakfast

Charles A. Leonard's grave near Stoney Camp, 1898. Leonard was from Oregon and arrived in Kotzebue Sound aboard Bernard Cogan's *Alaska*. He died of exposure and heart trouble. Bancroft Library, Alaskan Gold Rush Album (2000.23).

Doctor Westley's cabin near Reilly Camp with the Quaker missionary Carrie Samms (third from left) and an unidentified woman on the right, 1899. Bancroft Library, Alaskan Gold Rush Album (2000.23).



to describe the goings-on inside his cabin at Penelope Camp, from the “meaningless, helter-skelter” of careless conversation to his companions yawning or gazing out of a frosty window. The result is a snapshot of cabin life on the Kobuk:

C.C. [Reynolds] is clipping Cox's whiskers and makes inaudible remarks. [Thomas J.] Rivers is shaving, just like any Christian of a Sunday morning. I am writing at the table. Uncle Jimmy is standing by the stove with his hands in his pockets, facing the window and whistling. A pail of water is set into the top of the heating stove and sizzles in varying tones. All is quiet for a while, when positions are changing. Ablutions are going on behind closed canvas.

Uncle Jimmy sits down on a bench and pulls his beard in a slow, rhythmical motion. He is abstracted.

Grinnell continued in this vein for another half page before asking, “Is it monotonous, does one think who has not spent months in a cabin with the same faces and the same voices and the same routine of endless twilight?” He concluded, “I marvel how some who have not inward resources can endure it.”<sup>46</sup>

It would be over two months before winter loosed its icy grip, and before spring arrived some stampedeers elected to move down the Kobuk River and cross Hotham Inlet so that they would be prepared to board ocean-going ships. Others returned to the river steamers that brought them up the Kobuk the previous year and hoped that the vessels had not been damaged by ice pressing against their

hulls. In the first week of February, Robert and Carrie Samms left their hosts in Penelope Camp to return to their mission on the Baldwin Peninsula. They traveled with Charles Reynolds' brother Harry and four other men who wanted reach the Penelope where it was ice-bound at Eschscholtz Bay in Kotzebue Sound. They planned to have the yacht ready for sailing when the rest of the mining company arrived in the spring. For other denizens of the Kobuk mining camps, there was no ship to go to and they could not live at the mission because there were no trees to cut for cabins and the missionaries were not accepting boarders. They would have to remain in their Kobuk River cabins until spring.

Writing from his camp at the mouth of the Mauneluk River, Dr. James S. Stone fretted about the people in the coming year who might be tricked, like he had been, into placing their hope in this distant corner of Alaska and soon his thoughts turned to the voles that presented a serious threat to stored food and multiplied faster than the stampedeers could kill them:

Do not let these transportation companies hoodwink the people again on mere conjecture. This is a cold, inhospitable country that produces nothing to save life. There is no game; nothing raised in the soil. Fish are abundant, but without good warm clothing and plenty of provision, no one could live here. There has not been seen this winter or since July last a single bear, deer, moose, elk or even a rabbit. During the summer

a few wild geese were killed, and this winter a few grouse; nothing in the shape of animal life but the 'Arctic mouse,' the most destructive animal of its size with which I am acquainted, and as I write this I hear him cutting into our sacks of provisions.<sup>47</sup>

In his journal Grinnell was also taking stock of his situation and of the flagging spirits in the mining camps. He confessed that he was no Mark Twain and could not therefore weave entertaining tales or craft poetry based on his unusual circumstances, but he did manage to render this succinct assessment of morale in the camps:

There is unrest everywhere. All admit that they have been duped. Some are making the best of circumstances, but others are taking it to heart in a pitiful degree. Although for the most part good-natured, chagrin is the rule. There are many pathetic tales half hinted at. Men left families to live as best they might, in vain hope, in narrowed circumstances at home, selling or mortgaging all they possessed to outfit themselves, confidently expecting to return with quickly-acquired wealth. About twenty-five men have lost their lives so far from drowning, freezing or scurvy, several of whom we know to have dependent families at home. It is worse than war, for there is no pension. And then the ridiculousness of this mad rush!<sup>48</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Grinnell, *Gold Hunting in Alaska*, edited by Elizabeth Grinnell (Chicago: David C. Cook Publishing, 1901), 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>3</sup> James H. Shotwell to his wife Margharete R. Shotwell, November 9, 1898, 14-15, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections Division (PNW00417). Hereafter called "Shotwell letters."

<sup>4</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 23.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>6</sup> "At Thirty Miles North of the Arctic Circle," *San Jose Weekly Mercury*, July 8, 1899, 7; "Friends Publication Board," *American Friend* 6 (1899), n.p.

<sup>7</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 25.

<sup>8</sup> "Argonauts from Tropical Santa Barbara in Winter Camp North of the Arctic Circle," *Santa Barbara Morning Press*, August 22, 1899, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Maurice Hattem, ed., "The Letters of William K. McKee from Alaska during the Gold Rush of '98," *Branding Bar* 142 (March 1981), 5, 8.

<sup>10</sup> "Argonauts from Tropical Santa Barbara in Winter Camp North of the Arctic Circle," *Santa Barbara Morning Press*, August 22, 1899, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 26-27; "Diary of M.A. Hartnett on Trip to Kotzebue Sound, Alaska, 1898," 31, University of Washington Libraries, Manuscripts & University Archives Division (VF312B). Hereafter called "Hartnett diary." The legend of the Flying Dutchman has its origins in the story of the Dutch captain Vanderdecken who sailed in the 1640s to the East Indies for spices and gambled his salvation on a rash pledge to round the Cape of Good Hope on the return trip. From that time on his ghost ship, crewed by skeletons, was doomed to sail the world's oceans forever. This idea was popularized in the opera *Der fliegende Holländer* (1843) by the German composer Richard Wagner. The name was likely given to Knobelsdorff because he was German (or Deutsche) and because he never seemed to stop traveling.

<sup>12</sup> Hartnett diary, 28-29. "News from Gold-Hunters in Kotzebue Sound," newspaper clipping based on December 4, 1898 letter, in Bancroft Library, Joseph Grinnell Papers.

<sup>13</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 27-28.

<sup>14</sup> Shotwell letters, November 9, 1898, 18-19. For more about the Koyukuk River stampede see, Chris Allan, *Arctic Odyssey: A History of the Koyukuk River Gold Stampede in Alaska's Far North* (Fairbanks: National Park Service, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 28, 32.

<sup>16</sup> "No Gold in Kotzebue," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 30, 1899, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 31.

<sup>18</sup> "No Gold in Kotzebue," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 30, 1899, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 29.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 35, 38.

<sup>21</sup> Shotwell letters, November 9, 1898, 16-17.

<sup>22</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 34. See also, Hartnett diary, 40.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 37, 43, 44, 56, 59, 67, 68. See also, "At Thirty Miles North of the Arctic Circle," *San Jose Weekly Mercury*, July 8, 1899, 7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-36.

<sup>25</sup> Shotwell letters, November 24, 1898, 21; "Start for the Kubuck River," *San Francisco Call*, April 28, 1898, 11.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22

<sup>27</sup> For an explanation of Inupiaq marriage practices, including polygamy see, Ernest S. Burch, Jr.,

*Social Life in Northwest Alaska: The Structure of Inupiaq Eskimo Nations* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2006), 87-89 and 62 for taboos surrounding death.

<sup>28</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 33, 40-41.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-57.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>32</sup> "Argonauts from Tropical Santa Barbara in Winter Camp North of the Arctic Circle," *Santa Barbara Morning Press*, August 22, 1899, 1.

<sup>33</sup> "At Thirty Miles North of the Arctic Circle," *San Jose Weekly Mercury*, July 8, 1899, 7.

<sup>34</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 45-46.

<sup>35</sup> "Deluded Men Seeking Gold in Kotzebue," *San Jose Weekly Mercury*, July 8, 1899, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Shotwell letters, November 30, 1898, 23 and February 27, 1899, 1-3.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, February 27, 1899, 4.

<sup>38</sup> "At Thirty Miles North of the Arctic Circle," *San Jose Weekly Mercury*, July 8, 1899, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Hartnett diary, 36-37.

<sup>40</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 59.

<sup>41</sup> Hattem, "Letters of William K. McKee," 11.

<sup>42</sup> George I. Reeves, et al., eds., "Alaska: The Gold Rush as Seen by the Reeves Brothers, 1898-1900" (1995), 35, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Alaska & Polar Regions Collections & Archives, Reeves Brothers Papers. See also, Hattem, "Letters of William K. McKee," 5.

<sup>43</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 52.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>47</sup> "No Gold in Kotzebue," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 30, 1899, 3.

<sup>48</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 60.



The steamer *John Reilly* transporting stampedees across Hotham Inlet, June 1899. National Park Service, Alaska Regional Curatorial Center, Karlene Leeper Collection (KOVA-73).

## Chapter 5: Duped and Deceived

**A**s winter began to release its grip on the Arctic, roughly 900 stampedeers were living in cabins along the Kobuk River and its tributaries. Dozens more were still hunkered down on the Selawik and Buckland rivers. The families of the gold-seekers had heard nothing from their loved ones since September the previous year and were beginning to worry. Likewise, the financial backers of mining companies and those who had grubstaked friends to investigate Kotzebue Sound anxiously awaited letters that would reveal if their investments paid dividends. Charles D. Lane was one of these. He and his son had gone north on the *Jane A. Falkenburg* but returned on the same vessel after only a few weeks. They left behind men with enough supplies to prospect and stake claims in Lane's name. As the *San Francisco Call* explained,

Shipping men interested in the Kotzebue Sound district are wondering why it is that no news has come out from that section this year. Several firms made arrangements to have a messenger sent out and C.D. Lane, the millionaire mine owner, engaged a man who knows the country well

especially to bring him news. None of these men have come out as far as the general public knows, and not a word of authentic news has arrived from the thousand men who went to Kotzebue.

Despite this lack of information, Lane was supremely confident in the area's potential and was already loading two schooners with lumber, coal, and supplies for another season of gold-hunting.<sup>1</sup>

Captain Bernard Cogan, the man who engineered the stampede many months earlier, was also curious to hear what all of his boosting might yield. In April the previous year, after delivering stampedeers to Kotzebue Sound, he went whaling in the Arctic Ocean and then returned with the *Alaska* to San Francisco without stopping again at Kotzebue Sound. Now he was preparing to do much the same with additional stops to unload passengers and freight at St. Lawrence Island, Golovnin Bay, Cape Nome, Unalakleet, Cape Prince of Wales, and Point Hope. When a reporter asked his opinion about stampedeers' fate (and the lack of news), he struck an optimistic tone:

It looks to me very much as though the boys have struck gold and were too busy to send out a messenger. Or they may have all been so busy that no one could be persuaded to make the journey. One thing is certain, there will be no starvation, as everybody was well supplied with provisions and there is fish and game in abundance. I am certain that I will find them all well when I get there in June.<sup>2</sup>

The reality was quite different. The Kotzebue Sound stampedees had not struck gold and were increasingly angry about this fact. Far from being too busy, most of them were frittering away the hours until spring and dreaming of leaving the area as quickly as possible. It was true that starvation was not a problem among the stampedees, but scurvy was—as much as a third of the gold-seekers had fallen ill. For the healthy ones, boredom, irritability, and depression were sure signs of cabin fever and would soon lead to squabbles even between cabin-mates who were previously friendly.

Joseph Grinnell was as able at portraying his fellow stampedees in prose as he was at preserving the skins of birds, and he managed to capture on a single page the malaise among disappointed gold-seekers. He described a group of men he mockingly dubbed “the Aristocracy of the Kowak” who did not go out to look for gold and had not participated in the Kobuk River social scene over the course of the winter. Now they were quite bored and idler even than the average Kotzebue Sound stampeder. As Grinnell explained,

Few of us have been on intimate terms with them, but they are said to lie in their bunks until twelve o'clock noon, and to stay up, when once out,

until two the following morning. They divert themselves by shooting at mice which run across the floor, using their six-shooters. Various boxes and knot-holes about the walls of their residence suggest targets. The walls themselves are riddled with bullet holes.

In addition to target practice from the comfort of their bunks, this particular clique had figured out a way to dispense with the chores that gave structure to the lives of other stampedees:

They are said to have trained a young Eskimo as personal attendant, who does all the work of the cabin, building fires, bringing wood and water, and even cooking. He sleeps on the floor, so that he may be handy to rekindle the fires of a cold night. The first man to arouse in the morning tosses a boot or other article at the native servant, which reminds him of his domestic duties. He blacks their mukluks, it is rumored, and serves coffee and cigars in bed.<sup>3</sup>

On March 18 Joseph Grinnell noticed a sure sign of spring—water started dripping from the ceiling of his cabin like rain. At night, when the cabin's woodstove burned out and the air chilled inside, Grinnell observed icicles growing from the ceiling “like stalactites in a cave, and slippery cones rise from the floor like stalagmites.” Outside the snow was still two feet deep and soft and damp enough to make travel difficult when it to clung to snowshoes and collapsed under the runners of dog sleds. Nevertheless, Grinnell journeyed into the woods each day with the doctor William Coffin in attempts to collect specimens of grey jay and other birds. During these excursions, the bright spring-



Joseph Grinnell on snowshoes near Penelope Camp, 1899. Bancroft Library, Portraits of Joseph Grinnell's Family (1973.44).

time sun reflected from the snow into their eyes and by the time they reached Penelope Camp again they felt as if their eyes were impregnated with sand. At first, Grinnell thought he was immune to snow-blindness because of his “rather deep-set eyes with roofing brows,” and he avoided wearing his Inupiaq snow goggles because he said he could not spot birds and aim his shotgun with them on. Eventually he would pay the price.

The doctor was the first to succumb after a full day of trekking and when the pair returned to camp Coffin was in agony. His medical training did not prepare him for this particular malady, so he turned to Indian Charley's wife who, Charley assured him, was known to be “a specialist in eye cases of this

nature.” As Grinnell explained, a remarkable backcountry surgery was about to take place:

Indian Charley's wife called and looked at the patient's eyes, swollen and inflamed and painful to a degree. She pointed to some toothpicks on the cabin table, and, being told to ‘proceed,’ she whittled three of them to a sharp point. Handing one to the suffering doctor, she bade him thrust it into his nostril. He did so and found to his astonishment that the mucous membrane was without sensation. Obeying his doctress, he continued to thrust in the point of this pick and likewise the two other,

when a hemorrhage of considerable severity occurred.

This was the goal of the operation and once the blood stopped flowing, Coffin's nose was red and painful, but his eyes stopped hurting as much. After a few hours both the nose and eyes were normal and the doctor was delighted. Ignoring the fact that much of California sees no snow, he promised to employ the Kobuk River snow blindness cure back home.<sup>4</sup>

On April 13, Carl von Knobelsdorff arrived in Penelope Camp after traveling roughly 500 miles by dog-sled from St. Michael and the south coast of the Seward Peninsula. He

brought news of a "big strike" in the Cape Nome area that he said was bigger than the Klondike. Grinnell was skeptical: "There may be some truth in it . . . But I am hard to convert to any gold proposition now. I shall have to see it to fully believe it." However, many of his companions at Penelope Camp were enthusiastic about trekking southward even though temperatures were rising and melting snow and ice made travel dangerous. Grinnell reported that Charles Reynolds and other mining company members had left camp with the much more modest goal of reaching the Quaker mission and, ultimately, the *Penelope* where it was frozen into sea ice. They arrived exhausted; Thomas Rivers and Clyde Baldwin collapsed and had to be hauled into camp; and several of the men suffered terribly from snow-blindness. Even though the trek to Cape Nome, at this time of year, could be life-threatening, stampedeers found the news irresistible, and even Grinnell was willing to entertain the possibility that a gold strike to the south might reverse their fortunes.<sup>5</sup>

By the end of April, stampedeers pulling sleds over the icy Kobuk River were arriving daily at Penelope Camp. They were determined to reach Cape Nome, but as Grinnell explained, he would not be making the same attempt: "I am convinced myself, from what the Eskimos tell us, that it is useless to start for Cape Nome now. It will thaw before half the distance is covered."<sup>6</sup> Because the men at Penelope Camp were healthy and had ample food supplies, their camp was becoming a waystation for desperate men. Many arrived with frozen feet because soaring temperatures allowed socks and boots to become soaked with perspiration, ruining their insulating qualities, and men were also falling into pools of water gathering around cracks in the river ice. Grinnell described a group of eight who arrived as part of the steady stream of humanity passing through his cabin:

A party with a heavily loaded dog sled leaves Reilly Camp to investigate rumors of gold at Cape Nome on the south coast of the Seward Peninsula, March 20, 1899. Bancroft Library, Alaskan Gold Rush Album (2000.23).



They came staggering into the cabin, groping their way to the nearest seat, almost dead. Nearly all were snow blind to a more or less extent. One fellow's eyes were paining him so that he sobbed and cried like a child. . . . We have to entertain so many visitors that it is getting tiresome naturally. I judge we have fed sixty men in the past week, or at least have served that many meals. We call our camp the 'Penelope Inn,' or 'Cape Nome Recuperating Station.'<sup>7</sup>

Although spring had arrived, this did nothing for the men suffering from scurvy. Grinnell reported that Penelope Camp had its own "scurvy trail" where the afflicted walked a wide circle through the woods in the mistaken belief that exercise would cure them. And Penelope Camp would soon see more scurvy cases as even the stampedees not bound for Cape Nome abandoned their camps and moved downriver toward the ocean. "Many people are traveling on the river, so as to get as far as the Mission before the ice breaks up," wrote Grinnell. "Scurvy is on the increase. Two more men have died of it at Ambler City. Four at the Iowa cabins are down with it."<sup>8</sup> Grinnell was happy to report that none of his mining company had come down with symptoms. In fact, their good health was likely due to the steady diet of game meat Grinnell and his hunting partners brought to camp as a byproduct of his bird-collecting activities.

Eventually the wave of Cape Nome stampedees passed and tranquility returned to Penelope Camp. This did not last long. In early May, the camp residents learned that a young girl named Kalkak from the nearby Inupiaq settlement had been exiled to live alone in the woods as part of cultural practices related

to coming-of-age.<sup>9</sup> Kalkak was considered a friend by the stampedees, and as Grinnell explained, they were outraged:

We have just learned of a superstition which is the most cruel of any noted among these strange people. It has roused our civilized horror. A very pretty little girl about thirteen years old, who has been the pet of the camps all winter, and whom the boys have looked upon as a 'little sister,' has been shut up all by herself in a small snow cave back in the woods. There she is doomed to stay until the snow melts, without speaking to anyone or leaving her cramped position, with no fire and with only such cold food as may be brought to her.

Grinnell concluded, "This is the law concerning all Kowak women when they are supposed to have reached marriageable age." Unwilling to accept this tradition, at least in the case of their friend, the stampedees armed themselves with guns and marched over to the village to demand that the parents, Omechuck and his wife Atungeena, take the child back into their home. James Wyse headed the expedition with a large knife on his belt and Grinnell thought they presented "a dangerous front." After a tense exchange, the stampedees announced that "if they did not end this and other cruelties, and liberate the girl by to-morrow noon, we would come over in a great body and tear down the cave and take her away." At first the stampedees were not sure if they would emerge victorious but, as Grinnell explained, "We stirred them up and they may conclude that this 'missionary association' of gold-hunters is not here for nothing." A short time later the girl was allowed to return home.<sup>10</sup>

## *Introducing Erik O. Lindblom—Millionaire*

*E*rik Lindblom was born the son of a school teacher in Sweden. As a young man he trained as a tailor but wanderlust sent him through much of Europe and then to the United States by 1886. In 1898 he joined the whaling crew of Bernard Cogan's *Alaska* because he wanted a chance to hunt for gold at Kotzebue Sound. However, when the ship reached the Seward Peninsula, Lindblom overheard whalers saying that no gold had yet been found. The young Swede hatched a plan—he would 'jump ship' and find a more promising gold field elsewhere in Alaska. To do this, he joined a detail of men sent to fetch fresh water and when no one was looking he disappeared across the tundra.

*L*indblom knew that Cogan would pursue him, so he ran until he could hardly stand. On the third day, weary and hungry, he encountered a prospector who had no extra food but did offer this advice—he told him to go back and that "his bones would bleach in the mountains" if he persisted. Lindblom did try to return, but when he saw an armed posse searching for him, he sought the aid of an Inupiaq man who hid him under a pile of animal skins in the bottom of his umiak. Lindblom then made his way to Cape Nome and became one of the Scandinavians—called the Three Lucky Swedes—who were the first to strike it rich from the golden sands (and inland gravels) of Nome.



Erik O. Lindblom and Hanna Sadie Sparman, ca. 1903. The couple married in 1907. Alaska State Library, Portrait File (p01-4562).

A month earlier, in mid-March, an elderly woman had died in the Inupiaq camp, and Grinnell observed another cultural exchange with surprising results. The death occurred at a time when the villagers were busy moving out of their winter dwellings and into tents. According to Grinnell, they were planning to relocate to the other side of the Kobuk River to “put up wick-i-ups,” a reference to dome-shaped homes with a willow sapling frame and a skin or canvas covering. “The person who died was an old woman who went by the natural route of old age,” he explained. “She was dragged out of her igloo a few yards and left in the snow, for the dogs to eat up, we are told, as she had no especial friends.” Charles Reynolds, the undertaker who had organized the burial of Indian Charley’s child some months before, stepped in to attend to the woman’s funeral arrangements. However, it seems Reynolds had experienced a change of heart regarding the need for a Western-style burial and the merits of traditional Inupiaq ways. “Wonderful to relate,” wrote Grinnell, “the undertaker did not bury the body, but put it on a scaffold in true native style. He is being convinced that this is the proper form of burial.”<sup>11</sup>

By May 24 warm weather had softened the Kobuk River ice just enough to deliver the moment so many stampedeers yearned for—break-up. During the night the river ice fragmented and began to flow, offering the promise that navigation would soon be possible again. Maurice Hartnett described this much-anticipated day beginning with an alarm sounded by a local Inupiaq man:

This morning at 2 A.M. Okukohnouk awoke us to tell us to take Bergen’s boats out of the water as they were in danger from the ice. We found there had been quite a movement of ice during the night;

large cakes of ice were thrown on to the bank clear of water; one piece in particular was noticeable—it was a triangular shape about 20 feet on its sides and over five feet thick. The river is clear all the way across in several places within sight and the large flows are flowing going down stream . . . These great bodies of ice have a tremendous force, and make a sight worth seeing.<sup>12</sup>

Grinnell also described the chaotic flow of crumbling ice, though unlike his fellow stampedeers he regarded it as a sad moment and confessed to wanting more time for bird collecting and for taking notes that would eventually become his scientific treatise on Kotzebue Sound bird life.<sup>13</sup> He even secretly hoped the company’s steamer *Helen* might spring a leak and sink after it was freed from the ice. In fact, news was circulating in the camps of several steam launches that had been left unattended during the winter and were thought to be badly damaged. As William A. Hayne, Jr. explained:

Strange to say, two fine launches were left tied in the river until completely frozen under. The ice first froze around them, then an overflow would come; this would freeze, then another overflow, and so on until finally the whole steamer, smokestack and all, disappeared from view. The attempt is going to be made to dig them out, which may or may not be successful.<sup>14</sup>

The more attentive boat owners either dragged their steamers onto shore for the winter or used jacks to lift them onto the surface of the frozen river to prevent ice pressure on the hulls or encapsulation due to overflow.

In his journal Grinnell managed to capture the drama of the Kobuk River break-up and its tendency to form ice jams, which often led to extensive flooding:

The water has risen until it is on a level with the bank on this side, and on the opposite side it is spreading out over the tundras. It is covered completely from side to side with a crunching, grinding mass of ice from three to five feet thick. Yesterday there was a jam on a sand-bar below and the ice course was stopped. Then that from above came down with force, crushing and piling into great ridges of blue and green blocks from ten to fifteen feet in height. . . . The banks are plowed by the resistless stream and trees are broken off like threads.

Meanwhile, Indian Charley decided that he needed to travel four miles upriver to rescue a birch bark canoe at Guardian Camp that he feared would be crushed by a cascade of ice. He borrowed a kayak from Thomas Rivers and snaked his way through areas of open water between the bobbing ice chunks. According to Grinnell, he had been expected back the same day and when he did not appear Charley's father began pacing the riverbank and wailing because he feared his son had drowned.<sup>15</sup>

Over the course of a week, the floating ice diminished and dozens of stampedees in all manner of river craft passed Penelope Camp. Grinnell heard from visitors that the *Helen* was unharmed and that Bernard Cogan's steamer *John Reilly* had been repaired after it ran aground on a sand-bar the previous fall. To everyone's relief, Indian Charley also emerged safe and sound—Grinnell reported that he had been visiting another Inu-

piaq village. The Californian bird-collector was haunted by the knowledge that he would need to leave a place he found so fascinating and wrote that on several occasions he imagined he could hear the *Helen's* whistle even when no vessel was in sight. Then on June 6 the real thing appeared, manned by eight members of the company from Upper Penelope Camp. The one man onboard the *Helen* who was not a member of the Long Beach and Alaska Mining & Trading Company was incapacitated by scurvy and was being transported to the Quaker mission for treatment. Grinnell and his companions spent several days packing their belongings onto the tiny vessel and saying their goodbyes to Inupiaq friends. Indian Charley presented them with twenty whitefish to feed them on their journey and the *Helen* set sail for the sea.

Before long the *Helen, Iowa, Agnes E. Boyd, George M. Stoney* and several other river steamers were gathered in the broad, braided delta at the mouth of the Kobuk River. The journey had been uneventful, but they could not advance any farther because the ocean at Hotham Inlet remained locked in ice. While many found this bottleneck a frustrating delay, Grinnell and his fellow Californians managed to enjoy themselves and to stay occupied by hunting migratory birds and collecting eggs for Grinnell's scientific studies. As he explained,

The crowd has been in the tent all day singing and reading, while I have one end of the long table for the 'morgue' [where he skinned and stuffed birds]. . . . We are a jolly crowd and no one would believe used to be disappointed gold-hunters. The main occupation of this branch of the L.B.A.M.&T. Co. at present is bird-nesting. I hope we have to stay here two weeks yet. Day and night are all the same to us nowadays.



Steamer *Mattie Farrington* hindered by sea ice in Hotham Inlet, July 1899. Bancroft Library, Alaskan Gold Rush Album (2000.23).

Whereas over the winter his companions had dismissed Grinnell as a “bird fiend” and laughed at his efforts to instruct them in ornithology, now he was converting some of them to his cause. “Bird-nesting” described the search for bird nests in the spring and summer in order to gather examples of the eggs. In addition to the fish that the men were netting in the river, the improvised camp was well supplied with scrambled eggs because Grinnell used a straw to blow out the contents of each egg for preservation.<sup>16</sup>

While Grinnell’s group waited at the mouth of the Kobuk for the ocean ice to break up, they heard tales of woe from other parties and from distant stampeder camps. They were sad to learn that their friend Jack Messing of San Jose had died aboard the

*Agnes E. Boyd*. As Grinnell noted, “He was found dead in his bed on the steamer. Five other men were sleeping with him, but noticed nothing unnatural until they attempted to arouse him for breakfast.” The steamer *John Reilly* also arrived at the river delta with the corpse of a man dead from scurvy and ten others weakened by the disease. The Californians learned that two stampeders on the Selawik River had been shot by an Inupiaq man. According to the shooter, he was entirely justified and explained that the whites “forced him to mend a sled at the muzzle of a revolver, and scared him so that he finally tried to run away. They picked up rifles and started after him. But he got behind a tree with his own rifle and anticipated them . . .” Grinnell also learned the extent of scurvy in

Jack Messing's funeral after he died in his sleep aboard the *Agnes E. Boyd*, June 25, 1899. Messing was from San Jose, California and spent the winter in the Hansen Camp. National Park Service, Alaska Regional Curatorial Center, Karlene Leeper Collection (KOVA-73).

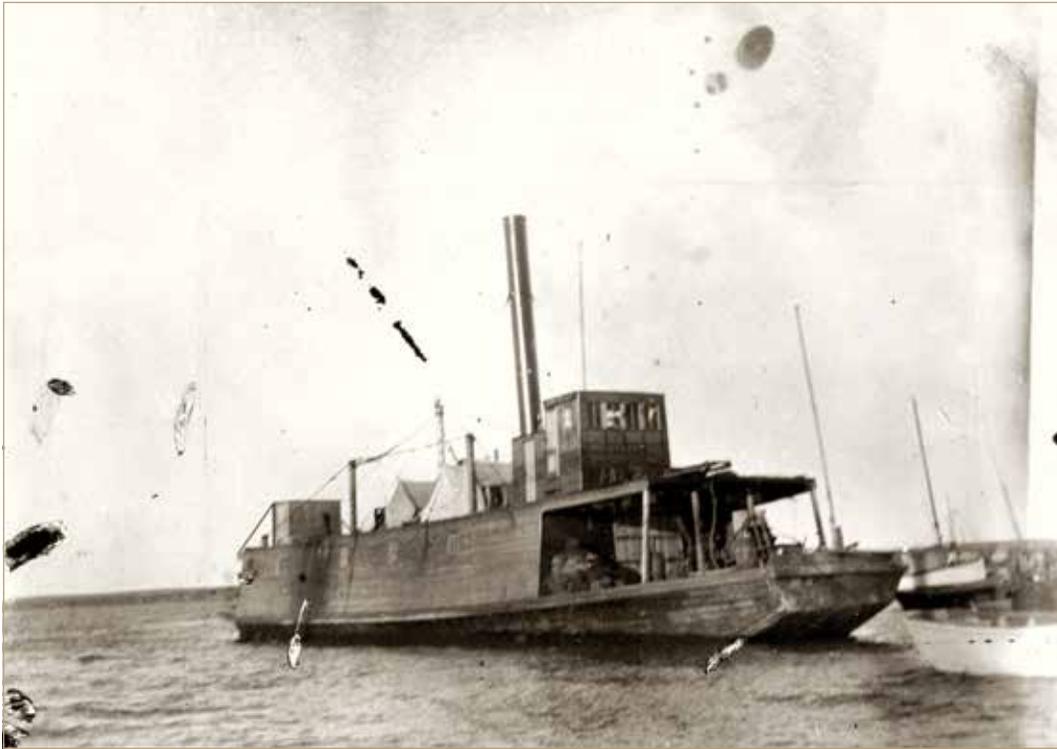


the camps, particularly on Pick River where fifty-two out of sixty men were sick and helpless. Even the stampeders who emerged from the experience without accident or disease were unhappy. As Grinnell lamented, they squabbled over trifles:

As we see them, the general run of people are impatient to get home [and] are cross and quarrelsome. Many are the 'scraps' and differences among companies. It is a common thing to hear men cursing each other bitterly over such trivialities as loading a boat or setting up a tent. Sometimes partners will divide their supplies, even breaking a spoon or knife in two to 'make it even.' I am glad to

say that our crowd is remarkably free from such things.<sup>17</sup>

On June 27 the ice in Hotham Inlet had melted enough and had broken into drifting cakes so that the first river steamers were able to weave their way through and reach the Baldwin Peninsula. That day the *Helen*, *John Reilly*, *Agnes E. Boyd*, *Delight*, *Mattie Farrington*, *Nugget*, and *Iowa* managed to slip through and found their way to a small natural harbor on the tip of the peninsula near the Quaker mission. From their tents along the beach, the stampeders could see that unbroken sea ice covered Kotzebue Sound for miles around. The first concern for Grinnell and his comrades was reaching the *Penelope*, still trapped in the ice nearly fifty miles to the



The *John Reilly* after Hotham Inlet was free of ice, July 1898. Bancroft Library, Alaskan Gold Rush Album (2000.23).

south, but for many others, this was a chance to socialize, to plan their next move, and to celebrate their nation's birthday. Maurice Hartnett observed the scene and wrote, "[I] find a great many people here at the mission and it has quite the appearance of a town." He also noted that within a few days twenty-five boats had arrived and preparations began for Independence Day celebrations.<sup>18</sup>

Hundreds of stampedeers had gathered around the mission and Inupiat families were also camped, either because they were gathering for fishing and trading or because they had joined the Quaker community. Pearl Watt of Chillicothe, Ohio was on hand for the festivities that involved both stampedeers and Inupiat and wrote,

We had what was probably the biggest 4th of July ever held north of the Arctic Circle. The celebration

began at midnight in the explosions of giant powder and dynamite and firing of rifles, revolvers, etc. The program began at 2 p.m., a platform having been erected out of doors. Music by the orchestra; prayer; America; Declaration of Independence read by P.H. Watt [referring to himself]; address by Col. E[dward] S. Ingraham, Seattle, Washington . . . After this program we had boat races, sailing and rowing, umiak and kayak races for the natives and rifle and revolver shooting contests. Everybody seemed to enjoy the exercises and enthusiasm was not wanting.<sup>19</sup>

After the fun was over, each stampedeer had a decision to make—head for home or make another attempt to find gold? A few went north to Point Hope to investigate a minor



A stampeder encampment on the Baldwin Peninsula near the Quaker mission, July 4, 1899. Bancroft Library, Alaskan Gold Rush Album (2000.23).

gold discovery on a Noatak River tributary the miners were calling Lucky Six Creek. The decision for the men of the *Penelope* was clear—they would navigate through the treacherous pack ice in Kotzebue Sound and attempt to reunite with their companions who, they hoped, had already reached Cape Nome by the overland route. The company voted to take on six additional passengers and experienced sailors who could pay their way with work on the boat. They also decided to give their river steamer to Robert and Carrie Samms for use at the mission. Grinnell wrote this about the *Helen*: “Be this her epitaph: ‘She served her purpose, if she was slow.’” But before they could leave Kotzebue Sound, they stopped at nearby Chamisso

Island for drinking water and were delayed by stormy weather and turbulent seas. This suited Grinnell just fine as it gave him the chance to harvest the eggs of murre, puffins, and gulls along cliffs that served as a massive seabird rookery.<sup>20</sup>

The journey for vessels sailing south from Kotzebue Sound into the Bering Strait and the Bering Sea was a challenging one. After eleven days of difficult sailing, Grinnell reported the experience was “a nightmare” and described being within sight of Cape Nome only to be swept backwards for two days by high winds and strong currents. Snow squalls and sleet made the passage even more arduous. The Californians were luckier than some who were shipwrecked on the



Stampedees gather at the Quaker mission's warehouse to celebrate Independence Day and their own survival after a winter in the Arctic, July 4, 1899. Bancroft Library, Alaskan Gold Rush Album (2000.23).

storm-punished coast or disappeared in the tempest. When the *Penelope* finally reached Cape Nome, the stampedees scrambled to locate the other members of their mining company who had crossed the Seward Peninsula during the winter. As Grinnell explained, others suffered greatly when they left Kotzebue Sound to travel across the Seward Peninsula:

We found our Cape Nome representatives all here save [Harry] Cox, who was left with some claims toward Fish River. All are well, but from their account they must have had some sorry experiences. Dr. Gleaves, Gale and party were lost in

the overland trip and ran out of provisions, resorting to their seventeen dogs for food in the last pinch. They finally reached supplies with barely enough meat for two days longer. Close shave. The body of Dr. De-France of the 'Iowa' party was found frozen in the trail in the mountains.<sup>21</sup>

The bulk of the mining claims staked by members of the Long Beach and Alaska Mining & Trading Company were seven miles west of the emerging boomtown people were calling Anvil City. Grinnell estimated that two thousand men or more were living in tents or driftwood shacks on the beaches and added,



An Inupiaq camp on the Baldwin Peninsula with upturned umiaks, meat drying on a rack, and an American flag, July 4, 1899. Bancroft Library, Alaskan Gold Rush Album (2000.23).

Several warehouses have been built and two substantial frame buildings are going up. They say there are ten thousand men in this district, mostly scattered out among the hills. Five thousand claims are recorded, but of these only about a dozen are known to be of value. Four are so far being worked, but these I know to be extremely rich, for anyone can look on to see the 'shining' as it is separated from the gravel in the sluice boxes.<sup>22</sup>

As Grinnell noted, the profitable claims were several miles from the ocean and at that time stampeder were only beginning to realize that the beach sands in

front of their tent city also contained the shining stuff. The so-called "three Lucky Swedes"—John Brynteson, Jafet Lindeberg, and Erik Lindblom—would quickly become millionaires after staking some of the richest ground in the region, but for most new arrivals, pulling wealth from the ground was still a difficult proposition.

Pearl Watt spent a year on the Kobuk before making his way to Cape Nome, and in a letter home he described the area as "poor man's country" because anyone with a shovel, a pan, and a small sluicing device called a rocker could start pulling money from the earth. His testimonial and many others like it indicated that, unlike Kotzebue Sound, Cape Nome not only promised gold but also delivered:



The *Arctic Bird* arriving at the Quaker mission in Kotzebue Sound, 1899. San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, Albert G. Kingsbury Lantern Slide Collection.

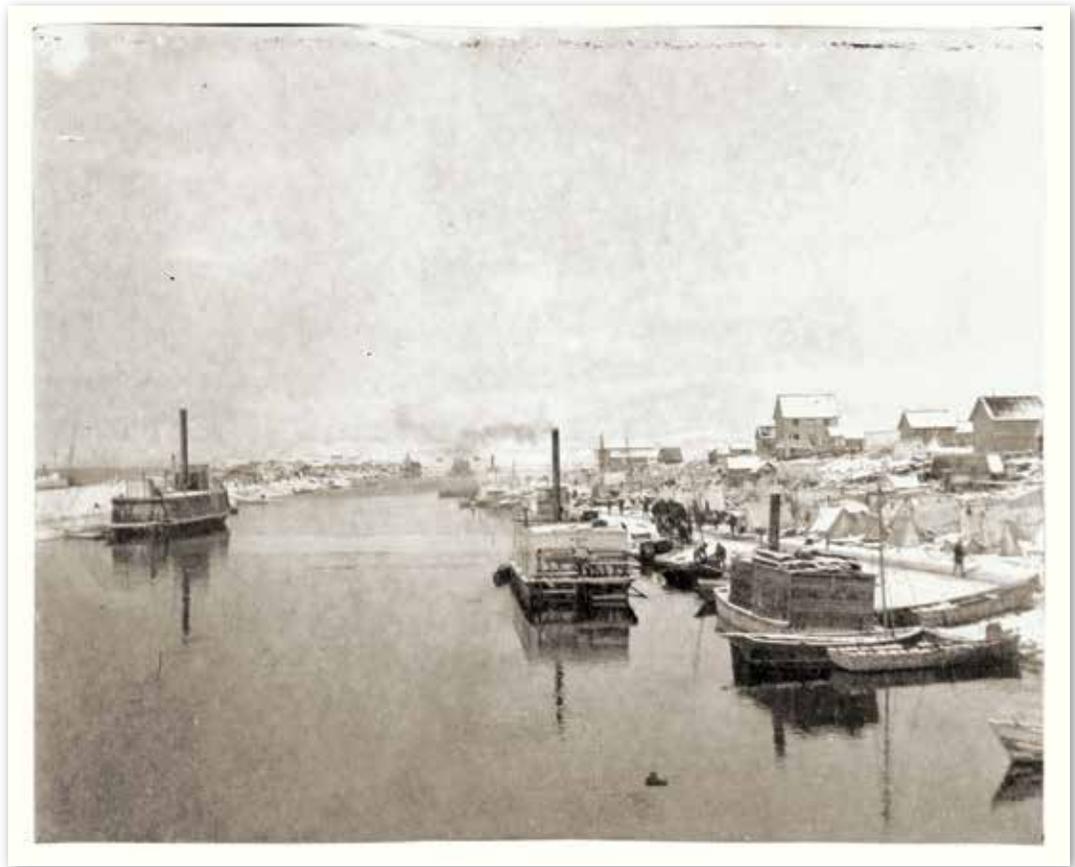
I have at last reached the land of gold and there is plenty of it. Spent several days out in the mountains visiting the different rivers, creeks and gulches and then came back to the city, here I am now 'rocking on the beach.' This is a poor man's country if there ever was one. The sands along the beach carry considerable gold and some thousand men are working along the beach with rockers saving the gold. We average from \$1.00 to \$2.00 an hour and some have made as high

as \$100 when they struck a particularly rich place.<sup>23</sup>

Joseph Grinnell also acknowledged the mining district's potential as members of his mining company began some of the first real prospecting they had done since arriving in Alaska. But as he explained, progress was slow and the work difficult:

Uncle Jimmy and I were set to digging a hole back on the tundra, and if anyone doubts the work is hard let him try it himself. We worked

Paddlewheel steamers and river scows on the Snake River where the boomtown of Anvil City (later known as Nome) was taking shape, 1899. Bancroft Library, Alaskan Gold Rush Album (2000.23).



three days and got to a depth of ten feet with no favorable results. The tundra is thawed barely through its covering of moss, seldom more than six inches. The rest of the way the frozen ground was as hard as rock and had to be chipped off bit by bit. The hole was about four by five feet, just room enough to wield a heavy pick. We broke the points off the pick every day. A strata of pure ice a foot thick was encountered, but most of the way we worked through a sort of frozen muck or packed mass of unrotted vegetation which, when it thaws, looks and smells like barnyard filth.<sup>24</sup>

Trying to penetrate permafrost with hand tools was enough to discourage many gold-seekers. The gold was spotty and there were no guarantees. Because only one person could fit in their prospecting hole at a time, Grinnell and Wyse alternated with half-hour shifts in the pit while the man above-ground hoisted buckets of mud and water. As Grinnell noted,

After the first day the walls began to melt and cave in little by little, so that each morning and noon we would have to bail out a foot or more of mud and water. It was about as dirty work as one can imagine. The fresh clods, as we picked them out of the bottom, were so cold that for a time frost formed on



Stampeders shoveling gravel into rockers on the beach near Cape Nome. Joseph Grinnell and his fellow gold-seekers found it impossible to keep claim-jumpers off of their claims. National Park Service, Alaska Regional Curatorial Center, Karlene Leeper Collection (KOVA-73).

the outside just like a cold piece of iron brought into a warm room in winter. Although as cold as a refrigerator down in the pit, the perspiration poured off from us from the stifling air.

Grinnell and his companions voted to take Sundays off, so they toiled in this fashion for ten hours a day, six days a week. This schedule left little time to pay attention to the political and legal tensions building in Anvil City. In short, the newly formed mining district was plagued by the problem of over-staking and latecomers were angry at being shut out. As Grinnell explained,

It seems that the first men to this region, the so-called ‘discoverers,’

staked out as many as one hundred claims each under power of attorney [for friends and relatives]. They then formed a mining district and passed a law that powers of attorney cannot hold, thus handicapping those who have come in since, so one man can take up but one claim.

Given the lack of formal government authority in the town, a miners’ meeting was called and a resolution proposed that would, if carried, nullify old claims and open the entire district up to re-staking. Such a move would have caused pandemonium as gold-seekers rushed to stake new claims and battled each other for the best selections. Instead, a U.S. Army lieutenant-

“Rocking out gold at Cape Nome”— Joseph Grinnell observes as his companions wash gravel with a device called a rocker that separates sand and gravel from placer gold, August 1899. In the background a wooden aqueduct carries water to a neighbor's claim. Bancroft Library, Portraits of Joseph Grinnell's Family (1973.44).



ant stepped in and, commanding about a half-dozen soldiers with fixed bayonets, he cancelled the meeting and warned against “incendiary and menacing speech” in the future. The Army militia also forbade anyone from carrying firearms within city limits to discourage disappointed stampeders from resorting to violence.<sup>25</sup>

By the end of July, the Long Beach and Alaska Mining & Trading Company began to fragment when Charles Reynolds, William Coffin, Clyde Baldwin, and J.B. McCullough left Anvil City for home aboard the steamship *Albion*. Another member found work as a restaurant cook for \$150 the first month and promises of a raise in the next. Joseph Grinnell was determined not to abandon the com-

pany and explained that he and the fourteen remaining members stayed because “we have a good deal of money invested, [and] hate to leave everything when affairs are looking better than ever before.” To increase their chances, this group soon split up, with six investigating tundra claims and Grinnell and eight others working the company’s beach claims.

On the beaches their fortunes were looking up. Using rockers and plenty of hard work, the Californians began to harvest between fifty and sixty dollars a day, always with the hope of finding a richer concentration of gold dust and nuggets. They also invested in a town lot and erected a small building where they could retreat from foul weather or simply take a break from living in tents on the beach.

“Our property is advancing in value and so is the stock of the L.B.A.M. & T. Co.,” wrote Grinnell. “We own a lot in Anvil City [that is] 200 x 300 feet. The beach claims are proving better. . . . The past week we have taken out \$250 in gold dust.” During this period, Grinnell split his time between cooking and acting as “cleaner-up.” This involved removing several prospecting pans full of black sand and gold dust from the rockers and then panning that material to remove most of the sand. Next he poured mercury into the mix, which bonded chemically with the particles of gold to form an amalgam. When he heated the amalgam over a fire, vaporizing the mercury, he was left with “buttons of pure gold.”<sup>26</sup>

Cape Nome was an obvious improvement over the Kobuk River, where Grinnell saw no indications of gold, but it was no promised land. In late August, he described a particularly good clean-up that yielded eighty-five ounces of gold. At between fourteen and fifteen dollars per ounce, this equaled roughly \$1,500. However, the cost of food and supplies in Anvil City was high—twice the cost of the same in Seattle or San Francisco—and Grinnell knew that according to the by-laws of his mining company, any profits needed to be split twenty ways. He realized that his share would scarcely cover his personal expenses in what was becoming the most expensive city in America. Thomas Rivers listed the cost of local supplies (and revealed that the use of “Anvil City” was being replaced by “Nome”):

There are four or five big stores in Nome and you can buy almost anything if you have money. Potatoes and onions are worth \$12.50 per sack, coal oil \$8 per case, flour \$3 a sack, sugar 25 cents a pound, coffee 50 cents, eggs \$25 a case, drinks 50 cents each and meals from \$1 to

\$2.50 each. Apples are sold at three for 50 cents.<sup>27</sup>

At these prices, it made sense to eat from their provisions of dried and canned food rather than spending their profits on groceries. The situation was made even more frustrating because Grinnell encountered luckier men who liked to flaunt their good fortune. The Californians had begun taking in lodgers for three dollars a night and selling meals for one dollar. As he explained, “One man came in for supper last night who planked down a bag of dust worth fully \$800 for me to weigh the dollar from. I poured out a little too much and he grabbed the bag and went out, saying ‘Keep the change!’”<sup>28</sup>

Life on the Cape Nome beaches was difficult enough, but what really discouraged Grinnell and his chums were the claim-jumpers. According to both law and mining tradition, gold-seekers were required to “locate” their mineral claims with notices at the corners of the desired property and to record that claim with the proper authorities as soon as possible. As the number of stampederes surged, many people ignored claim boundaries and either forced their way in with bluster and threats or simply hijacked a claim when the owners were away. This happened daily both on inland claims and on the beaches and the authorities could do little to prevent it. As Grinnell explained, these pirates were called “jumpers” or “beach combers” and they were not easily dissuaded:

Our claims are now covered with beach jumpers and we cannot get them off. Mob law rules. There are one hundred beach combers to one claim owner, and the authorities will not or cannot do anything. The lieutenant in charge gave us some notices to ‘vacate,’ but the people pay no at-



tention. It fell to me to go up to one of our claims, and I showed the notice to each of the workers along the beach. Some laughed at me. Some sneered. One 'tough' consigned me and the notice to a warmer place than Cape Nome in August. . . . This at my own claim!

Grinnell pressed the man to "be reasonable and give me a hearing" before again being told to go to hell. The problem had been going on for weeks, and the man in question had found a "pocket" and was taking one hundred dollars a day from their claim. This affront made Grinnell's blood boil, but he had to keep his anger in check: "We have discussed the advisability of using force, but have abandoned it. [Samuel] Fansher says we 'might get disfigured,' for there are people here just awkward enough to hit a fellow in the face."<sup>29</sup>

At the end of August, the Californians were frustrated with low yields on their beach claims and decided to change their strategy. They voted to acquire a "fifty percent lay" on a claim along a tributary of the Nome River called Buster Creek which they believed offered a higher chance of success. A lay refers to the practice of working a claim on royalty, paying the owner a fixed percentage of the gold recovered. This was a last-ditch effort to strike it rich, and the members of the Long Beach and Alaska Mining & Trading Company were willing to spend two full days towing their boat up the Nome River and then packing supplies on their backs, ultimately trudging twelve miles into the highlands of the Seward Peninsula. All the while it rained and there was nothing to burn for heat or cooking except green willow saplings. "It was very disagreeable, hard work," wrote Grinnell, "but . . . we are well settled, with an oil stove to depend on when the willow wood fails."

Before long they were all digging into the frozen gravel under a thick layer of moss and mud, but the first returns were only modestly encouraging—the riffles in their sluice boxes showed coarse gold "though in no fabulous amount." The nights were cold, the endless daylight of summer was long passed, and Grinnell could sense that their endeavor was nearly over. "Here we are," he wrote, "working like beavers, thirteen of us, including me, the cook. It's the last struggle of a dying company. But it isn't dead yet."<sup>30</sup>

Although the Buster Creek claim had produced about \$400 a week for the group along with "some very pretty nuggets," a cold snap on September 13 threatened to put a stop to their mining. When the men emerged from their tents in the morning, the creek was bordered with ice and icicles adorned the edges of their sluice boxes. Recent clean-ups had been promising, but when Grinnell made calculations, he realized that they were still barely making what they would have in wages for an average job. He complained bitterly about the challenge of cooking on a tiny stove in cold temperatures and the persistent staleness of foods that had been "shipped and towed and packed and unpacked, and swapped, and crushed, and dampened" for nearly two years. It was obvious that his companions were exhausted and were suffering from sore feet and blistered hands. As a group they voted and were back in Nome within a week, by which time the world was blanketed in new snow.

In spite of snow flurries, hundreds of people were still pouring into Nome. They arrived on ships after abandoning the Klondike gold fields and traveling down the length of the Yukon River. They also arrived from Seattle and San Francisco in ever increasing numbers. Some were stragglers from Kotzebue Sound who were either too sick or lacked the means to make the trip earlier. Some came



A hodgepodge of lumber, prospecting gear, canvas tents, and boats at Nome that covers three miles of the shoreline, 1899. Alaska State Library, Clarence L. Andrews Collection (p45-1054).

from other disappointing stampedes like the one up the Koyukuk River. News of the area's wealth was spreading around the world, and new stores, hotels, and saloons were popping up all around. Grinnell called his temporary home "the loveliest, speediest, swiftest mining camp ever seen in Alaska" and before long he had a job offer from the office of the town's new mayor. But, as he explained, he was feeling emotionally depleted and had had his fill of the former residents of Dawson City and the Klondike with their claim-jumping and thuggish ways. He wrote, "I wouldn't stay here for \$300 per month. No, nor for any-

thing. I hate the place. There's the toughest crowd of people, sporting Dawsonites, everyone ready to 'do' everybody else."<sup>31</sup>

For Joseph Grinnell and his mining partners, the gold rush was over. They had survived a winter on the Kobuk River and had sweated and strained in muddy pits in Alaska's most active gold field, but the prospect of another long winter in Alaska was too much. They discussed the possibility of returning the following year to probe their mining claims again, but their spirit was not in it. Instead, they would take their \$6,000 in Nome gold (or roughly \$300 per

member) and return to California to tell their families that they tried and that they counted themselves lucky. The *Penelope* left its anchorage at Cape Nome on October 2, 1899. Although many were like the members of the Long Beach and Alaska Mining & Trading Company—tired and frustrated and ready to go home—others were just getting started. They scattered across Alaska

to prospect on new waterways and old; they even returned to the rivers of Kotzebue Sound for another try. For this determined minority, Alaska offered both adventure and opportunity, and if one distant creek did not work out, they ‘mushed’ to the next promising location and the next one after that, always believing that the new diggings would yield a golden fortune.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> "A Millionaire to Start on a Hunt for Gold," *San Francisco Call*, June 14, 1899, 5.
- <sup>2</sup> "No Word from the Miners on Kotzebue Sound," *San Francisco Call*, March 28, 1899, 4; "First of the Gold Field Fleet," *San Francisco Call*, May 18, 1899, 2; "Ready for a Rush to the Gold Fields," *San Francisco Call*, May 19, 1899, 7.
- <sup>3</sup> Joseph Grinnell, *Gold Hunting in Alaska*, edited by Elizabeth Grinnell (Chicago: David C. Cook Publishing, 1901), 68.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-71. For more about snowblindness and indigenous cures see, Robert Fortuine, *Chills and Fever: Health and Disease in the Early History of Alaska* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1992), 51-53.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-77. See also, "Diary of M.A. Hartnett on Trip to Kotzebue Sound, Alaska, 1898," 44, University of Washington Libraries, Manuscripts & University Archives Division (VF312B). Hereafter called "Hartnett diary."
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 72, 74.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.
- <sup>9</sup> Among the Inupiat, a girl at the time of her first menstrual period was required to undergo a time of isolation ranging from five to forty days. While living on her own, the girl wore a special caribou-skin hood to shade her eyes and observed dietary restrictions. For more about this cultural practice see, Robert Fortuine, *Chills and Fever: Health and Disease in the Early History of Alaska* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1992), 16-17 and J. Louis Giddings, *Kobuk River People* (College: University of Alaska Department of Anthropology and Geography, 1961), 243-244.
- <sup>10</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 76.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.
- <sup>12</sup> Hartnett diary, 48.
- <sup>13</sup> *Birds of the Kotzebue Sound Region, Alaska* (Santa Clara: Cooper Ornithological Club of California, November 14, 1900).
- <sup>14</sup> "Argonauts from Tropical Santa Barbara in Winter Camp North of the Arctic Circle," *Santa Barbara Morning Press*, August 22, 1899, 1.
- <sup>15</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 78.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 82; "Has Struck the Golden Goal," *Chillicothe Gazette*, August 29, 1899, 3.
- <sup>18</sup> Hartnett diary, 54.
- <sup>19</sup> "Has Struck the Golden Goal," *Chillicothe Gazette*, August 29, 1899, 4.
- <sup>20</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 85.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 86. See also, "Miners Arrive from Kotzebue and Cape Nome," *San Francisco Call*, October 2, 1899, 5; "Dog Meat as Diet," *Nome News*, December 2, 1899, 2. One example of deaths during the voyage through the Bering Strait can be found in "Lost in Behring Sea," *Union Gazette* [Corvallis, OR], September 8, 1899, 1.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> Letter from Anvil City dated August 5, 1899 to Watt's mother in "Has Struck the Golden Goal," *Chillicothe Gazette*, August 29, 1899, 4. For thorough descriptions of the Nome gold discoveries see, Leland H. Carlson, "The Discovery of Gold at Nome, Alaska," *Pacific Historical Review* 15 (September 1946), 259-278 and Leland H. Carlson, "The First Mining Season at Nome, Alaska—1899," *Pacific Historical Review* 16 (May 1947), 163-175.
- <sup>24</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 87-88.

<sup>25</sup> Terrence Cole, ed., *Nome: City of the Golden Beaches* (Anchorage: Alaska Geographic, 1984), 27.

<sup>26</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 89-90. Mercury is toxic if ingested, and the mercury vapor was particularly harmful if miners breathed it in. Fortunately for Grinnell, it appears that he worked outdoors over an open fire. Details about the *Albion* and its mission in Alaskan waters can be found in "Arctic Relief Boats," *Los Angeles Herald*, August 16, 1899, 1.

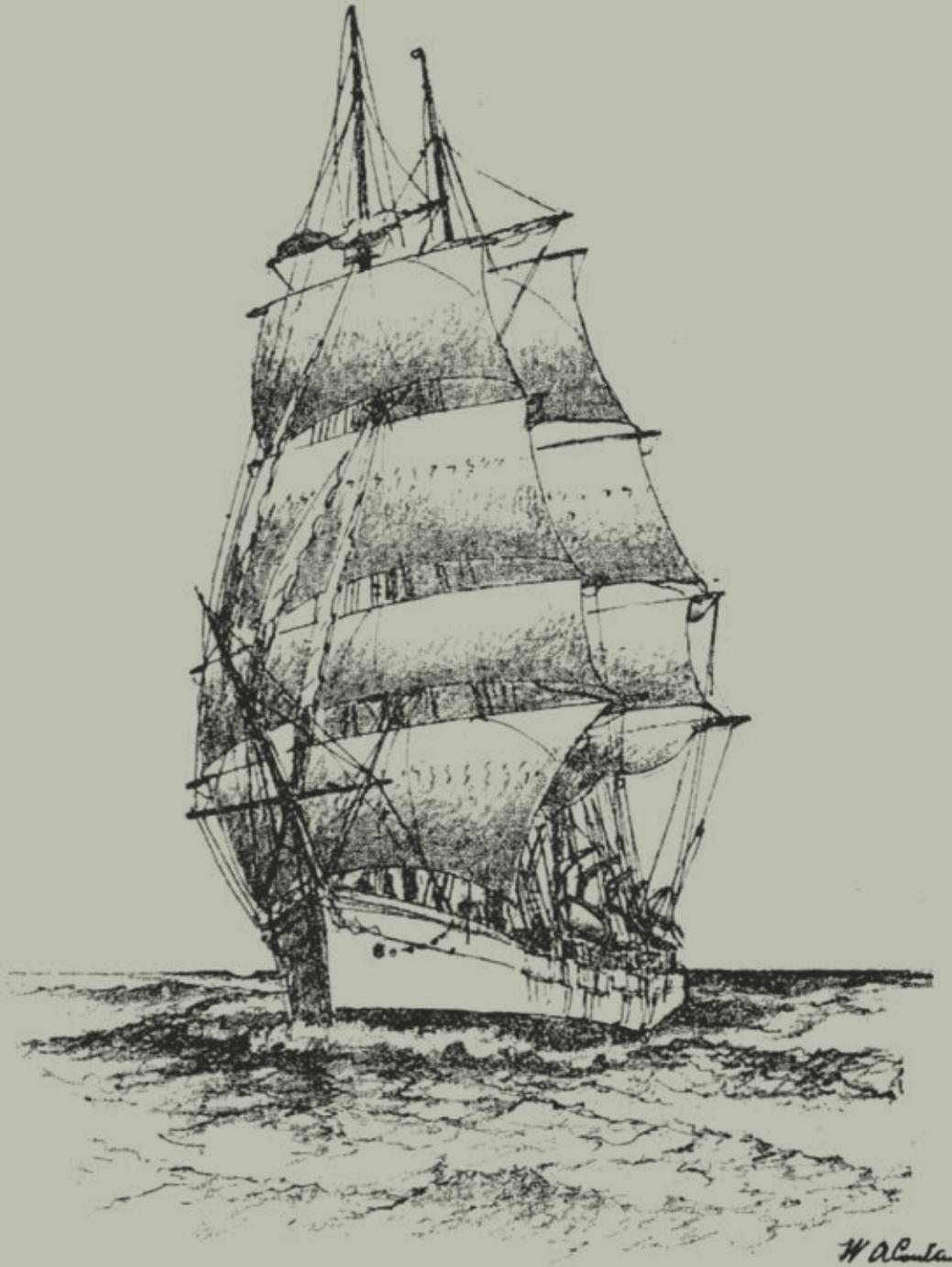
<sup>27</sup> "Gold at Cape Nome," *Los Angeles Herald*, November 9, 1899, 4.

<sup>28</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 90, 92.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 92; "Gold Plentiful on the Beach at Cape Nome," *San Francisco Call*, September 14, 1899, 1.

<sup>30</sup> The meaning of "lay" in a mining context is most likely borrowed from the whaling industry in which a lay is a crew member's share of the profits.

<sup>31</sup> Grinnell, *Gold Hunting*, 96; "Gold at Cape Nome," *Los Angeles Herald*, November 9, 1899, 4.



Captain Bernard Cogan's bark *Alaska* delivering cargo and passengers to Alaska's west coast before going whaling in the Arctic Ocean. By 1900 the ship was destroyed by a storm at Nome. *San Francisco Call*, May 18, 1899.

## Chapter 6: Barney Cogan's Legacy

The gold stampede to Kotzebue Sound (and the second chapter to Nome) may have been over for Joseph Grinnell and others who had ships standing by to take them home, but many stampedees remained stranded in Kotzebue Sound in the spring and summer of 1899. Some were low on food, others were immobilized by scurvy, but most had simply lacked an exit strategy from Alaska. As Dr. James S. Stone explained, it was not a coincidence that so many lacked enough cash for passage aboard a vessel sailing along Alaska's northwest coast: "When these men left San Francisco they were advised to bring no money with them, as there was nothing here to sell; that they would find more gold than they could use, and consequently they have no money. The transportation companies know this, so they will not take them." The irony was not lost on the men left behind—the very companies that had promised so much a year before were now unwilling to help the ill and indigent. Through July and August newspapers offered harrowing stories of suffering and death and urgent calls for the government to send ships to retrieve survivors from what some were calling the "Country of Death."<sup>1</sup>

One of the few government vessels available to rescue stampedees was the Revenue Cutter *Bear* commanded by Lieutenant David H. Jarvis. Lt. Jarvis was already known for orchestrating the Overland Relief Expedition in 1897 that delivered reindeer to Point Barrow to feed ice-trapped whaling crews, and he was beginning his annual patrol into the Arctic Ocean. Jarvis described a scene of "awful destitution" when he arrived on the Baldwin Peninsula and entered a camp inhabited by sick stampedees. The *Bear* crew offered medical care as best as they were able, including lime juice to combat scurvy, and took eighty-two men onboard for transport to St. Michael. However, Jarvis reported that nearly 250 men had to be left behind. As he explained, he had a plan:

The bark *Alaska* of San Francisco was expected to arrive, and the steamer *Townsend* passed in as the *Bear* left. The charterer of the *Townsend*, [Charles] D. Lane, assured me that they would take out all who wished to go. Many, if not all, will be able to leave by these vessels, but upon my return from the Arctic I will clean the beach of all who remain.

In addition to clearing out the stamper camps along the beaches of the Baldwin Peninsula, the Revenue Marine lieutenant obtained a list of forty-eight stampedees who had died in the previous sixteen months [see Appendix B] and offered this appraisal of Bernard Cogan's stampede:

The rush of people to Kotzebue Sound was a sad, deplorable affair. Misled by false information, and advertisements, 1,200 people, many totally unfitted to stand the hard conditions and climate, rushed to the country . . . During the winter no gold whatever was found, and in the spring they sought every means of escaping from the region. Many were drowned in the swift currents of the rivers in the fall of 1898; others lost their lives during the winter from the cold and, worst of all, in the spring scurvy broke out in nearly all the camps.<sup>2</sup>

The fatality rate during the Kotzebue Sound stampede had been high—as many as one in twenty stampedees died—but stories of misery and death were emerging from many of Alaska's gold fields and from the Klondike. What distinguished the Kotzebue Sound example was the depth of the deception that was necessary to launch the stampede in the first place. The region's reputation as a potential gold field was in tatters and many veterans of the experience wanted the world to know they had been cruelly misled. When asked his opinion about the area's gold potential, Charles H. Packard of Snohomish, Washington described his fellow stampedees as “bunckoe suckers” and outlined an elaborate fraud involving Yukon River gold dust passed off as a product of Kotzebue Sound:

No doubt glowing reports have been published in Seattle and 'Frisco papers, but—well, the output for last year can be safely estimated at less than \$1, and judging from present developments, next year's output will not exceed this. If you think I exaggerate interview returning pilgrims next summer. Something over \$10,000 in gold dust was purchased at St. Michael by officers of the steamer *Grace Dollar*, to be used in booming the Kotzebue Sound country . . . Owners and officers of other vessels are said to have bought dust at St. Michael for the same purpose.<sup>3</sup>

After this amount of negative publicity, one might imagine that future gold-seekers would steer clear of the area, but such was not the case. In spite of what was a disastrous year for nearly everyone involved, a few people were still ‘booming’ Kotzebue Sound and principal among them was Bernard Cogan. The man whose stories and vigorous promotions launched the stampede in 1898 was already preparing the *Alaska* for a voyage northward in the spring of 1899. His plans had changed little since the previous year. He would deliver passengers and freight to a string of Alaskan ports—St. Lawrence Island, Golovnin Bay, Cape Nome, Unalakleet, Cape Prince of Wales, Point Hope, and, of course, Kotzebue Sound—and then he would go whaling with his sons, 19-year-old John and 21-year-old Joseph.<sup>4</sup> By creating a sort of Far North ferry system, he was maximizing his profits—transporting stampedees and freight to and from northern Alaska and harvesting whales. Meanwhile, Benjamin Higgins of Provincetown, Massachusetts captained Cogan's steamer *John Reilly* up the Kobuk River and its tributaries, delivering

veterans like John D. Tallant, the banker from San Francisco, and eleven other prospectors to the headwaters of the Reed River where they reported finding twenty-two ounces of “rich nuggets under the tundra grass.” This news attracted an additional steamer—the *Nugget*—and an estimated seventy men to a hot springs on the Reed River where they spent the winter swapping tall tales and searching for signs of a genuine bonanza.<sup>5</sup>

Over the course of four decades, Bernard Cogan was one of the most successful whalers in Arctic waters and at the peak of his career his wealth was estimated at \$200,000, which he invested in land and large farms in California where he made his home with his wife Catharine Mathilda Cogan (née Smith). But he had suffered serious financial losses starting with the collapse of a real estate bubble in southern California in the late 1880s. He also experienced setbacks following the nationwide depression known as the Panic of 1893 that resulted in nationwide bank closures, business insolvency, and the failure of many American farms.<sup>6</sup> In 1899 this streak of bad luck was about to get much worse. First, his son Joseph died of toxic pneumonia (also called typhoid-pneumonia) on November 9, 1899 while Cogan and his boys were whaling in the Arctic Ocean. There was an epidemic of typhoid fever in Nome at the time and Joseph likely contracted the disease when the *Alaska* anchored there.<sup>7</sup> A San Francisco reporter who knew the Cogan family expressed how difficult the loss was for Bernard: “His death has nearly broken his father’s heart. He was only 21 years of age and leaves a host of friends in Alameda. ‘Joe’ Cogan was a particularly bright man and was of a lovable nature that made everybody who knew him a firm friend.”<sup>8</sup>

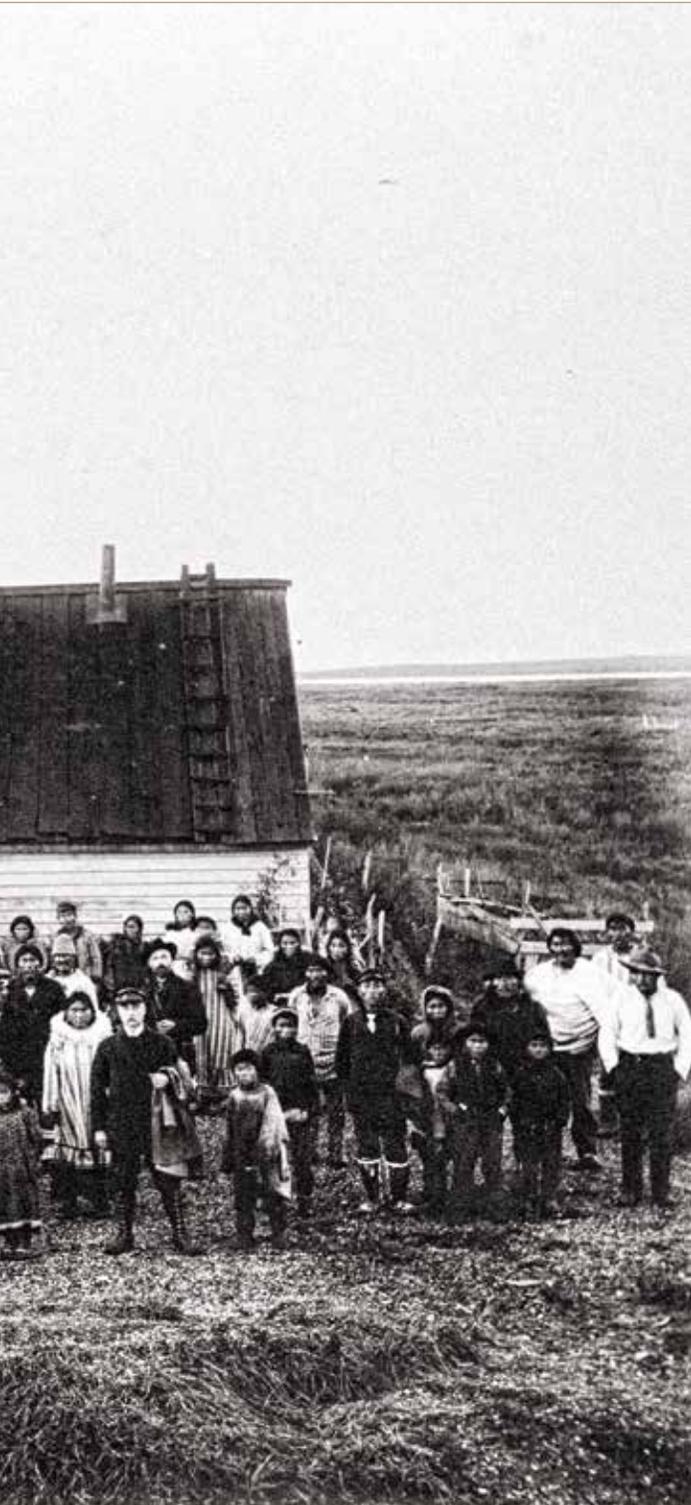
The following year, Cogan had again sailed the *Alaska* to northern waters and was

at Nome when a violent Bering Sea storm hit on June 5 and lasted for several days. Cogan was not on board at the time, but his seventy-five passengers, most of whom were headed for Kotzebue Sound, hurriedly abandoned ship while the waves pounded the hull and drove the *Alaska* against the beach. As the *San Francisco Call* explained, other vessels at anchor had managed to ride out the storm, but Cogan’s ship was a total loss except for some supplies that washed up on the sand: “Her 500-ton cargo of general merchandise was strewn along the beach. So heavy was the surf that not a case of goods was left intact, the only thing escaping total destruction being canned salmon, canned meats and canned fruits.”<sup>9</sup> Unable to continue whaling, Cogan turned to the only boat he still owned—the river steamer *John Reilly*—and a quest he was famous for talking about but had never pursued: finding gold in the rivers feeding Kotzebue Sound.

In 1901 the Kotzebue Sound region experienced a second stampede, though the focus was now on a new set of rivers. A few gold-seekers were still investigating the Kobuk River, but most were rushing to rivers on the southern coast of the sound along Goodhope Bay—the Buckland, the Kiwalik, and the Inmachuk—and this time there really was gold to be found. Very quickly trading posts sprang up to supply the gold miners with food and winter lodgings and, as eager prospectors made their way overland from Nome or arrived by ship, these posts filled up with a thousand residents or more. The town of Deering, named after the schooner *Abbie Deering*, emerged at the mouth of the Inmachuk River while Candle City sprouted at the confluence of Candle Creek and the Kiwalik River.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, Bernard Cogan was operating the *John Reilly* on the Kobuk and was occupying Reilly Camp near the mouth of the Shungnak River. Almost



The Inupiaq congregation of the Quaker mission, ca. 1902. This mission community later became the city of Kotzebue. University of Alaska Fairbanks, Archives, Cordelia L.M. Noble (1973-203-4).



immediately stories appeared in the *Nome News* that seemed to echo Cogan's tall tales from 1898. According to one account, a gold discovery was made by an Inupiaq man who would only reveal the location to Cogan "because the captain had shown him some courtesy or kindness, and this was his method of reciprocation." The deposit was not of placer gold but took the form of a ledge where gold was still lodged in quartz, or what is known as a lode deposit, on a Noatak River tributary. The story continued,

Captain Coogan [sic] took his vessel up the Kobuk as far as he could . . . and went into winter quarters. The native who found the ledge objected to anyone accompanying Captain Coogan, it is reported, and by his reticence and mysterious demeanor created a suspicion that he might have some other motive in isolating the captain from his party. But the good faith of the Eskimo has been proved, as reports from a number of sources certify, that Captain Coogan has made a rich strike.

Allegedly, samples retrieved by Cogan's party were assayed at \$900 per ton and the ledge was "possibly one of the richest in the world." Even the ice-skating, dog mushing mailman Carl von Knobelsdorff was involved with Cogan's latest activities, but when reporters asked him about gold strikes in the Kobuk and Noatak areas, he was tight-lipped. As the *Nome News* explained, "Mr. Knobelsdorff expressed a desire to not discuss the prospects he found, but says there is gold in the country, and that he will return next spring."<sup>11</sup> Not everyone was convinced.

By 1902 hundreds of prospectors were fanning out across the region and were focused primarily on the rivers

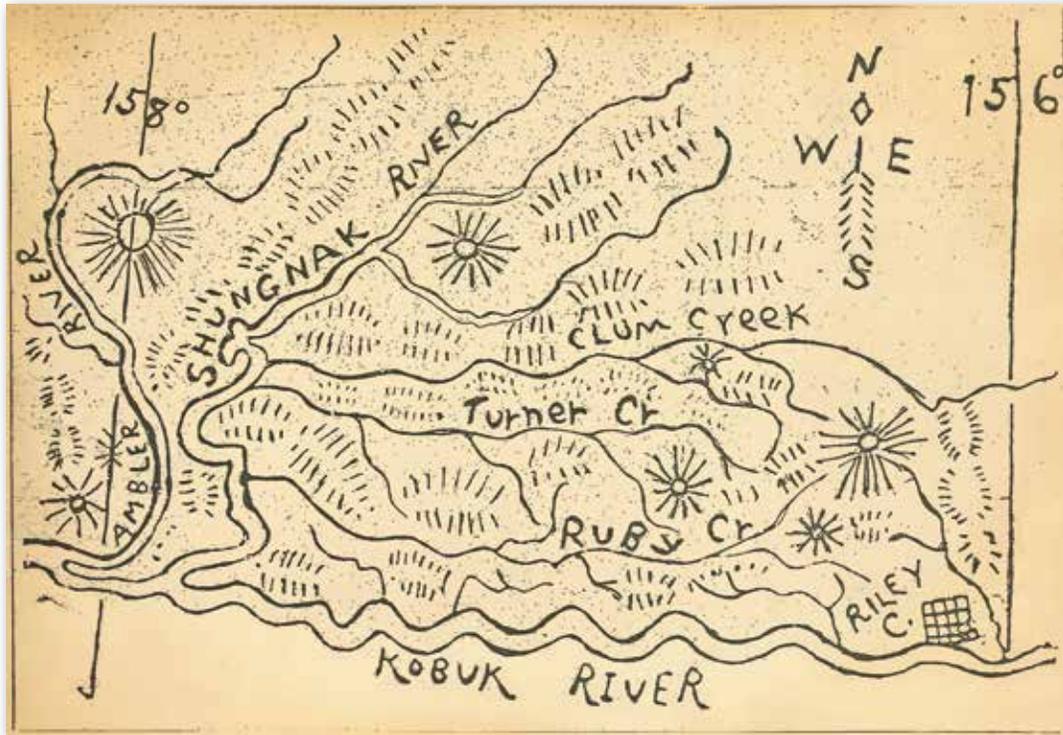


Veteran gold-seeker Lewis Lloyd (right) and a partner shovel gravel into a sluice box at Dahl Creek near the village of Kobuk, ca. 1905. University of Alaska Fairbanks, Archives, Lewis Lloyd Collection (1988-161-73).

entering Goodhope Bay. Bernard Cogan's investigation of the Kobuk ensured that the river remained in the news and attracted its own pack of prospectors, though no authentic reports of a gold strike emerged. By this time Cogan's search for gold had become legendary, a story that gave every prospector hope while also seeming too good to be true. As one Nome reporter explained, "It was reported last year that Captain Coogan [sic] had struck it rich, but the rich ledge story has become a sort of Alaskan chestnut, and people received the report com grano salis."<sup>12</sup>

Around this same time, reports began to emerge that his obsession with gold had led to a mental breakdown. A Kobuk River miner named John Huff said that he encountered Cogan aboard the *John Reilly* 200 miles up the Kobuk and that Cogan's mining partners had risked a charge of mutiny by restraining the veteran whaler:

When I saw Captain Coogan, whom I previously knew, he was tied with ropes to a chair on the deck of his vessel. I spoke to him, but he did



A sketch map of the upper Kobuk River showing Reilly Camp. The map also shows mining areas along Clum, Turner, and Ruby creeks in the Cosmos Hills. *Nome News*, December 22, 1903.

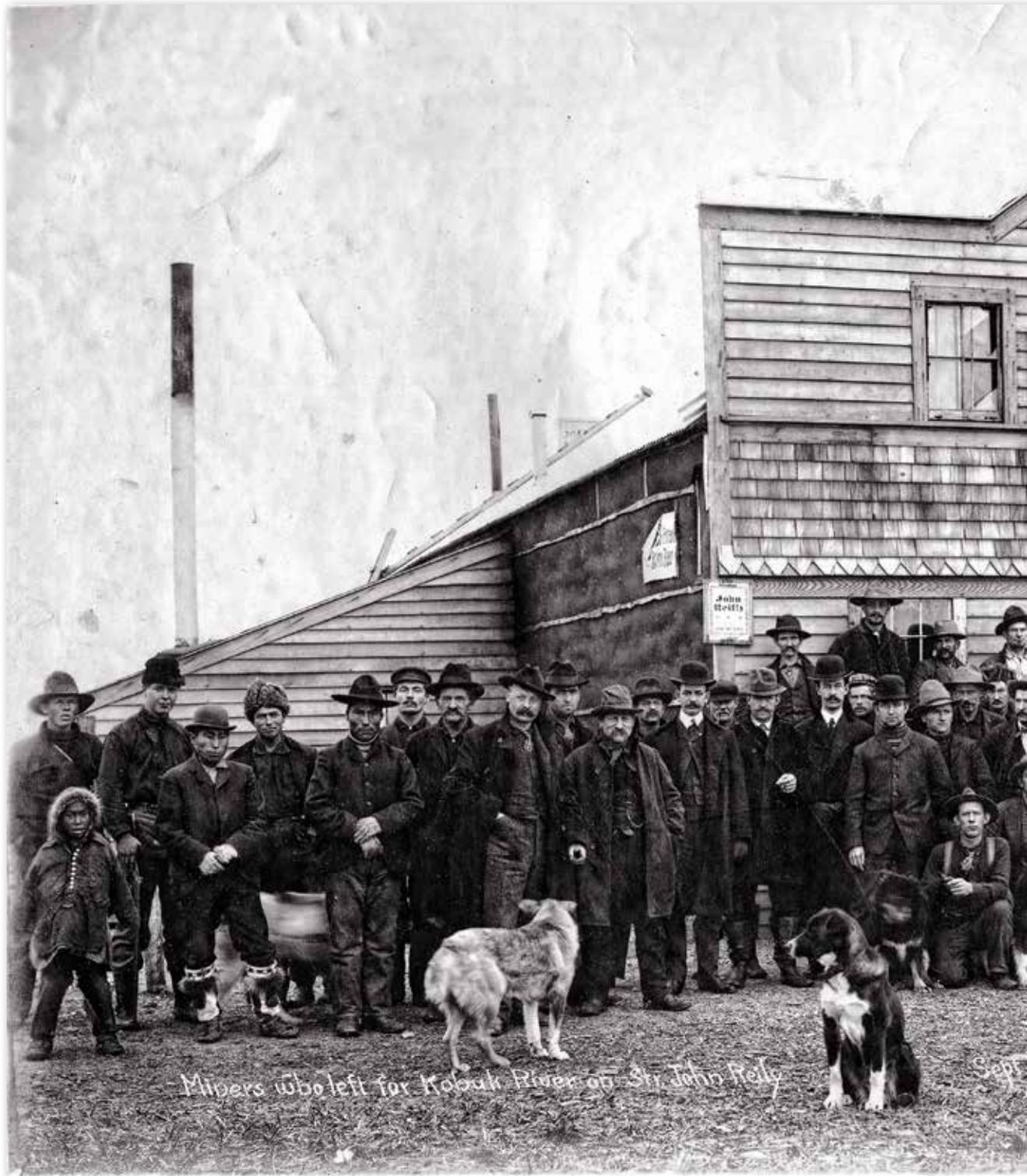
not recognize me. His boy died last fall, and this, with reverses, has unbalanced his mind. . . . The night after I arrived at the boat he was given something to make him sleep, and the next morning he awoke apparently rational. He knew me and we talked about old times, but I made the mistake of inquiring about the quartz ledge for which he has searched since 1898. He seemed to lose himself immediately, and became violent.<sup>13</sup>

Cogan's son John was also aboard the *John Reilly* and by the time the steamer reached Kotzebue Sound he managed to calm his father enough that the crew agreed to untie him. From the mouth of the Kobuk, the two men traveled by whaleboat to the village of Kiwalik at Spafarief Bay. There

they caught a ride on the schooner *Volante*, the same vessel that had delivered the Quaker missionaries to Kotzebue Sound four years earlier. The *Volante* was bound for Nome and the voyage was uneventful until they entered the Bering Strait on October 1 and a sudden squall began to toss the ship. At the most dangerous point, squeezed between Cape Prince of Wales and the Diomed Islands, a rogue wave struck the vessel, it lurched heavily, and Captain Cogan lost his footing and was thrown into the sea. Unable to reverse course in the violent weather, the *Volante* sailed on and Cogan disappeared beneath the waves. Observers reported that John wrung his hands and cried piteously, "My poor old dad! My poor old dad!"<sup>14</sup>

After Bernard Cogan's unexpected death, the search for gold in the Kotzebue Sound region continued unabated. Prospectors staked claims and made discoveries on the

Miners preparing to leave Candle City on the Kiwalik River to prospect on the Kobuk, September 29, 1903. A sign on the building indicates they will take the *John Reilly*, the river steamer imported by Bernard Cogan in the first year of the Kotzebue Sound gold stampede. Anchorage Museum, Archbishop Francis T. Hurley Collection (B2016.22.148).





Kiwalik and Inmachuk rivers, and on the Kobuk a new captain, James E. Cahill, began operating the *John Reilly*, transporting men and supplies up to the Shungnak River where in 1903 a minor stampede made the news. Groups of up to fifty miners purchased their supplies in Candle City, the boomtown on the Kiwalik River, and then sailed up the Kobuk for a season of gold hunting. Groups also traveled overland from Nome and Council City or sailed around the Seward Peninsula to reach the new diggings. There were enough customers to sustain business for the *John Reilly* as well as two more veterans of the original Kobuk steamer fleet, the *Agnes E. Boyd* and the *George M. Stoney*.<sup>15</sup> By the end of the prospecting season of 1903 there were 125 men on the Shungnak River, some of them Inupiat who worked for wages, and one eyewitness reported that about \$10,000 in gold had been collected. But this miner also called the river “undoubtedly overrated” and warned that high shipping rates and a lack of thawing equipment would hobble any efforts in the area. The Shungnak stampede, even though gold was harvested, was considered a failure.<sup>16</sup>

For many years mining in the Kobuk River area would remain a small-scale enterprise, mostly centered on the Squirrel River and creeks in the Cosmos Hills (which were named after nearby Fort Cosmos). Roughly a dozen miners were working claims and maps of the era show log cabin camps on the Shungnak River, Cosmos Creek, Wesley Creek, Ruby Creek, Dahl Creek, Riley Creek, and the Kogoluktuk River. As a rule, the prospectors who stayed with their claims managed to recover enough gold to live on and to do a little more prospecting, buoyed by the hope of a rich strike. A boat delivered mail from Nome to Kotzebue Sound three times a month and a small fleet of launches and barges was available to deliver miners

## *Sheldon Jackson's Reindeer—The New Game in Town*

*I*n the 1880s the missionary and educator Sheldon Jackson developed an elaborate strategy to solve what he believed was a persistent threat of starvation among Arctic peoples. The plan began modestly in 1892 with small reindeer herds imported from Siberia to Teller on the Seward Peninsula. But soon Jackson expanded his vision to include a vast reindeer industry managed by whites, Alaska Natives, and the Saami herders from Norway working together to make the Alaskan Arctic profitable. In addition, he hoped the herding program would transform Native people from nomadic hunters into capitalist entrepreneurs.



*D*uring the gold rush era, Jackson's reindeer were used as meat-on-the-hoof to feed whaling crews caught in Arctic Ocean ice and in a farcical effort to save starving Klondike gold-seekers by driving the animals northward from Haines—in both cases, the threats of starvation were exaggerated and many deer died en route. However, reindeer herding did eventually become a way of life in many northern Alaska communities. Jackson sent two hundred animals to Kotzebue in 1901 and later sent herds to Deering, Kobuk, and Selawik. These animals eventually provided meat and a cash income for villagers.



Sheldon Jackson sent 200 reindeer to Kotzebue in 1901 to be managed by Robert Samms of the Quaker mission. The Kotzebue herd shown here in 1915 was owned by the Lomen Reindeer Corporation. Alaska State Library, George A. Parks Collection (P240-215).

and their supplies to points up river. The town of Shungnak, on the Kobuk between Dahl Creek and the Kogoluktuk River, was the supply post for the mines in the Cosmos Hills and soon became the home of a U.S. commissioner and recorder for mining claims, teachers at a new Quaker mission-school, and a post office that opened in 1903. The arrival of a reindeer herd two years later further consolidated Shungnak's role as a regional hub. Meanwhile, another community, which at first was called Squirrel City, formed near the mouth of the Squirrel River. In 1909, a rush to Klery Creek and other Squirrel River tributaries resulted in this minor boomtown which boasted twenty or so log cabins, a store and restaurant, and the homes of Inupiaq families who found the fishing to be excellent. The town was soon renamed Kiana. In 1910, Philip S. Smith of the U.S. Geological Survey assessed the mining scene in the area and concluded, "The rigors of the climate and the short working season are against the development of a large camp and should dissuade the incompetent from invading the new district in a 'stampede.'"<sup>17</sup>

Brief as it was, the original Kotzebue Sound gold stampede had ushered in an array of profound changes to the lives of local residents. In the early 1900s, trading posts, mission schools, and post offices were creating the nuclei for permanent villages and Inupiaq people were finding opportunities for wage labor as guides, hunters, and miners in addition to following traditional lifeways and semi-nomadic subsistence patterns. Along the Kobuk River, the villages of Kobuk, Shungnak, Kiana, and Noorvik took shape as well as the nearby communities of Noatak, Selawik, and Buckland. Ambler is the exception on the Kobuk River—it was not settled until the 1950s. Candle and Deering, which both began as stampede trading posts, also grew with both Inupiaq and white residents. The

community of Christian converts and Quaker missionaries on the Baldwin Peninsula also grew into an enduring settlement in part because Sheldon Jackson decided to open a government reindeer station there in 1901 with 200 animals under the management of Robert Samms. With reindeer herding thriving, Kotzebue was on its way to becoming a regional hub and a population center. Similar efforts were implemented in 1905 in Deering and in Kobuk and the Selawik area two years later. Another important element in the creation of villages was the continued spread of missionary efforts and the construction of churches.<sup>18</sup>

More than a century has passed since gold-seekers first arrived in the region and conducted their brief, frenzied search for Arctic gold. And some might argue that an event this ephemeral is of little consequence, the ultimate flash in the pan. But the story of the Kotzebue Sound gold stampede is an important chapter in the much larger story of change in northwest Alaska that includes the whaling industry, the arrival of missionaries, waves of epidemic disease, the formation of cities and towns, and the adaptation of the Inupiaq people to modernity. It was a collision of two worlds and for indigenous people across Alaska the gold rush was a key moment when thousands of outsiders arrived and brought changes that reverberated through the region like ripples on a pond. Another significant effect of this and other gold stampedes (including the big ones in the Klondike and Nome) was how they changed the world's understanding of Alaska. When the stampeders returned home and told their stories, they established, almost overnight, Alaska's reputation as a land of great potential, great beauty, and great danger, an exotic place where adventure-seekers test themselves against unforgiving wilderness and where daily life offers challenges unknown at tamer latitudes.

The gold rush history of northern Alaska and Kotzebue Sound is documented today in large part because of the management goals of national parks that now cover much of the area where this historical action occurred. These parklands, with a combined size of over 20 million acres, cover most the Brooks Range, significant stretches of the Kobuk and Noatak rivers, and lands that flank the entrance to Kotzebue Sound. They include Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, Noatak National Preserve, Kobuk Valley National Park, Cape Krusenstern National Monument, and Bering Land Bridge National Preserve. All of these parks

were created in 1980 by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, commonly known as ANILCA. These protected places are mandated to preserve for the benefit of future generations “certain lands and waters . . . [with] nationally significant natural, scenic, historic, archeological, geological, scientific, wilderness, cultural, recreational, and wildlife values.”<sup>19</sup> This study of gold-seekers in the Arctic contributes to this mission by shedding light on an overlooked chapter in Alaska’s history and helping us to better understand the ambitions (and the dashed hopes) of the men and women who sought their fortunes on distant shores.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> “No Gold in Kotzebue,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 30, 1899, 3; “Country of Death,” *Seattle Daily Times*, July 18, 1899, 8. See also, “Trail of Dead,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 1899, 1; “Great Distress in Alaska,” *New York Times*, July 23, 1899, 11; “Hundred Lives Sacrificed in Kotzebue,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 1899, 1; “Death Its Guard,” *Boston Daily Globe*, July 27, 1899, 12; “Murdered by Natives,” *Boston Globe*, August 15, 1899, 3; “Hemmed in and Starving,” *Nebraska State Journal*, August 25, 1899, 1; “Tale of Woe and Death,” *Indianapolis Journal*, August 25, 1899, 4; “Gold Seekers in Need,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 25, 1899, 1.

<sup>2</sup> “Kotzebue Sound Gold Seekers,” *Sacramento Record-Union*, August 23, 1899, 1.

<sup>3</sup> “Kotzebue Sound,” *Seattle Daily Times*, July 6, 1899, 4.

<sup>4</sup> “Ardencraig Nearly Lost Her Windlass,” *San Francisco Call*, May 26, 1899, 9. Bernard Cogan had two sons and three daughters—Elizabeth, Gertrude, and Catharine. Elizabeth (known as Lizzie) also accompanied Cogan to Alaska in 1899 and was at the Quaker mission in Kotzebue Sound, but it is not known if she went whaling on the *Alaska* that year.

<sup>5</sup> “Gold at Kotzebue,” *Boston Daily Globe*, October 16, 1899, 4; “Gold Found on Kotzebue Sound,” *San Francisco Call*, October 3, 1899, 7. Other reports of gold from the same area appeared in “From the Kobuk,” *Nome Gold Digger*, December 13, 1899, 1; “From Kotzebue Sound,” *Nome News*, December 16, 1899, 2; “Find on Reed River,” *Nome Gold Digger*, February 21, 1900, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Cogan invested his earnings as a whaling captain in what turned out to be a real estate bubble centered on the emerging city of Los Angeles. When the bubble burst, fortunes were lost. In spite of his losses in the real estate market, at the end of his life Cogan owned acreage in Oakland, Fresno, and Trinity County near Redding, California. For more see, Glenn S. Dumke, “The Boom of the 1880s in Southern California,” *Southern California Quarterly* 76 (Spring 1994), 99-114; T.S. Van Dyke, *Millionaires of a Day: An Inside History of the Great Southern California 'Boom'* (New York: Fords, Howard and Hulbert, 1890); and Richard Striner, *Hard Times: Economic Depressions in America* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> “Epidemic of Typhoid Fever at Cape Nome,” *San Francisco Call*, April 16, 1900, 1. Over the winter of 1899-1900 there were 300 cases of typhoid in Nome and at least 30 sufferers died.

<sup>8</sup> “Whalers Successful,” *San Francisco Call*, November 17, 1899, 2; “Died,” *San Francisco Call*, November 19, 1899, 18. The death notice from this newspaper read: “[Died] at sea, November 6, 1899, Joseph A. Cogan, beloved son of Bernard and Catherine M. Cogan, and brother of Catherine, John and Gertrude Cogan and Mrs. Lizzie Calderwood, a native of New Jersey, aged 21 years and 2 months.”

<sup>9</sup> “Rivalry Among Whalers to Be First at Nome,” *San Francisco Call*, March 19, 1900, 6; “Violent Storm Wrecks the Bark Alaska on Nome Beach,” *San Francisco Call*, June 27, 1900, 7.

<sup>10</sup> “Paystreak Not Found,” *Nome News*, February 2, 1901, 4; “Stampeders Heard From,” *Nome News*, March 2, 1901, 1; “Horse Meat for Dinner,” *Nome News*, March 6, 1901, 4; “Strike on Keewalik,” *Nome News*, September 5, 1901, 2; “An Arctic Eldorado,” *Nome News*, September 19, 1901, 1; “Rocked Out 43 Ounces,” *Nome News*, October 3, 1901, 1; “\$117.00 in One Pan,” *Nome News*, November 15, 1901, 1; “At the Hotels,” *Los Angeles Herald*, January 4, 1902, 6.

<sup>11</sup> “Coogan’s Rich Strike,” *Nome News*, April 10, 1901, 4; “News from the Far North,” *Nome News*, September 30, 1901, 3.

<sup>12</sup> “Found the Rich Ledge,” *Nome News*, August 8, 1902. *Com grano salis* is Latin for “with a grain of salt” or “with a bit of common sense or skepticism.”

<sup>13</sup> “Kobuk Williams,” *Nome News*, July 22, 1902, 4; “Captain Coogan Is Crazy,” *Nome News*, August 8, 1902, 1; “Skipper Insane Aboard His Boat,” *San Francisco Call*, August 22, 1902, 7; “Captain Coogan Insane,” *Los Angeles Herald*, August 22, 1902, 10.

<sup>14</sup> “Capt. Coogan Lost at Sea,” *Nome News*, October 7, 1902, 1; “Sea Sweeps Skipper from Small Schooner,” *San Francisco Call*, October 24, 1902, 6; “Was Captain of the Old School,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 27, 1902, 11; “Half Century on the Sea,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, November 5, 1902, 10; “Old Whaler Drowned,” *Honolulu Evening Bulletin*, November 26, 1902, 2.

<sup>15</sup> “Strike on the Shungnak,” *Nome News*, January 23, 1903, 1; “Great Report from Kobuk,” *Nome Semi-Weekly News*, June 9, 1903, 2; “Great Riches in the Kobuk,” *Nome News*, September 25, 1903, 1. The steamer *John Reilly* continued to operate on the Kobuk River and in Kotzebue Sound until October 13, 1905. The vessel had departed Kiwalik that day bound for Kotzebue with ten tons of general merchandise when it ran aground. Six crewmen escaped to the beach and a small amount of cargo was salvaged. The vessel had no insurance. *U.S. Customs Wreck Report*, February 15, 1906.

<sup>16</sup> “Arrives from the Kobuk,” *Nome Industrial Worker*, December 22, 1903, 1; “Freight Rate to Shungnak,” *Nome Semi-Weekly News*, July 31, 1903, 1; “Shungnak Quiet,” *Dawson Daily News*, April 18, 1904, 3; “Expert Tells of Kobuk District,” *Fairbanks Daily Times*, October 3, 1906, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Philip S. Smith and Henry M. Eakin, “The Shungnak Region, Kobuk Valley” and “The Squirrel River Placers” in *Mineral Resources of Alaska: Report on Progress of Investigations in 1910*. U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 480. Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1911, 271-319.

<sup>18</sup> “New Reindeer Station,” *San Francisco Call*, May 29, 1901, 10; Roxanne Willis, “A New Game in the North: Alaska Native Reindeer Herding, 1890-1940,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 37 (Autumn 2006), 277-301; “The Rise and Fall of Reindeering,” in “The Kotzebue Basin,” *Alaska Geographic* 8 (1981), 140-141. For more about the formation of Kotzebue Sound villages see, Douglas D. Anderson, et al., *Kuuvanniit Subsistence: Traditional Eskimo Life in the Latter Twentieth Century* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1977), 52-60. Today there are Quaker churches in all eleven of the region’s villages.

<sup>19</sup> Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980, Title I, Section 101 (Purposes), December 2, 1980.



Clyde Baldwin of the Long Beach and Alaska Mining & Trading Company poses with his Kodak box camera soon after arriving on the Kobuk River, 1898. Bancroft Library, Portraits of Joseph Grinnell's Family (1973.44).

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*Seattle Daily Times*  
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## APPENDIX A

## STAMPEDER CAMPS ON THE KOBUK RIVER

This list was compiled by Carl von Knobelsdorff during one of his winter journeys up the Kobuk River and back down again. He counted 800 inhabitants in roughly thirty camps, some large, some a single cabin. The list survives because Joseph Grinnell copied it into his journal which was later published as *Gold Hunting in Alaska* (1901). It begins with Buckeye Camp, the camp closest to the Kobuk River mouth, and indicates how far each camp was from the previous one. On this occasion Knobelsdorff only reached the Pah River and only heard about camps on the Reed River second-hand. The fourth on the list—Reilly Wreck—refers to the place Bernard Cogan's steamer *John Reilly* collided with a gravel bar and was stranded for the winter. All told there were at least thirty-five stampeder camps on the Kobuk and a few more on the Selawik and Buckland rivers during the winter of 1898-1899. The list does not include the Inupiaq camps along the Kobuk that were home to an estimated 300 people.

- Buckeye Camp (40 miles from Kobuk River mouth)
- Orphans' House (35 miles)
- Sproud's Camp (.5 mile)
- Reilly Wreck (9 miles)
- Falkenberg Camp (9 miles)
- Lower Kotzebue Camp (1 mile)
- Indian Camp (12 miles)
- Jesse Lou Camp (20 miles)
- Sunnyside (12 miles)
- Lower Hanson Camp (.5 mile)
- Lower Penelope Camp and Lower Iowa Camp (3 miles)
- Guardian Camp (4 miles)
- Ambler City (30 miles)
- Upper Hanson Camp (3 miles)
- Mulkey's Landing (50 miles)
- Camp Reilly (4 miles)
- Agnes E. Boyd Camp (4 miles)
- Upper Iowa Camp (10 miles)
- Kogoluktuk River (6 miles up): Upper Penelope Camp and riverboat *Helen*
- Stoney Camp and Kate Sudden Gulch (10 miles)
- Farnsworth Camp (3 miles)
- Nugget Camp (3 miles)
- Upper Guardian Camp (8 miles)
- Davenport Camp (5 miles)
- Leslie D. Camp (5 miles)
- Ralston Camp (8 miles)
- Captain Green's Camp at Pah River (2 miles)
- Reed River camps (75 miles farther)

**APPENDIX B**

**A LIST OF STAMPEDERS DEAD AND MISSING**

Although many Kotzebue Sound stampeders reported fatalities, the precise number of dead is difficult to calculate. This list was compiled by William Alston Hayne, Jr., a former school superintendent who came north in 1898 with a group from Santa Barbara, California. These forty-six names, which appeared in the *San Francisco Call*, represent only a portion of those who died, but it illustrates the range of diseases and accidents that killed at least one hundred gold-seekers and perhaps more. The list seems to distinguish between scurvy and “black leg” although they are the same disease.

**PERISHED IN KOTZEBUE SOUND**

*San Francisco Call*, August 21, 1899

Hayne notes,

This list does not include thirty-six who were drowned when the *Jane Gray* was lost. Neither does it include the last reported deaths from drowning of the men who left Hotham Inlet for Cape Nome. The Indians have reported the boats lost and the men drowned. Robert Becker, F. Kudder, F. Johnson, D. McCall and Captain Smith, mentioned on the list, were on steam schooner No. 1. The two Pickering brothers are said to have been shot by Indians, whom they ill-treated.

Name	Home	Age	Place of Death	Cause of Death
J.L. Onderdonk	Portland, OR	----	Spring Gulch	overwork
E.C. Mead	Sumner, WA	64	----	----
Jesse Lou	----	----	----	black leg
Charles O. Leonard	Cleveland, OH	40	Stony Camp	heart failure
Sabin Harris	Oakland, CA	79	Reilly Camp	black leg
T.T. Trussler	San Francisco, CA	35	Nugget Creek	dropsy
F. Snyder	Seattle, WA	35	Reed River	spinal meningitis
C.R. Hay	Lawrence, KS	50	Ambler City	scurvy
H. Gross	Kansas City, KS	50	Ambler City	scurvy
G.E. Miller	Iowa	45	Miller's Pass	drowned
Captain C. Smith	Blakeley, WA	----	Selawik River	scurvy
A.C. Breed	Buffalo, NY	70	Pick River	black leg
J.J. Murrat	Los Angeles, CA	55	Kogoluktuk River	scurvy
M. Nelson	Hammond, ID	45	Monolook River	black leg
J. Berchey	Lecome, WA		Kobuk River	black leg
J. Chrandor	Healdsburg, CA	67	Kotzebue Camp	----
N.P. Brown	Kansas	63	Monolook River	black leg
Robert Becker	San Francisco, CA	----	Pick River	suicide
F. Kudder	Bay City, MI	----	Selawik River	scurvy
F. Johnson	Blakeley, WA	----	Selawik River	scurvy

D. McCall	Velit, WI	-----	Selawik River	scurvy
Jack Messing	San Jose, CA	45	Steamer <i>Agnes E. Boyd</i>	heart failure
Pickering Brothers	Princeton, KY	-----	Selawik River	murdered
W.L. Simpson	McDermot, NV	50	Monolook River	scurvy
C. Benjamin	Grand Harbor, ND	50	Reed River	scurvy
George McCoy	Montana	-----	Noatak River	missing
Charles Deidrick	Spearfish, SD	-----	Selawik River	missing
Frank Robinson	Utah	55	Noatak River	scurvy
Mr. Treisite	California	40	Noatak River	scurvy
Joseph Dobbins	South America	-----	Noatak River	scurvy
Joe Stearn	Butte City, MT	-----	Noatak River	scurvy
A.M. Fairbill	Texas	45	Quaker mission	scurvy
Mr. Martis	Santa Rosa, CA	45	Noatak River	missing
F. Howard	Fall River, MA	-----	Hotham Inlet	drowned
J. Howard	Fall River, MA	-----	Hotham Inlet	drowned
J. Graham	Fall River, MA	-----	Hotham Inlet	drowned
S. Wilmoth	Fall River, MA	-----	Hotham Inlet	drowned
John Morris	London, England	-----	Escholtz Bay	drowned
Unknown	-----	-----	Hotham Inlet	drowned
J. Freeman	Seattle, WA	-----	Escholtz Bay	accidentally shot
Peter Nelson	Fairhaven, WA	55	Selawik River	scurvy
Mr. Benz	Bay City, MI	57	Kogoluktuk River	scurvy
L.J. Bernhardt	Seattle, WA	46	Escholtz Bay	drowned
Martino Borally	Italy	39	Quaker mission	scurvy
S.F. Muller	San Francisco, CA	-----	Kotzebue Camp	drowned





The ill-fated expedition was composed of people from every state in the Union. Professional men, clergymen, business men, farmers, mechanics, miners, and common laboring men, in the excitement of the hour and enchanted by the wonderful stories told of the marvelously rich finds on the Kowak River, quit the staid pursuits of ordinary life and rushed into the wild and unexplored region of the Arctic to hunt for gold.

—Eugene McElwaine, *The Truth About Alaska* (1901)