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THE LAST FRONTIER: JEWISH PIONEERS IN ALASKA

by

Matthew J. Eisenberg

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for Ordination**

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1991

Referee, Dr. Jacob R. Marcus

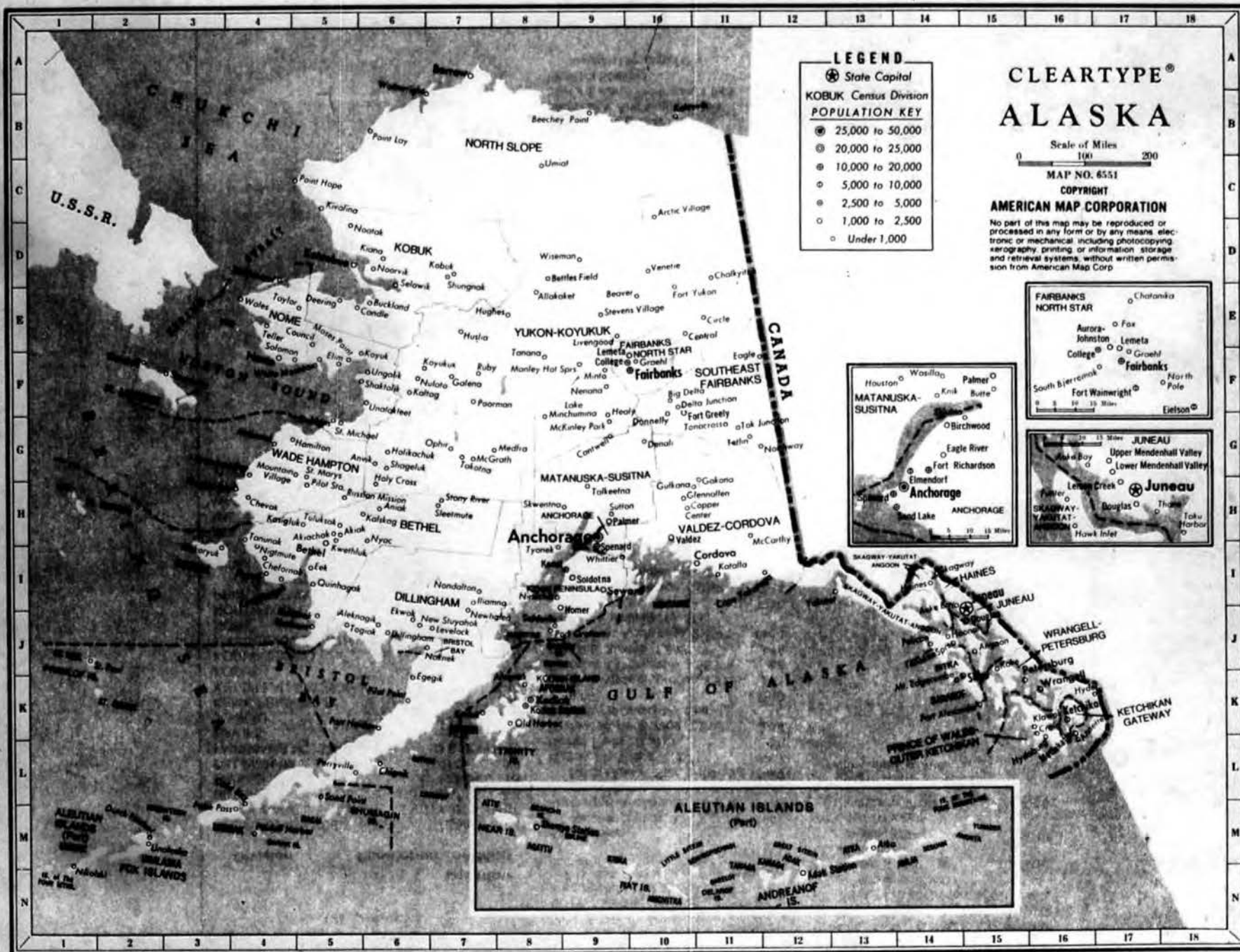
To: Patricia, my travel companion and life-mate,

and in memory of two remarkable women --
Jessie S. Bloom and Bernice Bloomfield.

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THESIS DIGEST --

THE LAST FRONTIER: JEWISH PIONEERS IN ALASKA

Chapter One: Alaska is, by far, the largest state in the Union. In 1741, an expedition underwritten by the Russians and captained by the Danish explorer, Vitus Bering, discovered the western coast of Alaska. There is evidence to suggest that one or more Jews may have been among Bering's crew. The Russians brought back sea-otter pelts to Siberia, thereby launching Russian fur trading fleets toward Alaskan waters. The Russians' governing agency in the colony was the Russian-American Company, which administered the territory until October 18, 1867. On that day, Mr. Benjamin Levi raised the stars and stripes over Sitka and symbolically transferred Alaska to the American sphere of influence.

Chapter Two: Jews, representing four of the seven partners of the Alaska Commercial Company (A.C.C.), played a major role in the economic development of the Alaska Territory. The Alaska Commercial Company bought a twenty year lease from the government to harvest fur seals on the Pribilof Islands. Many Jews, several who worked for the A.C.C., and others who worked independently, played an important function in the fur trading economy. We learn about these men from eyewitness accounts and reports in the Alaskan press. During this time, we also see unsuccessful attempts at Jewish communal organization.

Chapter Three: Alaska's first gold strike occurred in 1880, at Juneau. This strike was followed by gold rushes in: the Klondike in 1898; Nome in 1899; Fairbanks in 1903; Ruby in 1907; and Iditarod in 1910. Jews were among the prospectors, but made more significant contributions as merchants and outfitters. In 1901, Alaska's first Jewish organization was

founded at Nome. Sixty charter members established the Nome Hebrew Benevolent Society. In April 1915, President Wilson announced the building of the Alaska Railroad. The base of operations was Anchorage, which attracted thousands, many Jews among them, with employment and lucrative economic prospects.

Chapter Four: This chapter concentrates on the Jewish history of Fairbanks. Robert Bloom helped organize the Chevra Bikur Cholim in 1908. Bloom, his wife Jessie, and their four daughters, constituted the Jewish community until the Second World War and the arrival of Jewish G.I.s. The Blooms became the chaplains and surrogate parents for hundreds of Jewish G.I.s. during those years.

Chapter Five: Summary of chapters one through four and a brief update of the Jewish communities in Juneau, Anchorage, and Fairbanks.

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1989, my wife and I visited Alaska, commonly known as "the last frontier." I had been hired by the Jewish Congregation of Fairbanks, to be their first ever resident rabbi, or more accurately rabbinical student. Our encounters with magnificent nature and compassionate persons, lured us back for the summer of 1990. During those summers, we learned many of the things, both natural and spiritual, which draw people to this great northern country. However, when we sought to learn about Jewish Pioneers in Fairbanks, and how they associated among themselves, there were few facts. To research some of those Jewish pioneers, in Fairbanks, Juneau, and Anchorage, presented itself as a worthwhile rabbinic thesis. Honorable in that, Jewish pioneers' memories would be honored through publication. Moreover, this thesis was written to honor today's Alaskan Jews who consistently strive, against considerable hardships, to survive and strengthen our people Israel.

A note on scope and methodology. This thesis is a partial history of Jewish Pioneers in Alaska. There was an abundance of source material for certain people and places, and a dearth for others. With more time, additional source material might be uncovered on other people and places. The thesis is limited to the time span beginning with the discovery of Alaska, and ending with the lives of the first Jewish pioneers in Juneau, Fairbanks, and Anchorage.

At first glance, there may appear to be a methodological problem with this history. After all, the Jews who came to Juneau and Fairbanks were in pursuit of gold, whereas those in Anchorage followed the railroad's development. How can one write about all three of these communities when

their *raison d'être* were not the same? It is true that different economic factors drew Jewish Pioneers to each town. However, the existence of economic opportunity was the common thread. Jews trekked to "the last frontier" to better their economic lot -- whether it was through fur trading, gold prospecting, merchandising, or a combination -- they came to Alaska for her economic enticements.

Another aspect of this thesis must be explained. There is a section on the Klondike Gold Rush which was located in Dawson City, Yukon Territory. While it is true that Dawson is not in Alaska, it is also true that Dawson was crucial to the development of gold mining in Alaska. Gold fever attracted people to Juneau, Alaska in 1880; pulled them to Dawson, Yukon Territory, in 1898; and then to Fairbanks to 1903. It would be impossible to make sense of the gold stampedes without Dawson, Yukon Territory.

The history of Jewish Pioneers in Alaska, is the story of rugged human beings in search of economic security and wealth, and endowed with a fierce sense of individualism. These members of our people Israel, occasionally overcame their individualistic tendencies and gathered to pray, and associate as a Jewish community. These courageous men and women provide us a glimpse into American Jewish History on "the last frontier."

Matthew J. Eisenberg
February 1991 / Adar 5751

CHAPTER ONE

THE DISCOVERY OF ALASKA -- Vitus Bering -- JEWS MAY HAVE ARRIVED WITH BERING -- THE BEGINNING OF THE RUSSIAN PERIOD -- RUSSIAN ALASKA BECOMES AMERICAN ALASKA. BENJAMIN LEVI RAISES THE FLAG -- Jews' Role In The Economic Development And Purchase Of Alaska

THE DISCOVERY OF ALASKA

"Alaska." No name is more fitting, and it is to United States Senator Charles Sumner that we owe gratitude. He proposed the name in 1867 while urging Congress to ratify the Treaty of Cession of Russian America to the United States. In his speech, which has become a classic in Alaskan literature, Senator Sumner asserted:

Clearly any name borrowed from classical history or from individual invention will be little better than a misnomer or a nickname unworthy of such an occasion. The name should come from the county itself. It should be indigenous, aboriginal. Happily such a name exists.¹

In the language of the Aleuts, "Alaska" means "Great Land."² Alaska encompasses 591,004 square miles, or approximately 2.2 times the area of Texas, the largest state in the lower forty-eight.³ She is larger than the 13

¹ Agnes Rush Burr, *Alaska: Our Beautiful Northland of Opportunity* (Boston: The Page Company, 1919), p. 246.

² Ernest Gruening, *The State of Alaska* (New York: Random House, 1954), p. 3. However according to Sol Ripinsky, Alaska is an English derivation of the Icelandic word "Alakshoa," which means the land of glaciers. See, Sol Ripinsky, "An Alaskan Report - 1909," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XI, No. 1, October 1978, p. 56.

³ Clause M. Naske and Herman E. Slotnick, *Alaska: A History of the 49th State, Second Edition* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), p. 5.

original states of the Union, measuring over 2,000 miles in length and 1,400 miles in breadth. Alaska's ecological diversity is as incredible as her size. Alaska possesses arctic plains; millions of acres of forests; swamps; glaciers and ice fields; broad valleys; fjords; Denali (Mt. McKinley), the tallest mountain in North America; active volcanoes; twelve major river systems; three million lakes; and countless islands.⁴

Humanity discovered Alaska rather late in the quest to explore and dominate new worlds. Until the early eighteenth century, the North Pacific was the least known area of the world.⁵ It was the Russians who sought to discover it, as they ventured beyond Siberia. Siberia had proven to be a great storehouse of fur-bearing wildlife. In those days conservation was not seriously considered,⁶ so as fewer Siberian furs were harvested, Tsarist eyes looked across the Pacific.

Peter the Great (1696-1725) was curious to discover what lay beyond Siberia. He wondered: Were the continents of Asia and America joined? Already there was an European and an Asiatic Russia, might there be an American Russia also?

Vitus Bering

To satisfy this curiosity, Peter the Great appointed Vitus Bering, a Danish explorer who had served in the Imperial Russian Navy for some thirty years.⁷ Under Bering, two successive Kamchatka⁸ expeditions were

⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

⁶ Ernest Gruening, *The State of Alaska* (New York: Random House, 1954), p. 4.

⁷ Agnes Rush Burr, *Alaska: Our Beautiful Northland of Opportunity* (Boston: The Page Company, 1919), p. 245.

commissioned: a first to determine whether or not the continents of Asia and America were joined; and a second to thoroughly explore eastern Siberia and the American coast opposite it.

The first expedition departed from Saint Petersburg, in February, 1725.⁹ The materials and supplies for the ships, except for the lumber, had to be transported some six thousand miles across the massive continent. The ship was built on the Kamchatka Peninsula between April and July 1728. On July 14, 1728, the *Saint Gabriel* sailed northward. On August 15th, Bering, with the approval of his officers, ordered the expedition to turn about "because the coast did not extend further north" and no other land was near.¹⁰ The overland journey back to Saint Petersburg required a year and a half, and arrived March 1, 1730. There, Bering's results were deemed inconclusive and unsatisfactory. He had proved the separation of the Asiatic and American continents, but nothing concerning what lay further east.¹¹

The second expedition was ordered in 1732, by the Empress Elizabeth.¹² Once again Bering began several years of preparation and transportation of materials. However, due to political intrigue and bureaucratic interference, it was not until the morning of June 4, 1741, that the expedition set sail.¹³

⁸ Kamchatka is a peninsula, approximately 750 miles long, in Northeastern Siberia, projecting southward from the Asian mainland between the Sea of Okhotsk (west) and the Bering Sea and the Pacific Ocean (east).

⁹ Ernest Gruening, *The State of Alaska* (New York: Random House, 1954), p. 4.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 5.

¹² Peter the Great died in 1725, but his instructions that: a) the first Kamchatka expedition continue; and b) his dream of discovering what lay beyond Siberia, were faithfully carried out by his successors, Catherine (1725-1727) his wife, and Elizabeth his daughter. See, H. H. Bancroft, *History of Alaska 1730-1885* (New York: Antiquarian Press Ltd., 1960), p. 36.

¹³ Ibid., p. 67.

JEW MAY HAVE ARRIVED WITH BERING

At this point the reader may wonder, what does this have to do with the history of Jews in Alaska? Was not David Shirpser, who in 1867 arrived in Sitka,¹⁴ the first Jew to set foot in Alaska? The answer, is probably not. Dr. Jacob R. Marcus, eminent American Jewish Historian and faculty member of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, emphatically states: "There is no Jew who is the first Jew anywhere, there is always one who has been there before him."¹⁵ Sol Ripinsky, a Russian Jew, was an early pioneer in Alaska. On September 28, 1905, he wrote to the Jewish newspaper, *The American Israelite*:

In October, 1885, while at Sitka, I was commissioned by the general agent, Bureau of Education, to proceed to the Aleutian Islands in the interest of government schools for the Aleuts. After many delays and being shipwrecked, and enduring many hardships I reached Unalaska. . . .

At one time while in Unalaska I was called on by a priest of the Greek Russian Church. He asked me what was my religion, and when told, said he was always glad to meet with Jews, as he was half Jewish himself. "My name is Moses Salamatop and I am the Greek priest at Unga. One of my forefathers came to Alaska in one of the ships with Vitus Bering in the capacity of an officer, and there were several more Jews in the same expedition." On one of his visits Father Salamatop presented me with one of his photographs.

So it is in Alaska, as at any other point of the globe, the Jew is among the first to explore and exploit, the most substantial, the most enterprising, charitable, when charity does good, and an honor to his community. In 1886, I was transferred in the interest of education to

¹⁴ Bernard Postal and Lionel Koppman, *American Jewish Landmarks: A Travel Guide and History Volume IV* (New York: Fleet Press Corporation, 1986), p. 35. See also, Cyril Edel Leonoff, "Pioneer Jewish Merchants of Vancouver Island," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XIII, No. 1, October, 1980, pp. 21-22.

¹⁵ Dr. Jacob R. Marcus, from a tape recorded History II lecture, at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, Ohio. March 30, 1989.

the headwaters of Lynn Canal, Chilkat Peninsula, at present known as Haines.¹⁶

Apparently, a Jew or Jews, as yet unidentified, accompanied Bering to Alaska in 1741, one hundred twenty-six years before Mr. Shripser arrived in Sitka.¹⁷ Later, Jews were attracted to the Alaska Territory by economic opportunities, which in Bering's lifetime, were as yet undiscovered. Those discoveries were very close upon the horizon.

THE BEGINNING OF THE RUSSIAN PERIOD

Georg Wilhelm Steller, a German-born naturalist, and the expedition's physician, recorded the first meeting between Russians and Aleuts. This first encounter followed the pattern of other European-aboriginal contacts.

¹⁶ Sol Ripinsky, "An Alaskan Report - 1909," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XI, No. 1, October 1978, p. 56.

Later, there are other documented cases of Jews who were baptized or converted, but still retained something of a Jewish soul. One such case is that of Pavel Levin, son of Moshe Levin, who was baptized Russian Orthodox and became a monk in 1889, taking the name Iosif. His brother, Boris, had been baptized in 1886. Both had been baptized in San Francisco. The two were sent to Killisnoo to work among the Tlingits. Killisnoo, was a small settlement dominated by one industry, the pressing of herring oil. One of its leading citizens was an exiled Russian by the name of Iosif Florovich Zubov, who did not appreciate some of Iosif Levin's views. Iosif Levin, apparently, criticized the family customs of the Tlingits calling them "thieves, profligates, drunks selling your wives and daughters." Moreover, he was accused by the resident Russians of being a Talmudist, not a Russian Orthodox. Iosif Levin was said to have preached that the Virgin Mary and Christ were both Jews; that the teaching of love among men was practiced 3000 years before the birth of Christ; and that Russians were baptized under the threat of death if they refused. After these accusations, Iosif Levin was returned to San Francisco where an American doctor diagnosed him on the verge of a nervous breakdown. See, Antoinette Shalkop, *The Russian Orthodox Church In Alaska*, a term paper, October 20, 1981, pp. 28-30. Jewish Congregation of Fairbanks Archives. Dr. Michael Krauss, archivist.

¹⁷ H. H. Bancroft, *History of Alaska 1730-1885* (New York: Antiquarian Press Ltd., 1960). See note 21 on pp. 93-94 for the list of men on the expedition. The list was checked with Dr. Herbert Paper, linguistics professor at the HUC-JIR, Cincinnati, Ohio. In Dr. Paper's opinion none of the names is Jewish, however, he did note the possibility that Jews may have changed their names to conceal their ancestry. There is historical precedent for Jews changing their names.

Initially all the parties expressed friendliness, until a misunderstanding or supposed aggression occurred. As Steller reported, the Russians fired their muskets over the heads of the natives and laughed as the startled natives dived to the ground.¹⁸ Steller noted that the Aleuts "waved their hands to us to be off quickly as they did not want us any longer."¹⁹

The Aleuts may have wished the Russians away, but it was a wish in vain. Steller and the other survivors of Bering's crew²⁰ carried back a number of sea-otter pelts to Kamchatka. Within a few years, hordes of Siberian fur traders sailed to reap the rich fur harvest of the Aleutian and Commander Islands. This was the beginning of Russia's presence in Alaska.

For most of the next half century, the rulers of Russia showed little interest in Alaskan affairs. The Russians who sought animal pelts, were private individuals lured by immense profits and a ready market in China.²¹ Their conquest of the Aleutian Islands was systematic. They exploited one group of islands at a time, until the supply of animals was exhausted, then they moved eastward to the next island group, eventually reaching the mainland.²² As the operating distance from the Kamchatka Peninsula increased, the cost of doing business drove out many smaller companies. By 1770 a few merchants -- Pavel Sergeyevich Lebedev-Lastochkin, G. Panov, and Grigory Ivanovich Shelikhov -- dominated the Aleutian fur trade.²³

¹⁸ William R. Hunt, *Alaska: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1976), p. 23.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁰ Bering and many of his crew died of scurvy before they returned to Kamchatka in the summer of 1742.

²¹ Clause M. Naske and Herman E. Slotnick, *Alaska: A History of the 49th State, Second Edition* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), p. 28.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

These merchants became increasingly disturbed by foreign competition, especially the British, who could offer the Natives better and cheaper goods than the Russians. It is at this point that we find reference to another Jew sailing the Bering Sea, who was probably one of those foreign competitors. In 1787-1788, Senhor Cavalho, a Portuguese Marrano, was a secret partner of the governor of Macao;²⁴ ... Cavalho fitted out in conjunction with English, Chinese and Russian merchants two vessels ... to explore trading possibilities in the Northwest and in Alaska.²⁵ Responding to foreign competition, in 1788, Shelikhov and his partner, traveled to Saint Petersburg and implored Catherine II (1762-1796) to give them a monopoly of the fur trade.²⁶ They were denied. Deeply disappointed, they returned to their settlement on Kodiak Island.

By 1790, this initial phase of Russian presence in Alaska was coming to an end.²⁷ Large companies, with settlements on Kodiak Island, Cook Inlet, the Pribilof Islands,²⁸ and the Aleutian Islands, had displaced the small traders. Disputes among the rival companies erupted frequently, but with

²⁴ Macao is a Portuguese administered territory and port in Southeast China, south of Canton. It is the oldest permanent European settlement in Asia, dating to 1557. In 1849, Portugal declared it a free port. It will revert to China in 1999.

²⁵ Israel T. Namaani, *The Jewish Frontier* (gally proof), September, 1958. American Jewish Archives, Alaska Near - print file.

²⁶ Clause M. Naske and Herman E. Slotnick, *Alaska: A History of the 49th State, Second Edition* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), p. 31.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁸ "The Pribilofs were discovered in June 1786 by a Russian navigator named Gehrman (or Gerasim) Pribilof, who was looking for sea otter, not for fur seals. The finding of the immense seal rookeries led to the establishment by several rival Russian companies of settlements on the islands, until then, uninhabited. These villages were populated by Aleuts imported from Unalaska and other Aleutian islands. By 1796 indiscriminate slaughter had reduced the seal herds to a fraction of their former size. In 1799 Tsar Paul I granted a semi-official corporation, the Russian-American Company, a sealing and trade monopoly as well as a large measure of political control throughout Alaska." Gerstle Mack, *Lewis and Hannah Gerstle* (New York: Gerstle Mack, 1953), p. 31. Also note, the Pribilof Islands consist of two islands, Saint George and Saint Paul.

no existing government to mediate, violence occasionally occurred. One thing these companies did agree upon -- foreign competition had to be reduced.

At the time of Shelikhov's death in 1795, his desire to obtain exclusive fur trading rights was unfulfilled. His son-in-law and successor as head of the company, Nikolay Petrovich Rezanov, reached an agreement in 1797 with his leading business rival, to consolidate and form the United American Company.²⁹ Rezanov, unlike his father-in-law, was a member of the nobility and had access to the royal court. Thus, when Rezanov requested of Paul I (1796-1801) a monopoly of the American fur trade, it was granted in the name of the Russian-American Company. The lease, issued in 1799, was to span twenty years, and give exclusive rights as far south as the fifty-fifth parallel. During the next sixty-eight years, the Russian-American Company signed three lease agreements with the Russian Government; was the exclusive commercial enterprise in Russian America; and also exercised the governing power.³⁰

RUSSIAN ALASKA BECOMES AMERICAN ALASKA, BENJAMIN LEVI RAISES THE FLAG

The end of the Russian Empire in the New World and its transformation into Alaska, an American territory, occurred at 3:00 p.m. on October 18, 1867. The transformation was held before United States Troops, soldiers of the Siberian Line Battalion, Russian Naval personnel, officials of the two countries, residents, and new arrivals.³¹ Accounts of the actual flag

²⁹ Clause M. Naske and Herman E. Slotnick, *Alaska: A History of the 49th State, Second Edition* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), p. 36.

³⁰ Ernest Gruening, *The State of Alaska* (New York: Random House, 1954), p. 18.

³¹ Richard A. Pierce, "Prince D. P. Maksutov: Last Governor of Russian-America," *Journal of the West*, Vol. VI, No. 3, July, 1967, p. 405.

ceremony vary, but most state that the lowering of the Russian flag was bungled. Apparently, the Russian flag snagged on the flagstaff, a soldier climbed up and cut it down. It was embarrassing to the officials, and too much for the wife of the retiring governor Prince Maksutov to take, she fainted. The name of the young soldier who lowered and raised the flags was Benjamin Levi. His obituary appeared in *The Jewish Messenger*:

On the 9th [December 9, 1882], there died in this city [San Francisco], Benjamin Levi, noted as being the man who, . . . , when the territory of Alaska was formally turned over to the United States authorities assembled at New Archangel [Sitka], hauled down the Russian Flag, and in its stead raised the Stars and Stripes. After that Mr. Levi went to Fort Wrangell with his family,³² engaged in business and remained there until recently, when he came to San Francisco in search of medical assistance. He was for many years an employee of the Alaska Commercial Company.³³

In H. H. Bancroft's *History of Alaska 1730-1885*, he adamantly attacked any romanticization of the ceremony. Bancroft wrote:

In *Whympers Alaska*, 105-6, and in some of the Pacific coast newspapers, it is stated that the Russian flag, when lowered, clung to the yard-arm. The following extract from the *Albany State Rights Democrat*, March 26, 1875, will serve as a fair specimen of the

³² Fort Wrangell is three hundred thirty miles southeast of Sitka.

There is an humorous story told about a Captain Levy, (probably Benjamin's son) born and raised in his father's trading post at Fort Wrangell. Whenever the Tlingit Indians were in trouble with the government, they would hire Levy to interpret for them. At one important trial between "the People" and the government, the latter suspected that part of "the whole truth" was being lost in Levy's whiskers. The government sent for their own language experts. But upon their arrival, the Tlingits switched to Tlingit slang, "and the experts had to ask Levy what the Indians were talking about." N. C. McDonald, *Fish The Strong Waters* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1956), p. 25.

³³ *The Jewish Messenger*, New York, December 29, 1882, p. 2. See also, "A Pioneer Alaskan," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XIV, No. 1, October 1981, p. 91. In this citation, the *Jewish Messenger* erroneously reported October 9, 1867, as the date of transfer. In actuality, the date of transfer was October 18, 1867.

nonsense published on this manner: 'A sailor was ordered up the flagstaff, and had actually to cut the flag into shreds before he could take it down. When the American flag reached the top of the staff, it hung lifeless, until, at the first boom of the saluting Russian artillery, it gave a convulsive shudder, and at the second gun it shook out its starry folds and proudly floated in the breeze.'³⁴

Thus transpired the ceremonial transfer from Russia to the United States. Now, let us examine the conditions which helped to bring about the American purchase of Alaska.

Jews' Role In The Economic Development And Purchase Of Alaska

The governmental transition ceremony, although flawed, was relatively simple compared with the economic transition in progress. This transition from Russian territory to American territory, happened at a time when Jews could play a decisive role in that transition. According to American Jewish historian Rudolf Glanz, "merchant pioneering of American Jews had reached at the Pacific Slope such a concentration, that it acted the decisive role...."³⁵ Jews from Eastern Europe, who had learned their furrier's trade in the old country, often in Russia, typically went first to England before emigrating to America.³⁶ These skilled artisans, were in a propitious position to take advantage of the economic opportunities on the American Pacific Coast. Jewish fur traders, especially in San Francisco, transacted business with the Russian-American Company, and occasionally, some made visits to Alaska.

³⁴ H. H. Bancroft, *History of Alaska 1730-1885* (New York: Antiquarian Press Ltd., 1960), p. 600, footnote 18.

³⁵ Rudolf Glanz, *The Jews In American Alaska (1867-1880)* (New York: Dr. Rudolf Glanz, 1953), p. 3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

The Jewish fur traders of San Francisco knew that if the Russian-American Company lease was not renewed by the Russian Government, the riches of Alaska would be open for bidding. They hoped that favorable terms could be negotiated from the Russian Government, especially since many had heard Emperor Alexander II (1855-1881) was distressed over the Russian-American Company's financial problems.

The Russian-American Company had had financial problems for decades. When its third charter with the Russian Government was signed in 1844, special privileges, in the tea trade, were granted to avert the company's bankruptcy.³⁷ In 1848, efforts were made to develop export markets in coal, but shipments to San Francisco sold at a loss. In 1851, several California merchants formed the American-Russian Commercial Company, commonly called the Ice Company.³⁸ The sale of ice was prosperous for the Russian-American Company, but with the fur trade declining, there seemed to be little choice for the Russians, except to leave Alaska.³⁹ At a meeting held in Saint Petersburg in December 1866 -- attended by the emperor; Baron Edouard de Stoeckel,⁴⁰ the finance minister; and others, the decision was made to sell the colony.⁴¹ Emperor Alexander

³⁷ Clause M. Naske and Herman E. Slotnick, *Alaska: A History of the 49th State, Second Edition* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), p. 57.

³⁸ William R. Hunt, *Alaska: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1976), p. 50.

³⁹ Clause M. Naske and Herman E. Slotnick, *Alaska: A History of the 49th State, Second Edition* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), p. 58.

⁴⁰ Frank H. Sloss and Richard A. Pierce, "The Hutchinson, Kohl Story: A Fresh Look," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, January 1971, p. 5.

⁴¹ Clause M. Naske and Herman E. Slotnick, *Alaska: A History of the 49th State, Second Edition* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), pp. 56-57.

He instructed Baron Stoeckel to begin negotiations immediately upon his return to Washington, D. C., and to have the Americans make the first offer.⁴²

Less than one year earlier, in 1865, a young Jew by the name of Louis Goldstone, who worked as an agent for California fur houses, returned from a visit to Alaska with information that the Russians were ready to sell the territory.⁴³ Goldstone's employers quickly formed the California Fur Company, and in 1866, engaged as their Washington lobbyist Cornelius Cole, a senator from California.⁴⁴ In his memoirs, Senator Cole described how his intervention came about:

The charter of the company having it in charge in 1866, the Russian American Fur Company was soon to expire by lapse of time and a company was formed in San Francisco with the hope of succeeding to its privileges. These San Francisco gentlemen were put upon the notion by one Louis Goldstone, a young and enterprising Israelite, who had recently visited Alaska and had spent enough time there to gather much useful information, touching the resources of the country, and particularly about the fur trade. Goldstone's ideas about the business were regarded as extravagant, but nevertheless he was able to present sufficient data to render it reasonable certain that a large and lucrative business in furs might be built up. He had much to say about the fur seals and their habit of making annual visits in immense numbers to the island of Saint George, and the great value that might be gathered each year from their skins. Goldstone stated among other things, that the company then in possession of the franchise from the Russian Government had been exceedingly neglectful of its opportunities and cared but little for the renewal of its charter. It was hoped therefore by the San Francisco gentlemen

⁴² Ibid., p. 60. See also, Ronald J. Jensen, *The Alaska Purchase and Russian-American Relations* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), pp. 57-60.

⁴³ Bernard Postal, "Alaska," *The American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 61, 1960, p. 167.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 167. Senator Cole also had the advantage of a boyhood friendship with Secretary of State William H. Seward, who found Cole's lobbying helpful in the secret negotiations for the acquisition of Alaska.

among whom was the Collector of the Port⁴⁵ that by proper management they might obtain the coveted privilege. As I had lately been elected to the United States Senate, they thought I might be of assistance to them. Doubtless, also, the well known friendship of Russia towards America in the late struggle (Civil War) was taken into account.⁴⁶

The final phases of the purchase were completed in March of 1867. According to the story told by Secretary Seward's son Frederick, Baron Stoeckel appeared at his father's home on Friday evening March 29, and reported to Seward that Emperor Alexander II had agreed to sell the territory to the United States.⁴⁷ Stoeckel suggested that the negotiations be concluded the next day, but Seward was impatient to close the deal. The two men, and their staffs, met at the State Department that night. They began work before midnight and finally signed the Treaty of Cession of Russian America to the United States, at four o'clock a.m., March 30, 1867.⁴⁸ The treaty was ratified in May, and called for a purchase price of \$7,200,000.⁴⁹

The transfer of Russian Alaska to the United States was scheduled for October 10, 1867, now the race to buy out the Russian-American Company began. Each merchandizing company bidding to buy out the Russian-

⁴⁵ The Collector of the Port was an appointed position of the City of San Francisco. The Collector at the time of Goldstone's visit to Alaska, may very well have been Mr. John F. Miller, who on January 21, 1870, became President of the Alaska Commercial Company. See, Frank H. Sloss, *Stock Ownerships In The Alaska Commercial Company* (San Francisco: November, 1968), p. 4. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box C, File Folder 37.

⁴⁶ Rudolf Ginz, *The Jews In American Alaska (1867-1880)* (New York: Dr. Rudolf Ginz, 1953), pp. 6-7. See also, Cornelius Cole, *Memoirs of Cornelius Cole* (New York, 1908), pp. 281-282, footnote 27.

⁴⁷ Clause M. Naske and Herman E. Slotnick, *Alaska: A History of the 49th State, Second Edition* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), p. 61.

⁴⁸ Ernest Gruening, *The State of Alaska* (New York: Random House, 1954), p. 4.

⁴⁹ Agnes Rush Burr, *Alaska: Our Beautiful Northland of Opportunity* (Boston: The Page Company, 1919), p. 246.

American Company, had to consider two financial facts.⁵⁰ First, payment to the Russian-American Company for the privilege of the lease, and second, payment for its assets in Alaska which consisted of: equipment; trading posts throughout the territory; and the maintenance thereof.

The number of interested parties was great indeed. The group which won the bidding, we know as Hutchinson, Kohl, and Company; the predecessor to the Alaska Commercial Company. They bought out the Russian-American Company, and obtained a lease from the United States Government to harvest fur seals on the Pribilof Islands. To these companies, and to their principal partners, we now turn.

⁵⁰ Rudolf Glanz, *The Jews In American Alaska (1867-1880)* (New York: Dr. Rudolf Glanz, 1953), p. 7.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ANTECEDENTS OF THE ALASKA COMMERCIAL COMPANY AND ITS JEWISH PARTNERS -- EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS OF JEWISH PIONEERS IN ALASKA -- PRESS REPORTS OF DAVID SHIRPSER AND OTHER JEWISH MERCHANTS -- The Alaska Herald -- EARLY ATTEMPTS AT JEWISH ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE IN ALASKA -- Alfred Greenbaum -- Rudolph Neumann -- Sol Ripinsky

THE ANTECEDENTS OF THE ALASKA COMMERCIAL COMPANY AND ITS JEWISH PARTNERS

Less than a year after the formal transfer of Alaska from Russia to the United States, a corporation, based in San Francisco, formed under California law named the Alaska Commercial Company. The original seven partners were: Hayward M. Hutchinson, a Baltimore businessman; Louis Sloss, Lewis Gerstle,¹ and August Wasserman, all three San Francisco merchants and of German-Jewish origin; William Kohl, a shipbuilder and shipowner from Victoria, British Columbia; Leopold Boscowitz,² a Jewish fur

¹ As a point of interest, there are several places in Alaska named for Gerstle. (1) Gerstle Glacier, heads at Johnson Glacier E of Sight Peak, 34 mi. SE of Delta Junction. (2) Gerstle Point, on N shore of (3) Gerstle Bay, at mouth of Cathedral River, 33 mi. NE of the village of Cold Bay, Bristol Bay Low. Named in 1888. (4) Gerstle River, heads at Gerstle Glacier and flows N 40 mi. to Tanana River, 25 mi. SE of Big Delta, Alaska Range. Named in 1885. See Donald J. Orth, *Dictionary of Alaska Place Names* (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1967), p. 365.

² Was Leopold Boscowitz Jewish? He is not stated as such in any of the sources on the Alaska Commercial Company. However -- in Cyril Edel Leonoff, *Pioneers, Pedlars, and Prayer Shawls: The Jewish Communities In British Columbia And The Yukon* (Victoria, British Columbia: Sono Nis Press), 1978, pp. 27, 28, 74, -- a Boscowitz family is listed in Victoria, British Columbia. Joseph Boscowitz was a "pioneer Jewish fur dealer." "In 1858 the Boscowitz fur store on Wharf and Bastion Streets was one of the first business establishments in the city." "The first practicing Jewish physician in British Columbia was Dr. M. H. Boscowitz who arrived on the steamer *Pacific* 16 February 1863."

In, Frank H. Sloss, "Who Owned the Alaska Commercial Company?" *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, July 1977, p. 121, it mentions "Leopold Boscowitz, who, with his brothers, had established a fur-trading business. . . ." Therefore, Leopold Boscowitz must have been Joseph Boscowitz's brother. It is difficult to determine, however, if there was any familial relation to Dr. M. H. Boscowitz.

trader from Victoria, British Columbia; and Captain Gustave Niebaum, a Finnish ship's officer and Russian subject stationed in Sitka.³ Four of the seven original partners were Jewish.

The company's legal existence began on October 10, 1868, but those who had organized it, had already been associated as partners with an earlier firm named Hutchinson, Kohl, and Company.⁴ "It was that firm's brief but eventful career in the months following the Alaska purchase that led its partners to form the successor corporation," the Alaska Commercial Company.⁵ The manner in which the Alaska Commercial Company came to be, and how its principals bought the Russian-American Company, has been voluminously documented. The events have been reported in several sequences by several authors. In the 1970s, Frank H. Sloss; grandson of Louis Sloss, one of the founders of the Alaska Commercial Company; shed new light on the origins of the Company. The following, researched by Frank H. Sloss and Richard A. Pierce, is a newly sequenced account of how Hutchinson, Kohl, and Company met, organized, and became the Alaska Commercial Company.

THE HUTCHINSON GROUP. Mr. Hayward M. Hutchinson who had been engaged in supplying cooking utensils to the Union armies, found business

³ Frank H. Sloss and Richard A. Pierce, "The Hutchinson, Kohl Story: A Fresh Look," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, January 1971, pp. 1-2. See also footnote 40.

⁴ Frank H. Sloss, "Who Owned the Alaska Commercial Company?" *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, July 1977, p. 120. In footnote 4, Sloss writes: "The ensuing account of the formation of Hutchinson, Kohl, and Company differs from the version originally given in a statement made by Henry W. Elliott to Judge James Wickersham on March 21, 1916, now at the Alaska Historical Library, Juneau, which was used in . . . Richard A. Pierce, "Prince D. P. Maksutov: Last Governor of Russian-America," *Journal of the West*, Vol. VI, No. 3, July, 1967, pp. 395-416. The reasons for which professor Pierce and I concluded that the accepted account must be modified are explained in Frank H. Sloss and Richard A. Pierce, "The Hutchinson, Kohl Story," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, January 1971, pp. 1-6."

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

slacking off after the end of the Civil War.⁶ He was in the process of formulating his business future, when his friend, General Lovell H. Rousseau, mentioned that he had been ordered to Sitka as the American Commissioner to receive the transfer of Alaska.⁷ General Rousseau suggested Hutchinson accompany him, at least as far as San Francisco. They arrived in San Francisco, September 22, 1867.⁸ General Rousseau traveled on to Sitka, but Hutchinson stayed in San Francisco until late December of that year.

While in San Francisco, he searched for businessmen who might share his desire to invest in Alaska, he met Louis Sloss.⁹ This meeting, most likely, was not by chance. Hutchinson probably had become aware of Sloss' interest in Alaska as early as 1865.¹⁰ As mentioned above, Louis Goldstone, had formed a group in San Francisco with the hope of purchasing the lease of the Russian-American Company. (Mr. Goldstone was later to become conspicuous as a bitter enemy of the Alaska Commercial Company.) Mr. Sloss was a member of that group, for which Senator Cornelius Cole carried on negotiations with Baron Stoeckel, the Russian ambassador in Washington.¹¹

Mr. Goldstone's plan was frustrated by the purchase of Alaska, but certainly Mr. Cole and Baron Stoeckel knew who the interested parties were.¹² From them, that information may have been handed on to General Rousseau, the United States commissioner, or to his Russian counterpart

⁶ Frank H. Sloss and Richard A. Pierce, "The Hutchinson, Kohl Story: A Fresh Look," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, January 1971, p. 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Captain Alexei Peshchurov.¹³ If, during their voyage from the Atlantic Coast, the commissioners had mentioned Louis Sloss' name to Hutchinson, that would have been cause enough to seek out Sloss as a likely business associate.¹⁴ Lewis Gerstle, life-long associate and brother-in-law of Mr. Sloss, also would have been part of the arrangement.¹⁵

THE KOHL GROUP. Both William Kohl and Leopold Boscowitz lived in Victoria, British Columbia, and each previously had contacts with Prince Maksutov.¹⁶ Considering the size of Victoria and the nature of business, they must have known each other. At the time of the transfer, both were in Sitka, separately seeking business opportunities.¹⁷ Some event during that October in Sitka brought the two of them together to become the nucleus of what became the Kohl group. According to Sloss and Pierce, the clue lay in the movements of Captain Gustave Niebaum.

Either just before or just after the cession, he, with four associates, bought from Prince Maksutov the brig *Constantine*, one of the Russian-American Company vessels. He immediately started to fit it out for a voyage. His intention, obviously with Maksutov's blessing, was to proceed to the Pribilofs and pick up a cargo of sealskins, which he would take to San Francisco for sale. He made no secret of his plans; indeed, he undoubtedly talked them over with Kohl, and Kohl had good reason to pass the information on to Boscowitz. Kohl understood shipping, and Boscowitz understood sealskins; if they could jointly contrive to acquire that cargo on its arrival in San Francisco,

¹³ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁵ Frank H. Sloss, "Who Owned the Alaska Commercial Company?" *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, July 1977, p. 121. "Louis Sloss and Lewis Gerstle, both California pioneers of German-Jewish origin, were life-long associates in all their ventures and had capped their business intimacy by marrying two sisters. Sloss usually functioned as the traveler and negotiator for the firm (i.e., Louis Sloss and Company), and Gerstle as the draftsman of carefully phrased letters; in either case, one spoke for both."

¹⁶ Frank H. Sloss and Richard A. Pierce, "The Hutchinson, Kohl Story: A Fresh Look," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, January 1971, p. 5.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

and make arrangements for others to come later, the prospective profits would be staggering.¹⁸

But neither Kohl nor Boscowitz lived in San Francisco. They needed someone who had facilities for receiving, storing, and shipping furs. Presumably, Boscowitz knew, or knew of, August Wasserman the San Francisco fur dealer.¹⁹ Thus, on November 22, Boscowitz and Kohl departed for San Francisco.²⁰ There, they came to an agreement with Mr. Wasserman and returned to Sitka on January 18, 1868, to discuss with Prince Maksutov the possibility of access to seal catches in future seasons.²¹ Boscowitz and Kohl arrived in Sitka to discover Hutchinson had already secured the rights and privileges of the Russian-American Company from Prince Maksutov.²²

Before Boscowitz, Kohl, and Hutchinson actually make acquaintance for the first time, a few words need to be said about Hutchinson's negotiations with Maksutov. When Prince Maksutov announced that he had sold most of the commercial assets of the Russian-American Company to Hutchinson, there was amazement and anger on many sides.²³ Only later did Maksutov state his reason. He was a naval man, not a businessman. Maksutov's primary interests were, to calculate a fair sale price, and to complete the task quickly. Everyone tried to haggle with him, except Hutchinson who

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 5. See also, Record of Ship Clearances, Sitka, National Archives; *Daily British Colonist*, November 13, 1867; A. Honcharenko, Names of Ships Arrivals and Departures, San Francisco, Bancroft Library.

²¹ Ibid., p. 5.

²² Ibid., p. 5.

²³ Frank H. Sloss, *Only on Monday: Papers delivered before the Chit-Chat Club* (San Francisco: Frank H. Sloss, 1978), p. 76.

accepted the figure of \$350,000 and was ready to pay in gold coin.²⁴

Maksutov was quoted as saying:

You have treated me like a gentleman. You are the only man who has not tried to beat me out and cut my prices. The men you see here, have been here before you, forming combinations by which I won't get half of what I have been asking, and trying to beat me down.²⁵

It was January 1868, and now for the first time Hutchinson, Kohl, and Boscowitz were in the same place.²⁶ The three of them departed from Sitka, on January 24, aboard a ship bound for San Francisco. Aboard ship there was plenty of opportunity to explore business arrangements. The three reached an agreement relatively quickly, and upon arrival in San Francisco, had no difficulty obtaining approval from their associates;²⁷ Hutchinson from Sloss and Gerstle, Kohl and Boscowitz from Wasserman.²⁸ Thus, these six men, formed the firm of Hutchinson, Kohl, and Company. When Captain Niebaum arrived in early March with his cargo of sealskins, he was invited and accepted the position of seventh partner in the firm.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 76.

²⁵ Richard A. Pierce, "Prince D. P. Maksutov: Last Governor of Russian-America," *Journal of the West*, Vol. VI, No. 3, July, 1967, p. 404. The actual quote uses the plural 'gentlemen' supposedly referring to Hutchinson, Kohl, and Company. I adapted the quote to read 'gentleman' to refer to Mr. Hutchinson alone. This was done in light of the new information that Hutchinson negotiated alone with Maksutov -- put forth by Frank H. Sloss and Richard A. Pierce, "The Hutchinson, Kohl Story: A Fresh Look," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, January 1971 -- see note 48.

Richard A. Pierce based his original quotation on material in L. D. Kitchener, *Flag Over The North, The Story of the Northern Commercial Company* (Seattle: 1948), pp. 30-32.

²⁶ Frank H. Sloss and Richard A. Pierce, "The Hutchinson, Kohl Story: A Fresh Look," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, January 1971, p. 5.

²⁷ Frank H. Sloss, "Who Owned the Alaska Commercial Company?" *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, July 1977, p. 122.

²⁸ Frank H. Sloss and Richard A. Pierce, "The Hutchinson, Kohl Story: A Fresh Look," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, January 1971, p. 6.

All these developments were observed by Prince Maksutov, who was a fellow passenger on the voyage from Sitka.²⁹ However cloudy Maksutov's liquidation plans were at the outset, by March it was clear that Hutchinson, Kohl, and Company was the authorized commercial successor to the Russian-American Company.³⁰ That spring Maksutov escorted Hutchinson to the old company's principal outposts; Kodiak, Saint Michael, and the Pribilof Islands;³¹ to put him into possession of the buildings and equipment, and to introduce him to the personnel as their new employer.³²

The tour ended on the island of Saint Paul in the Pribilof group, where Hutchinson decided to spend the summer supervising the sealing operation. During the course of the summer, he encountered unexpected opposition from two other sealing expeditions at the islands.³³ The first was Williams, Haven,³⁴ and Company based in New London, Connecticut; the second was an expedition backed by John Parrott, a San Francisco banker.³⁵ In the words of Frank H. Sloss, "in due course . . . the Alaska Commercial Company ultimately became a combination of those three groups."³⁶

The next task at hand for the Alaska Commercial Company, was to negotiate with the United States government for the privilege of fur seal

²⁹ Frank H. Sloss, "Who Owned the Alaska Commercial Company?" *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, July 1977, p. 122.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 122.

³¹ See, chapter one, note 28 for an explanation of the Pribilof Islands.

³² Frank H. Sloss, "Who Owned the Alaska Commercial Company?" *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, July 1977, p. 122.

³³ Ibid., p. 122.

³⁴ Their full names were: Henry P. Haven and Major Thomas W. Williams. Refer Frank H. Sloss, *Supplement To Memorandum Of November, 1968 On Stock Ownerships In The Alaska Commercial Company* (San Francisco: September, 1972), pp. 7-8. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box C, File Folder 37.

³⁵ Frank H. Sloss, "Who Owned the Alaska Commercial Company?" *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, July 1977, p. 122.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 122-123.

hunting on the Pribilofs. Louis Sloss, the Company's President, went to Washington, D. C., late in 1868 for these negotiations. Progress was very slow and in hopes of making some headway, Sloss and the board of trustees resigned on January 21, 1870.³⁷ A new president, John Franklin Miller, was elected, and the new trustees were Louis Sloss, Hutchinson, Haven, and Richard H. Chapell of Connecticut.³⁸ The reason for Sloss' resignation falls into two distinct schools of thought. Frank H. Sloss, Louis Sloss' grandson, believes being Jewish was a negative factor.

In Washington, Louis Sloss made progress up to a point. He was good at hobnobbing with senators and congressmen, especially around the poker table, where he took care not to win too much. He gained a good many supporters, but not enough; adjournment came without action. By then he had concluded that his cause was hampered by having a Jew as its spokesman. He therefore resigned the presidency of the Company in favor of John F. Miller, a former Civil War general and future United States Senator who was *persona grata* among those who looked askance at a Sloss.³⁹

Another relative, Gerstle Mack, made no mention of Sloss' Jewish heritage.

She wrote, that Sloss hoped

"the negotiations might be speeded up if conducted by a company president who had legal training and who was personally acquainted with members of Grant's administration. . . ."⁴⁰

On July 1, 1870, President Grant approved an act of Congress entitled "An act to prevent the extermination of fur-bearing animals in Alaska," which instructed the Secretary of the Treasury to award a sealing concession

³⁷ Gerstle Mack, *Lewis and Hannah Gerstle* (New York: Gerstle Mack, 1953), p. 34.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³⁹ Frank H. Sloss, *Only on Monday: Papers delivered before the Chit-Chat Club* (San Francisco: Frank H. Sloss, 1978), pp. 78-79.

⁴⁰ Gerstle Mack, *Lewis and Hannah Gerstle* (New York: Gerstle Mack, 1953), p. 34.

to some responsible party.⁴¹ On August 3 of the same year, the Alaska Commercial Company won the right to buy the first twenty year lease.

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS OF JEWISH PIONEERS IN ALASKA

Eyewitness accounts provide good sources from which to learn about early Jews in Alaska. The first Jewish traders to settle in Alaska, were not seen in a favorable light, as compared with Jewish businessmen in other parts of the United States.⁴² Emil Teichmann, an agent for one of the largest Jewish fur firms, Oppenheim and Company,⁴³ went to Sitka on business in 1868, he logged the following in his dairy:

The most respectable class, and that which was of the best social standing, included the officials of the Quartermaster's Department and the Customs, the small number of municipal authorities, a military chaplain, and finally the agent of the American Company which, as successor to the Russian Company, was represented at Sitka. . . .

The second class, of a much lower standing, comprised the traders, keepers of billiard saloons and dealers in spirits -- these were mostly of the Jewish race and carried on a more or less illicit trade with the soldiers and Indians, evaded customs and excise taxes, and were liable to prosecution at any moment had the administration of the law not been so lax.⁴⁴

Apparently, most of the traders were Jews, for Mr. Teichmann wrote, that the non-Jewish merchants at a Protestant church service were "the few non-

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 34.

⁴² Rudolf Glanz, *The Jews In American Alaska (1867-1880)* (New York: Dr. Rudolf Glanz, 1953), p. 15.

⁴³ Richard A. Pierce, "Prince D. P. Maksutov: Last Governor of Russian-America," *Journal of the West*, Vol. VI, No. 3, July, 1967, p. 410.

⁴⁴ Emil Teichmann, *A Journey to Alaska in the year 1868: being a dairy of the late Emil Teichmann* (New York: Argosy - Antiquarian Ltd., 1963), p.189. See also, Rudolf Glanz, *The Jews In American Alaska (1867-1880)* (New York: Dr. Rudolf Glanz, 1953), p. 15.

Jewish traders" in Sitka.⁴⁵ Mr. Teichmann's description of the Jews in Sitka continued:

There was a remarkable person named Rapaport, a German Polish Jew by origin, who spent the greater part of his life in prison and as soon as he came out was again accused. Rapaport was the recognised scapegoat of the whole settlement; whenever anything happened -- theft, arson, assault, whatever it might be -- he was believed to be the criminal or at any rate to have had a hand in the crime. On one occasion he had a very bad time. He had won heavily when playing cards with three sailors, who accused him, rightly or wrongly, of cheating and assaulted the poor fellow so violently with sticks and knives that the next morning he was picked up for dead. Only after long efforts was he brought to. Nothing much happened to the sailors and only one was imprisoned because he was recognised as a deserter. But Rapaport as a result of his injuries was a real picture of misery and had to endure much scoffing.⁴⁶

Although the picture Teichmann painted of the Jews was not particularly flattering, his diary indicated Sitka was full of unsavory characters from all backgrounds. After one week in Sitka, Teichmann thought he had an accurate view of the populace, but the Jews astonished him.

On . . . Friday evening before going to bed I attended a curious ceremony. Our sleeping quarters, which were built only of planks, abutted on another hut which was used as a warehouse by a Jewish trader. Up to then I had never heard a sound there in the evenings, but on that night by curiosity was aroused by the murmur of several voices in the adjoining room. Looking through a crevice I saw quite an assembly of some twenty men, all of the Jewish persuasion, who were holding their Sabbath service and reading their prayers under the leadership of the oldest man present who took the place of a Rabbi. It was a memorable thing to see this religious gathering in so strange a setting and it said a great deal for the persistence with which the Jews everywhere, even in the most remote countries, practise their

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 201.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 234.

devotional exercises. I myself should scarcely have expected it in Sitka among a community which was engaged in such very disreputable occupations.⁴⁷

Teichmann was amazed by, but did not understand, the Jewish desire for communal worship and comradeship. As Glanz explains, "it is an expression of the Jewish will to survive, shown in the same way as in the history of the beginnings of the Jewish pioneer communities moving westward" across the American continent.⁴⁸ Wherever Jews settle, they are driven to achieve "historical unity in building up Jewish communal life."⁴⁹ As we shall see in the course of this thesis, the establishment of viable Jewish communities in Alaska has been difficult and has met with varying degrees of success.

Another eyewitness account of Jews in Alaska, is provided by the travel book of E. L. Huggins. In this book, Mr. Huggins described a settlement of 50-60 houses on Afognac Island in American Alaska, which he visited in June 1869.⁵⁰

At the time of my visit. . . , there were but two Europeans upon the island; one a Polish Jew employed by the Russians, now trading on his own account, the other a superannuated sailor. I was met at the beach by several elderly men, including the priest and a Jewish trader,⁵¹ most of whom I had seen at Kodiak [Kodiak], each of whom uttered a formula bidding me welcome to the island and offering me rest and refreshment.⁵²

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 199.

⁴⁸ Rudolf Glanz, *The Jews In American Alaska (1867-1880)* (New York: Dr. Rudolf Glanz, 1953), p. 16.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 16.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

⁵¹ As a point of interest, there is a Cohen Island, 0.3 mi. across, at N entrance to Eldred Passage, on E shore of Kachemak Bay, Kenai Penin., 8 mi. S of Homer, Chugach Mts. Named by W. H. Dall, USCGS, for a trader "who was operating in the area, in 1880." See Donald J. Orth, *Dictionary of Alaska Place Names* (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1967), p. 229.

⁵² E. L. Huggins, "Kodiak and Afognac Life, 1868-1870," *Western Folklore*, Vol. VI, 1947, p. 136.

PRESS REPORTS OF DAVID SHIRPSER AND OTHER JEWISH MERCHANTS

In addition to eyewitness accounts, reports in the Alaska press chronicled the activities of Jewish merchants. In the first copy of Alaska's oldest newspaper, *The Sitka Times*, September 19, 1868, there were several news items referring to local Jewish merchants.⁵³ One of them concerns the establishment of David Shirpser, a Jewish trader:

"D. Shirpser. Groceries and Provisions, canned fruit and shelfgoods of all kinds."⁵⁴

Mr. Shirpser was one of the first Jews to settle in Alaska. He arrived in Sitka, early June, 1867, four months before the territorial transfer to America.⁵⁵ His family was originally from the German-Polish town of Thorn.⁵⁶ Mr. Shirpser ventured into the far north to seek his fortune in the fur trade. He had been in Victoria, British Columbia, since 1859, but felt he could do better in the newly acquired territory. His first business transaction in Sitka, however, was not successful or pleasant. In fact,

⁵³ Rudolf Glanz, *The Jews in American Alaska (1867-1880)* (New York: Dr. Rudolf Glanz, 1953), p. 17.

⁵⁴ *The Sitka Times*, Vol. I, No. I, September 19, 1868, p. 4.

⁵⁵ Sol Shirpser, "An Alaskan Memoir," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, October, 1977, Volume X, Number 1, p. 16.

Mr. David Shirpser settled in Placerville, California, in the 1850s, and became one of its pioneer merchants. He emigrated to Victoria, British Columbia, in 1859, where he engaged in the clothing business with two of his brothers. He was very active in the Jewish community of Victoria, the first center of Jewish life in Western Canada. On August 31, 1862, he presided over the first meeting of Congregation Emanu-El and was elected its first president. He was still president when, on June 3, 1863, cornerstone ceremonies were held for the synagogue. The building was the first synagogue in Western Canada. That same year, he served as treasurer of the Chevra Bikkur Cholim of Victoria.

⁵⁶ The family consisted of six brothers and two sisters: Isadore, Adolph, David, Herman, Leopold, Louis, Rosalia, and Cecilia.

someone whom Shirpser had considered a friend, broke a verbal agreement which cost the new arrival almost \$10,000. Reputedly, this friend sold furs to Hutchinson, Kohl, and Company, which were instrumental in the formation of that firm.⁵⁷ From then after, Mr. Shirpser stood in firm opposition to the policies of Hutchinson, Kohl, and Company, and later the Alaska Commercial Company. (Shirpser and many others attacked the policies of the Alaska Commercial Company through a small San Francisco newspaper called the *Alaska Herald*. The details of which will appear further on.)

In the words of Sol Shirpser, David Shirpser's son:

My father was not very successful at Sitka, but he met two Russians, one of whom was named Charitonoff, and both had a little money which they wanted to invest in business. They suggested that my father go in with them and open a store in Kodiak, Alaska, under the name Shirpser, Charitonoff & Company. . . . They were fortunate in obtaining a very large log building formerly occupied by the Russian governor who had ruled Kodiak when it belonged to Russia. They remodeled the building into a store and dwelling and opened for business. This town was one of the strongholds of the powerful Alaska Commercial Company. By good management and energy they succeeded in opening about thirty stations in Alaska, which required so much goods that they found it necessary to purchase a larger vessel. . . . which could carry about 150 tons of merchandise.

My father took charge of loading this vessel with merchandise and proceeded north. . . . leaving goods at all the other stations, continuing into the Arctic Ocean as far north as Point Barrow. He traded at every village with the natives for their furs. Many times his vessel was caught in an ice pack and was nearly crushed. On his return voyage he called at all of the stations gathering up the furs they had on hand. Then at Kodiak they loaded up all the furs and proceeded to San Francisco. There the furs were turned over to brokers for shipment to London where the semi-annual fur auction was held. Buyers came to these auctions from all over the world.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 20.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 22-23.

Of Shirpser's thirty stations, one of the more important was in the Aleutian Islands. This trading post provided an increased variety of goods, as can be gleaned from their April 23, 1869 advertisement:

"D. Shirpser & Co., have for sale a well selected stock of Dress Goods, Fancy Goods and Groceries, all of which have been selected so as to suit the market. Kodiak, A. T."⁵⁹

The dissolution of the business in Sitka was published later in the same year:

"Dissolution of Co-partnership. The co-partnership heretofore existing between the undersigned under the firm name of Shirpser & Co., is this day dissolved by mutual consent. All debts due to and from the concern within the Territory of Alaska are to be paid to and by David Shirpser, and debts due to and from the concern in San Francisco are to be paid to and by Abraham Martin. -- Abraham Martin, David Shirpser, Hermann Shirpser."⁶⁰

Many Jewish merchants began their careers in the Alaskan fur trade, but interestingly, they soon learned "that the natives had acquired some of their Yankee trading tricks, such as, patching, coloring, and sewing parts of skins together."⁶¹ In addition to trading posts, Jews became involved in many other types of business. The following advertisements appeared in *The Sitka Times* in 1868:

"Storer and Burgman, Dry Goods and Groceries, Hardware and a choice lot of pure Irish Scotch and butter Whiskeys and Wines, etc. . . . Store No. 29 Lincoln St., Sitka, A. T."⁶²

⁵⁹ *The Alaska Times*, April 23, 1869, p. 3.

⁶⁰ *The Alaska Times*, July 16, 1869, p. 2.

⁶¹ Rudolf Glanz, *The Jews In American Alaska (1867-1880)* (New York: Dr. Rudolf Glanz, 1953), p. 23.

⁶² *The Sitka Times*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 1.

"J. M. Manassa will always keep on hand the best brands of Tobacco and Cigars, also Toys of every variety and playing cards, photographic albums and fine perfumery cheap."⁶³

"Isaac Bergman, the butcher in Sitka was never known to keep an empty market. He has always when he can find it, lots of fresh meat on hand No. 38 Market St., Sitka."⁶⁴

Also of interest, on October 24, 1868, *The Sitka Times* reported that Mr. Bergman, was chosen Alderman of Sitka "in the first election in the territory and was invited to make his first speech at a City Council meeting."⁶⁵

"L. Caplan Saloon. Has the following brands: butter whiskeys, French Martel, Old Tom and luscious 'Cocktails'."⁶⁶

There were efforts to brew beer for the territory, thus to replace the "straight drink" with a less intoxicating beverage. The belief was that this would minimize the dangerous effects of alcohol upon the general population, upon the natives, and mitigate corruption and exploitation in the community.⁶⁷ Many brewers considered the idea favorably.

"Improvements. The new brewery of Messrs. Levy and Company is nearly finished. The inside matter is expected up from San Francisco by the Bark Delaware, now due. When it is completed, our citizens will then have two lager beer establishments to buck against."⁶⁸

⁶³ *The Sitka Times*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 4.

⁶⁴ *The Sitka Times*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 1.

⁶⁵ Rudolf Glanz, *The Jews In American Alaska (1867-1880)* (New York: Dr. Rudolf Glanz, 1953), p. 19.

⁶⁶ *The Sitka Times*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 4.

⁶⁷ Rudolf Glanz, *The Jews In American Alaska (1867-1880)* (New York: Dr. Rudolf Glanz, 1953), p. 19.

⁶⁸ *The Sitka Times*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 4.

The Alaska Times, the successor to *The Sitka Times*, appeared on March 23, 1869, and continued to carry advertisements which described the lives, activities, and achievements of Jewish merchants. Merchants from outside the territory, particularly San Francisco, began to advertise in its columns. Moreover, the business world in the rest of the United States was beginning to take notice of the Alaskan market.⁶⁹ Indicative of this awareness, is the first advertisement of Hutchinson, Kohl, and Company.

"Hutchinson, Kohl, & Co. keep always on hand at their Store, Kodiak, a large assortment of Dry Goods, Groceries, Hardware, Clothing, Boots, Shoes, Glass and Crockery Ware, also Dealers in all kinds of Furs
Sam'l Sussman, General Manager, Kodiak, A. T."⁷⁰

Subsequent copies of the paper carried more commercial news items bought by businessmen to sing their praises. Concerning trading expeditions:

"Sailed -- The Schooner General Harney, Capt. *M. Levi*, sailed from this port last Monday bound up north. She takes along a fine assortment of goods suitable for the trade on the different islands. She will return here in about five months, after establishing two or three trading posts."⁷¹

Items concerning importation:

"New Goods. The Steamer Active brought up a large supple of all kinds of assorted goods, for Samuel Storer, Kinhead and Louthan, J. M. Manassa, Theodore Haltern. These gentlemen have an excellent assortment of all goods needed and suitable for our market. These goods could not have come at a better time and we are pleased to note that the industry and enterprise of these gentlemen has not been

⁶⁹ Rudolf Glanz, *The Jews In American Alaska (1867-1880)* (New York: Dr. Rudolf Glanz, 1953), p. 19.

⁷⁰ *The Alaska Times*, March, 23, 1869, p. 3.

⁷¹ *The Alaska Times*, March, 30, 1869, p. 3.

without its reward. The merchants deserve our patronage as well as the praise of our citizens generally."⁷²

During this time, Isaac Bergman, who had a small butcher shop, occasionally supplied, now had a consistent supply.

"City Market. Arrangements have been perfected for the receipt of by every steamer from British Columbia, Washington Territory, Oregon, California, of the finest stall fed cattle and the choicest kinds of vegetables which these countries produce."⁷³

A brewery was also well established.

"The Sitka Brewery. -- The immense quantity of beer leaving this brewery for places along the coast tells well for the establishment. Very large quantities have left during the past week for Tongas, Wrangle, Stickine, Kodiak, and other trading posts. The fine quality of beer supplied by the Sitka Brewery to our merchants and traders is very creditable to Mr. Cohen,⁷⁴ the indefatigable and hard working manager. He deserves success and is receiving it. Go on brewing your best, Mr. Cohen, you're sure to prosper. Go ahead."⁷⁵

Old and new names of Jewish merchants appear in this founders' period of the territory, and the transfer of business ownership is common.

"Sitka Brewery. -- Mr. Rudolph, who owns one brewery here already, bought out Benjamin Levy's⁷⁶ interest in the above brewery on the first of this month."⁷⁷

Mr. Levy, apparently, sought a larger task.

⁷² *The Alaska Times*, August, 13, 1869, p. 3.

⁷³ *The Alaska Times*, December, 11, 1869, p. 3.

⁷⁴ As a point of interest, there is a Cohen Island which is 0.1 mi. long, off E shore of Favorite Channel, 1 mi. NW of Point Stephens and 16 mi. NW of Juneau, Coast Mts. Named by USCGS and published in 1893 on chart 8300. See Donald J. Orth, *Dictionary of Alaska Place Names* (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1967), p. 229.

⁷⁵ *The Alaska Times*, May, 21, 1869, p. 3.

⁷⁶ Benjamin Levy also spelled Levi. See above, chapter one text and note 32.

⁷⁷ *The Alaska Times*, February 12, 1870, p. 3.

"On a Visit. Mr. B. Levy, formerly of this city, has returned from San Francisco on the Schooner *General Harpney*, he being appointed the chief manager of Col. F. & G. Tittle's business up here in Alaska. Ben is well known, here and up north, and if he will only do half as well as we wish him, he is bound to make his pile in this Territory."⁷⁸

A later item on Mr. Levy reads:

"At Kadiac we learn that Ben Levi is doing a heavy business."⁷⁹

The Alaska Herald

The *Alaska Herald* began publication in March 1868, only six months after Alaska became an American territory.⁸⁰ It was edited half in English and half in Russian, and published in San Francisco by Agapius Honcharenko, a refugee from Tsarist Russia.⁸¹ Rudolf Glanz described the publication this way:

It combined, in a very clever way, so-called "original correspondence" from the Arctic regions with the advertising of the tradespeople -- for the greatest part Jewish. These businessmen already had a clear view of their commercial interests in Alaska, or wanted only to explore the market. Beside these items, details on the development of commerce with Alaska were published and correspondence from Russia, particularly news about the situation of Russian Jews, appeared in the paper. The veiled purpose was to give the paper a Russian-American atmosphere, complimentary at the same time to Jewish advertisers. All this, however, did not prevent the editors from writing in a way that assumed as quite natural anti-Jewish prejudice by the Russian population in Alaska.⁸²

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

⁷⁹ *Alaska Herald*, Vol. 2, 1869/70, No. 39, p. 2.

⁸⁰ Rudolf Glanz, *The Jews In American Alaska (1867-1880)* (New York: Dr. Rudolf Glanz, 1953), p. 8. For a detailed explanation of *The Alaska Herald*, see pp. 8-15, 27-44.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

⁸² Ibid., p. 9.

There were advertisements from firms in Washington territory, and British Columbia, but most were from Jewish firms in San Francisco.⁸³ For instance:

Jacob Schreiber & Co., . . . Manufacturers . . . Bedding . . .
Furniture S.F.⁸⁴

A. Wasserman & Co., 425 Sacramento Street, San Francisco.
Liberal cash advances made upon all consignments to our house in
London.⁸⁵

H. Liebes & Co., manufacturers of Ladies Fur and Buggy Robes,
129 Montgomery Street, . . . San Francisco.⁸⁶

Weil & Co., Importers of Cigars and Tobacco.⁸⁷

There was one 1874 advertisement for a trading post in Unalaska, which listed a Mr. C. Sheinefeldt:

C. Sheinefeldt remains in charge of C. J. Jansen's trading post.⁸⁸

The *Alaska Herald* also published "pep stories" to hype their advertisers and catch the attention of potential customers.

Black Foxes. -- Anyone desiring to see some of the products of Alaska may be gratified by a visit to the enterprising firm of H. Liebes & Co., at No. 129 Montgomery Street. These gentlemen have lately

⁸³ Ibid., p. 9.

⁸⁴ *The Alaska Herald*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1868/69, p. 7.

⁸⁵ *The Alaska Herald*, Vol. 1, No. 10, 1868/69, p. 4.

⁸⁶ *The Alaska Herald*, Vol. 1, No. 13, 1868/69, p. 4.

⁸⁷ *The Alaska Herald*, Vol. 2, No. 29, 1869/70.

⁸⁸ Rudolf Glanz, *The Jews In American Alaska (1867-1880)* (New York: Dr. Rudolf Glanz, 1953), p. 44.

received from Alaska three Black Foxes which are exhibited in front of the store.⁸⁹

We are informed that Messrs. A. Wasserman & Co. have purchased the clipper ship "Winger Arrow" for the Sitka Trade, and that other vessels will soon be ready to follow her.⁹⁰

The *Alaska Herald* also served as a principal source of criticism of the Alaska Commercial Company. According to Glanz, the unsuccessful bidders for the 1870 sealing concession, bankrolled the newspaper, among them, the above mentioned David Shirkser and Louis Goldstone.⁹¹ In response to charges of misconduct, in 1875, the Treasury Department sent a special agent to check on the operations of the Alaska Commercial Company.⁹² The company was cleared of any wrong doing, but the allegations peaked Congressional curiosity. As a result, Congress, early in 1876, launched its own investigation.⁹³ The committee called Mr. Robert Desty of San Francisco to testify. Mr. Desty told the committee that he had done most of the writing which had attacked the company over the previous six years.⁹⁴ Desty admitted that his employees, most of whom had been unsuccessful bidders for the sealing concession, had given him source material and that the accusations of fraud, favoritism, and mistreatment of natives, made against the company were untrue.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ *The Alaska Herald*, Vol. 1, No. 12, 1868/69, p. 2.

⁹⁰ *The Alaska Herald*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1868/69.

⁹¹ Rudolf Glanz, *The Jews In American Alaska (1867-1880)* (New York: Dr. Rudolf Glanz, 1953), p. 13.

For more inflammatory charges against the company, see a pamphlet entitled, *A History of the Wrongs of Alaska*.

⁹² Rudolf Glanz, "From Fur Rush to Gold Rushes," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, January, 1975, Volume VII, Number 2, p. 97.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 97. See also H. H. Bancroft, *History of Alaska 1730-1885* (New York: Antiquarian Press Ltd., 1960), pp. 630-659.

In 1887, Alfred P. Swineford, Governor of Alaska, attacked the company in his annual report, and made reference to the Jewish faith of the owners.⁹⁶ After filing this report, Governor Swineford traveled to the Pribilofs and to several company trading posts. As a result, his 1888 annual report reflected a softening of his view of the company.⁹⁷ The first report, however, prompted another congressional investigation of the company. Once again the company was completely vindicated.⁹⁸ The House Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries concluded, that the Alaska Commercial Company had "fully performed the covenants and stipulations of said contract" and "contributed liberally to the support, maintenance, comfort, and civilization of the inhabitants of not only the seal islands, but also those of the Aleutian Islands, Kodiak, and the mainland."⁹⁹

Mr. Louis Goldstone, who became a bitter enemy of the Alaska Commercial Company, after it was awarded the seal-fur lease, did reconsider his position. Goldstone posted a letter to the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives.

San Francisco, Cal., Dec. 15, 1871.

HONORED SIR: During the last session of Congress a memorial was prepared by the undersigned and associates and presented to the House, and referred to your committee, in which it was alleged that the lease to the Alaska Commercial Company by the United States, for the islands of St Paul and St George, Alaska, August 3, 1870, was illegally obtained by said company from the Secretary of the Treasury, and ought to have been awarded to the undersigned and associates. I now desire to withdraw said memorial. The allegations contained therein, having been made under a misapprehension of facts, are

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 97. See also L. D. Kitchener, *Flag Over The North* (Seattle, 1954), p. 78.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 97.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 98.

⁹⁹ Gerstle Mack, *Lewis and Hannah Gerstle* (New York: Gerstle Mack, 1953), p. 34. See also *House Report 3883*, 50th Congress, 2nd Session, pp. vii, xxiii.

therefore untrue. The undersigned, representing the memorialists, as an act of justice to the Secretary of the Treasury and all concerned, begs to withdraw all statements of complaint contained in said memorial.

I have the honor to be, sir, your obedient servant,

LOUIS GOLDSTONE

HON. John A. Bingham, Chairman Judiciary Committee House of Representatives, Washington, D. C.¹⁰⁰

EARLY ATTEMPTS AT JEWISH ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE IN ALASKA

Pioneer Jews who settled in Alaska, had the best of intentions, though never attained the historic Jewish community organization of a Kehillah.¹⁰¹ The Kehillah was the basic unit of Jewish communal governance in medieval Europe. Jewish localities were granted autonomy by regional monarchs, to organize and assume responsibility for Jewish taxation, education, synagogue, hospital, home for the aged, charity funds, and ransom funds.¹⁰² As described by fur agent Emil Teichmann, in 1868, there was a desire among Jewish pioneers to carry on religious activities and rituals, but they never reached an organizational level. Jews in Alaska, however, did gather privately to celebrate the Festivals and special occasions. As early as 1869, we find evidence in *The Hebrew*, a Jewish newspaper out of San Francisco.

Jewish Affairs in Alaska. -- From a friend, Mr. L. Caplan who resides in Sitka, Alaska, and is now on a visit to this city, we have received the following notice about our co-religionists in that town. There are fourteen Jewish residents among whom are four families, last Pesach they had Matzoths sent them from this city, and kept a

¹⁰⁰ H. H. Bancroft, *History of Alaska 1730-1885* (New York: Antiquarian Press Ltd., 1960), p. 647. See also *House Committee Reports, 44th Congress, 1st Session*, 623, p. 136.

¹⁰¹ Rudolf Glanz, *The Jews In American Alaska (1867-1880)* (New York: Dr. Rudolf Glanz, 1953), p. 3.

¹⁰² In the nineteenth century, with the abolition of the ghettos in Central Europe, Jewish self-government was reduced to supervising the purely religious affairs of the various communities.

Zeider. They are well off, and intend shortly to organize a congregation.¹⁰³

There is no indication that Sitka's Jews were ever able to organize a congregation. The transformation from private associations for religious purposes into a legal organization, was still decades in the future. The organizational impediment was the lack of Jews.¹⁰⁴ To the disappointment of Jewish pioneers, Jewish immigration into Alaska did not meet expectations.¹⁰⁵ This was a time of hope that others would come to help form communities. In that spirit, the Jews of Alaska kept up their contacts with Jewish communal life outside the territory. There was keen interest in Jewish affairs in the states south of Canada. For instance, in 1869, a Jewish subscriber from Sitka wrote to *The Hebrew* in response to "The Philadelphia Principles," which had been promulgated by a conference of Reform Rabbis.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ *The Hebrew*, San Francisco, April 30, 1869, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴ That would change with the 1899 gold strike in Nome, Alaska. The first Jewish organization was established in Nome in 1901. Sixty Jews chartered the Nome Hebrew Benevolent Society. See also "A Western Picture Parade," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XIII, No. 1, October, 1980, p. 43.

¹⁰⁵ Rudolf Glanz, *The Jews In American Alaska (1867-1880)* (New York: Dr. Rudolf Glanz, 1953), p. 25.

¹⁰⁶ The Philadelphia Principles were promulgated by thirteen Reform Rabbis who met there, for four days, in November 1869. The seven principles adopted by the conference were intended to distinguish Reform Judaism from Orthodox Judaism. For a discussion of this conference and its principles, see Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 255-260.

Let them know that there are Jews close to the North Pole, where Franklin¹⁰⁷ and his crew lost their lives, who never will be converted, not even by the Jewish Rabbis themselves who held the above mentioned conference in Philadelphia.

Very respectfully, A. Levy.¹⁰⁸

In the words of historian Rudolf Glanz, "this pathetic way of speaking corresponded to the feelings of these pioneers in Alaska, to their longing for deeper Jewish values. . . ."¹⁰⁹ Many pioneer Jews hoped to bring whatever they could of Judaism with them, not to engage in a process of reforming it. There was not a sufficient concentration of pioneer Jews, nor was there time to think theologically about Judaism. These Jews observed holidays and rituals, whenever and wherever they could. Early Alaskan Jews did not live according to a strict observance of Jewish law. The reasons were of practicality, not of theology. Jewish numbers were very small, there were no organizations from which to receive daily support, therefore, each Jew made decisions based upon his own conscience. When these decisions differed from Jewish law, the motivations were personal, not the result of any overarching movement such as Reform Judaism.

Jews in the states south of Canada, also desired to keep up contacts with their arctic brethren. The Jewish Press on the Atlantic coast, wrote proudly of their Alaskan Jewish pioneers :

¹⁰⁷ In 1847, Sir John Franklin came within ninety miles of completing the Northwest Passage, before becoming blocked by ice. See Henry W. Clark, *History Of Alaska* (New York: The MacMillian Company, 1930), p. 45. See also Morgan B. Sherwood, editor, *Alaska And Its History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967), pp. 39-40.

¹⁰⁸ *The Hebrew*, San Francisco, January 7, 1870, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ Rudolf Glanz, *The Jews In American Alaska (1867-1880)* (New York: Dr. Rudolf Glanz, 1953), p. 25.

There are Jews prospering in Alaska Territory. Last week we received a remittance from our first Sitka subscribers. One of them writes that cold, as is the region of our newly purchased possessions, the Jews wish to be informed about the doings of the co-religionists and the *Messenger* will therefore be a welcome visitor.¹¹⁰

This pride was also committed to writing, (see p. 9 above) in the 1882 obituary of Benjamin Levi, who was reputed to have raised the American Flag in Sitka, thereby symbolically transferring Russian Alaska into American hands.

Alfred Greenbaum

Alfred Greenbaum was an early General Agent for the Alaska Commercial Company at Unalaska. In 1879, Mr. Greenbaum assisted Father Shaishnikoff in the establishment of a fund to build a hospital at Unalaska.¹¹¹ Moreover, he had talent and provided entertainment for the local residents. From his company log book entrees,¹¹² we learn a great deal about the rigors of life on the island. The Company owned a building which stood three stores high. It held offices, living quarters, served as a meeting place, and was the center of business and social life at Unalaska.

January 14, 1879: Entertained natives in the Company's building. Those who attended were all in masks and costumes. Enjoyed dancing and everybody retired peacefully at 10 o'clock p.m.

January 15, 1879: Snow continues to fall in great quantities, being with one exception, many years ago, the heaviest fall of snow in

¹¹⁰ *The Jewish Messenger*, New York, Volume 28, 1870, p. 4.

¹¹¹ *The Jewish Messenger*, New York, Volume 28, 1870, p. 119.

¹¹² Ray Hudson, editor, *People Of The Aleutian Islands: A Project Of The Unalaska City School District* (Unalaska: Unalaska City School District, 1986), pp. 119-121. This is the citation for all of Mr. Greenbaum's Company log book entrees.

the memory of the oldest people. Walking is almost impossible & in great many places insurmountable:

March 8, 1879: As Sunday the 10th concludes the Russian Holidays I intend to entertain the natives in our new Hall with a dance tonight 6:30 p. m. People enjoyed themselves highly until 11:30 p.m.

April 13, 1879: The following notice was conspicuously placed in the Store in Russian: All persons are requested to settle accounts at least every 12 months. Persons whose debt has increased larger than the Agent deems them responsible for can only receive additional advance for hunting -- outfit -- A copy of this Notice will be placed on every Station & Traders are instructed to comply with same.

April 26, 1879: Store opened today until noon on account of the Russian Easter services beginning this afternoon.

The balance of Bachoff's Estate donated for the poor at Unalaska \$29.50 & \$20.50 contributed by the church for the same purpose, will be distributed this day to 76 families, which includes the entire settlement, all being destitute for the want of Provisions. The distribution to each family will consist as follows: 1 pound Hard Bread, 3/16 pound Tea, 1/3 pound brown Sugar, 9 pounds flour.

In other entrees, it is evident that Greenbaum did not hold the local Aleuts in high esteem.

February 2, 1879: A steady heavy gale; This weather occasions much suffering among the thoughtless Natives, who won't embrace the opportunity to fish and hunt in good weather -- A good man always has enough and never need suffer.

February 14, 1879: To relieve the monotony, the Church bell rang this morning summoning all piously inclined to devote a short time in smelling incense & chanting some song which sounds in the distance.

This unappreciative view of the Natives may, partly, have been the result of an earlier labor dispute with them.

March 28, 1878: Employed 18 men to clear the snow from Plank Road & Wharf. I fed them at noon with such food as we eat.

After 6 P.M. being time to quit work all the Laborers were invited to partake of a good Supper consisting of Fish Chowder, Bread & Tea. They came in the Company's building & one growler Cornelia Tshnjn induced all to refuse in eating on the pretense that the Soup was burned. They all left without touching any of the food, which I offered them, being influenced by a native. . . they [received] the usual pay for labor 1.00 per hour. Those very fools who refused to accept my hospitality came in the Store this day, demanding debt on top of their already heavy debts, which I refused in every case here mentioned, as the ingratitude which the people of this Island have repeatedly shown to the Company deprives [me of extending to an Aleut] the smallest courtesy or human treatment. To such beasts of semi-savages -- I cannot blame the Russians in making Serfs of this people. I can speak of 5 years personal experience, & I came to the conclusion, that kind treatment & charity has no gratitude from an Aleut, I sincerely believe if they are kept under stricter subjection, that they can only be made to realize their incapability of being their own guardians, & thus in time may probably be redeemed as suitable members of civilization. In making this statement I refer to the average Aleut, there is certainly some few exceptions, who deserve of a better pedigree.

Greenbaum resigned his position as General Agent for the Alaska Commercial Company and left for San Francisco on November 22, 1878.¹¹³

Rudolph Neumann

Rudolph Neumann arrived in Alaska on May 21, 1873.¹¹⁴ He came, as did many others, to work for the Alaska Commercial Company. Mr. Neumann worked at the Saint Michael station from 1873-1880. He came to Unalaska soon after Mr. Greenbaum left for San Francisco. Neumann served as the General Agent for the Company in Unalaska, from July 15, 1880, until his death on October 10, 1898.¹¹⁵ He respected the language and culture of

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 121.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 123.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 122-124.

the Aleutian people, and it is reported that when white school teachers and missionaries wanted to acculturate the Aleuts, he supported Aleutian cultural and linguistic integrity. Isabel Shepard, an Aleut at Unalaska who met Neumann in 1889, testified to his decency.

Mr. Neumann is the very soul of politeness. He treated me with the most unfailing courtesy and kindness all the time I was in Unalaska. He had been first at Saint Michael, then at Unalaska for over sixteen years, spending only the summer season there, however, and the winter in San Francisco. He has led a varied life and has traveled extensively over the world, beginning in his youth with adventures in New Zealand. Mr. Neumann is a Bavarian, and speaks many languages, and is especially fluent in Russian.¹¹⁶

Mr. Neumann was also a man of considerable culture, for Ms. Shepard wrote, he played quite well Beethoven's sonatas on the organette.

He had several brothers, two of whom also worked for the Alaska Commercial Company: Henry at Saint Michael, and Emanuel in San Francisco.¹¹⁷ Neumann saw the heyday of sea otter hunting in the Aleutian Islands, and witnessed its decline. This caused him great concern, not only as an employee of the Alaska Commercial Company, but as a fellow human being, disturbed by what he foresaw for the Aleutian people. In 1897, he wrote:

The low prices prevailing in the London market and the constant and rapid decrease of the sea-otters, has made that branch of the trade unprofitable and has forced us to abandon, in this district [Unalaska], the following stations: Woznesensky, Belkofsky, Morzhovoi, Sanak, Akutan, Biorka, Makushin, Kashega, Tshernofsky, and Umnak.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 123.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 124.

The natives of these ten settlements supported themselves entirely by hunting sea-otters, but, in consequence of the disappearance of these animals in the localities above mentioned, had to be transported in schooners during the last few years to the remaining sea-otter grounds in the vicinity of Kodiak Island, which now have, also, ceased to be profitable, and the people will eventually be forced to rely on Government aid for their subsistence.¹¹⁸

That is, of course, what eventually transpired.

Sol Ripinsky

Another notable Alaskan Jewish Pioneer was Sol Ripinsky. Born in Rypin, Poland, April 15, 1859, he was the oldest son of a rather well-to-do family.¹¹⁹ Mr. Ripinsky was educated at a military academy, and received fine training in painting, calligraphy, and drafting.¹²⁰ Ripinsky graduated as a 2nd Lieutenant in the cavalry, but was disappointed to learn he was too young to join the Polish Lancers, so he decided to see the world.¹²¹ He traveled through Shreveport, Louisiana; Sacramento, California; and Salem, Oregon.¹²² In Oregon, Ripinsky joined the State Militia and rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, and from that time forward, was known as "Colonel Sol Ripinsky."¹²³

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 125.

¹¹⁹ Bernice Bloomfield, "Col. Sol Ripinsky," *Congregation Beth Shalom Bulletin*, Vol. XVI, No. 7, March 1975, p. 3.

¹²⁰ Elisabeth Hakkinen, "Musings from the Sheldon Museum: Col. Sol Ripinsky," *Chilkat Valley News*, Vol. IX, No. 46, December 22, 1974, p. 7.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 7. See also *Mining Record*, July 30, 1894. "Mining Record" appears to be a partial title. For further information on Sol Ripinsky and others, see "Jews in Alaska, the Bernice Bloomfield Collection," at The Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library.

¹²² Rudolf Glanz, "From Fur Rush to Gold Rushes," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. VII, No. 2, January 1975, pp. 99-100.

¹²³ Norton B. Stern, Editor, "An Alaskan Report -- 1909 by Sol Ripinsky," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XI, No. 1, October 1978, p. 56.

He arrived in Sitka,¹²⁴ in 1884, and worked as a law clerk to the U. S. Attorney, until Dr. Sheldon Jackson, the General Agent of Education, asked him to teach in the school at Kodiak.¹²⁵ Jackson described Ripinsky as,

a suitable man . . . a Russian Hebrew, who had received a liberal European education and was recommended by a former superintendent of public instruction for the State of Oregon.¹²⁶

Jackson continued:

He [Ripinsky] was so anxious to go that he was willing to take the risks of the trip in a small 10-ton sail boat. Being loaded with desks and other school supplies, the vessel sailed from Sitka on the 7th of September [1885].

On September 10, . . . the vessel sprang a leak in a storm. She was headed for land, and with great difficulty kept afloat. Mr. Ripinsky and the captain (the sole occupants) worked at the pumps day and night for life, until the vessel was finally driven through the breakers into Lisianski Strait and beached. Pumping the water out and repairing the vessel as best they could, they again launched her with the purpose of trying to make Killisnoo.¹²⁷ In the storm at sea while the waves were rolling over the deck they had lost much of their provisions, which were washed overboard, and they were reduced to great straits by hunger. As the vessel continued to leak, they were compelled to work at the pumps. To add to their danger they were in unknown waters among strange rocks and in danger of being dashed to pieces. Finally, after sixteen days of battling with the elements and hanging between life and death, they reached Killisnoo and were safe.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Sitka is on the west side of Baranof Island, 95 miles southwest of Juneau. The Kodiak Island group lies in the Gulf of Alaska, south of Cool Inlet and the Kenai Peninsula. The city of Kodiak is located near the northeastern tip of Kodiak Island, at the north end of Chiniak Bay. Kodiak is approximately 700 miles west of Sitka.

¹²⁵ Elisabeth Hakkinen, "Musings from the Sheldon Museum: Col. Sol Ripinsky," *Chilkat Valley News*, Vol. IX, No. 46, December 22, 1974, p. 7.

¹²⁶ Sheldon Jackson, *Report On Education In Alaska* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1886), p. 27.

¹²⁷ Killisnoo is 75 miles by water from Sitka.

¹²⁸ Sheldon Jackson, *Report On Education In Alaska* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1886), p. 27.

After they unloaded the remainder of their supplies, the captain stayed to repair his vessel. Ripinsky hired a canoe and its Tlingit owner, and the two of them paddled back to Sitka. He reached Sitka, just as the ship *Bonita* was leaving for western Alaska.¹²⁹ The *Bonita* was scheduled to dock in Unalaska,¹³⁰ not Kodiak, but since Unalaska was also in need of a teacher, Dr. Sheldon Jackson changed Ripinsky's assignment to Unalaska.¹³¹

At Unalaska, the Alaska Commercial Company provided for Ripinsky's residence, but asked him to take his meals elsewhere.¹³² He opened school with 45 pupils, 20 boys and 25 girls.¹³³ Ripinsky taught the school in English on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, while the priest taught in Russian, on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays.¹³⁴ The priest may have been Father Salamatop, whom Ripinsky mentioned above (see p. 4) and claimed a Jewish forefather from Bering's discovery voyage of 1741.

The United States Commissioner at Unalaska, Mr. Chester Seeber, did not appreciate Ripinsky's talents, and described him as "a very dangerous man."¹³⁵ Mr. Rudolph Neumann, on the other hand, was impressed with Ripinsky. So much so, that in a letter to the Alaska Commercial Company, Mr. Neumann wrote:

¹²⁹ Elisabeth Hakkinen, "Musings from the Sheldon Museum: Col. Sol Ripinsky," *Chilkat Valley News*, Vol. IX, No. 46, December 22, 1974, p. 7.

¹³⁰ Unalaska is located on Unalaska Island, which is in the Aleutian Islands approximately 600 miles west of Kodiak.

¹³¹ Elisabeth Hakkinen, "Musings from the Sheldon Museum: Col. Sol Ripinsky," *Chilkat Valley News*, Vol. IX, No. 46, December 22, 1974, p. 7.

¹³² Ray Hudson, editor, *People Of The Aleutian Islands: A Project Of The Unalaska City School District* (Unalaska: Unalaska City School District, 1986), p. 171.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

... during his stay here he has behaved himself well and minded his own business. ... honest, willing, and trustworthy. ...¹³⁶

The Company subsequently offered Ripinsky a job at the station on the Kuskokwim.¹³⁷ He declined, however, and transferred to Haines¹³⁸ to teach in the "Old Log School" for two years, 1886 and 1887.¹³⁹

During the summer he was hired by the United States Navy to hand-map the area. This was a risky proposition, for near Davidson Glacier, there recently had been trouble between the Tlingit Indians and White settlers.¹⁴⁰ Ripinsky, ever willing to take risks, accepted the challenge. Before dropping off Ripinsky on shore, the Naval Commander told the Tlingits that if he returned and did not find Ripinsky alive and well, he would destroy their village.¹⁴¹ To illustrate his point, the ship disembarked, fired upon, and destroyed an abandoned beach shack.¹⁴² The message was received, loud and clear, for as Ripinsky loved to tell:

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 172.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 172. The Kuskokwim River has its source in three forks that rise on the western slopes of the great Alaska Range. It flows in a westerly direction from the mountains to the Bering Sea. It is the second largest river in Alaska (Yukon is the largest) and is navigable for some five hundred miles. See Agnes Rush Burr, *Alaska: Our Beautiful Northland of Opportunity* (Boston: The Page Company, 1919), pp. 212-213.

¹³⁸ Haines is 200 miles by water north of Sitka. It is 16 miles by water southwest of Skagway, but 359 road miles. Originally, it was an Indian village called "Dtehsuh" meaning "end of the trail." It was a trading post for both the Chilkat and Interior Indians. The first white man to settle there was George Dickinson, an agent for the Northwest Trading Company, who came to the post in 1878. In 1881, a Presbyterian missionary, S. Hall Young, founded the Willard Mission, the name of which was later changed to Haines Mission.

¹³⁹ Elisabeth Hakkinen, "Musings from the Sheldon Museum: Col. Sol Ripinsky," *Chilkat Valley News*, Vol. IX, No. 46, December 22, 1974, p. 8.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 8.

Every time I'd row down the channel, there was a canoe-load of native men following me to be sure I got back safely!¹⁴³

In actuality, Mr. Ripinsky had cordial and respectful relations with the Native People of the area. He worked with them in the cannery stores, and later, traded with them in his store.¹⁴⁴ From 1887-1890, Ripinsky worked as storekeeper for the Alaska Packers Association, at their Pyramid Harbor cannery.¹⁴⁵ He then moved across the inlet and, simultaneously, worked for the Chilkat Canning Company, ran his own small trading post, and was Postmaster at Chilkat.¹⁴⁶ He remained the Postmaster until 1899.

During this time, Sol Ripinsky moved his store from Chilkat to nearby Haines. From 1897 until late in the summer of 1899, his brother Morris Ripin¹⁴⁷ came up from San Francisco with his wife and daughter, to take over store operations.¹⁴⁸ Gold was found in the Klondike, Yukon Territory, late in the season 1896. In the following summer, 1897, thousands made their way through Haines and Skagway¹⁴⁹ to take part in the Klondike stampede. The Ripins ran the store and did well during these boom years.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p.8.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p.8.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.8.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p.8.

¹⁴⁷ According to Elisabeth Hakkinen, Sol Ripinsky said that he and his brother had different names because it was the custom in Poland, at that time, for the oldest son to add "sky" to his name. Elisabeth Hakkinen, "Musings from the Sheldon Museum: Col. Sol Ripinsky," *Chilkat Valley News*, Vol. IX, No. 46, December 22, 1974, p. 8.

¹⁴⁸ From a letter written by Marion Cowen, grandnephew of Sol Ripinsky, to Bernice Bloomfield, August 20, 1978. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box A, File Folder 24.

¹⁴⁹ Skagway was one of the principal departure points for the Yukon gold fields. Many miners purchased their outfits and supplies there before trekking north. When the first Alaskan and Yukon business directory was issued in 1903, it listed over a dozen Jewish names in a population of 1,400. They were engaged in dry goods, restaurant, real estate and other businesses. There was a musician, and a public school teacher, Mrs. Mamie Rosenberg. See Rudolf Glanz, "From Fur Rush to Gold Rushes," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. VII, No. 2, January 1975, p. 103.

In 1920, shortly before Morris Ripins death, Sol Ripinsky bought back the business.¹⁵⁰ Morris was a Civil War Veteran, and is buried, along with his wife in a Military Cemetery in Sitka.¹⁵¹

Ripinsky served as the United States Commissioner in Haines for several years, he was active in the Pioneers of Alaska, was a thirty-second degree Mason, and held other territory-wide positions.¹⁵² He was also a large land owner, which ran him into legal difficulties. Beginning in 1897, Col. Ripinsky requested the removal from his land of people he called "squatters."¹⁵³ It was a lengthy and expensive legal process, with many decisions, appeals, and reversals. The *Iditarod Pioneer* reported one of the reversals this way:

Skagway, Jan. 12, 1911 -- A cablegram from the clerk of the Appellate court at San Francisco brought word that in the case of Ripinsky vs. Haines town-lot holders, that the court had reversed the decision of the lower court and given decree to Col. Ripinsky. This gives to him title to 15 acres of land in the heart of Haines and the right to collect for six years' rental on that portion of the land wrongfully occupied.

This verdict makes Mr. Ripinsky, who is a highly respected pioneer, a rich man. . . .¹⁵⁴

The final verdict, however, was rendered in January of 1913, giving him title to only his house and his garden (Lot 27, Block 1, Haines Townsite).¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ Elisabeth Hakkinen, "Musings from the Sheldon Museum: Col. Sol Ripinsky," *Chilkat Valley News*, Vol. IX, No. 46, December 22, 1974, p. 8.

¹⁵¹ Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box A, File Folder 24.

¹⁵² Elisabeth Hakkinen, "Musings from the Sheldon Museum: Col. Sol Ripinsky," *Chilkat Valley News*, Vol. IX, No. 46, December 22, 1974, p. 8.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁵⁴ *The Iditarod Pioneer*, February 11, 1911.

¹⁵⁵ Elisabeth Hakkinen, "Musings from the Sheldon Museum: Col. Sol Ripinsky," *Chilkat Valley News*, Vol. IX, No. 46, December 22, 1974, p. 8.

Ripinsky had expected to hold a much greater area, up to 600 acres, but none of his claims proved persuasive.¹⁵⁶ The years of litigation exacted a heavy financial toll upon Ripinsky, most of the \$50,000 he had brought to America was depleted.¹⁵⁷ This left him near poverty.

On the political front, Ripinsky was among the men who sought Alaskan representation in Congress, also known as Home Rule. He was elected the delegate, from the Haines district, to the territorial convention convened in Juneau, October 9, 1899.¹⁵⁸ Ripinsky, in fact, introduced the resolution requesting territorial government for Alaska. He spoke to the assembly:

Resolved. That the committee on civil government be and is hereby instructed to prepare and report to this convention a memorial to Congress respectfully asking and urging the enactment of a law creating a territorial form of government for Alaska on such lines as to the committee may seem most expedient and proper.¹⁵⁹

This request was made several times, but did not become a reality until 1912.

Ripinsky's financial worth may have declined, but not his human worth to the residents of Haines, they twice elected¹⁶⁰ him mayor, the first time in 1916.¹⁶¹ He died in 1927 and was buried in Haines in a service

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁵⁸ Bernice Bloomfield, "Col. Sol Ripinsky," *Congregation Beth Shalom Bulletin*, Vol. XVI, No. 8, April 1975, p. 4.

¹⁵⁹ Elisabeth Hakkinen, "Musings from the Sheldon Museum: Col. Sol Ripinsky," *Chilkat Valley News*, Vol. IX, No. 46, December 22, 1974, p. 10.

¹⁶⁰ Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box A, File Folder 24.

¹⁶¹ Norton B. Stern, Editor, "An Alaskan Report -- 1909 by Sol Ripinsky," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol XI, No. 1, October 1978, p. 36.

performed by the Masonic Lodge.¹⁶² There are those who say Ripinsky was buried in an unmarked grave on the mountain,¹⁶³ later to be named Mount Ripinski.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Elisabeth Hakkinen, "Musings from the Sheldon Museum: Col. Sol Ripinsky," *Chilkat Valley News*, Vol. IX, No. 46, December 22, 1974, p. 9.

¹⁶³ Nathan Kirsh letter to Congregation Beth Shalom, June 20, 1978. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box A, File Folder 24.

¹⁶⁴ Mount Ripinski was named for Col. Solomon Ripinsky. This mountain, standing 3600 majestic feet, is 15 miles SW of Skagway, in the Saint Elias Range on the Chilkat Peninsula.

The mountain is named Ripinski, although we know it should be Ripinsky. Someone, somewhere, changed the "i" to a "y" and it has been spelled Ripinski ever since.

Col. Ripinski is also memorialized on a plaque at The Sheldon Museum and Cultural Center in Haines.

CHAPTER THREE

FROM FUR RUSH TO GOLD RUSHES AND THE DISCOVERY OF JUNEAU -- The Robert Goldstein Family -- The William David Gross Family -- Evergreen Cemetery -- THE KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH: DAWSON CITY, YUKON TERRITORY -- THE NOME GOLD STRIKE AND ALASKA'S FIRST JEWISH ORGANIZATION -- The Nome Hebrew Benevolent Society -- The Leo Seidenverg Family -- FAIRBANKS -- THE ALASKA RAILROAD, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ANCHORAGE, AND ITS JEWISH PIONEERS -- Leopold David -- Isidore "Ike" Bayles -- Zachary J. Loussac

FROM FUR RUSH TO GOLD RUSHES AND THE DISCOVERY OF JUNEAU

In 1869, during the fur-trade boom, the Alaska Commercial Company's steamer navigated the Yukon River to establish a fur-trading post at Nulato.¹ The company soon founded other posts to attract natives to trade their furs for equipment and provisions. By opening the interior to trade, the company inadvertently provided the means by which Alaska's economic base would soon change from furs to gold. Many of these early traders were "transitional figures," in as much as some of them doubled as traders for the company and prospectors in the Yukon River Valley.²

The first gold strike occurred in 1880, not in the Yukon Valley, but at Juneau. However, the events that led to the founding of Harrisburg, later called Rockwell, and still later called Juneau, might be said to have started in 1848 with the discovery of gold in northern California.³ Alaska historian Robert De Armond explains:

¹ William R. Hunt, *Alaska: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1976), p. 59.

² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³ Bob De Armond, "And A Town Grew," *The Alaska Sportsman*, August, 1960, p. 34. The gold was discovered January 24, 1848, by James Marshall on the South Fork of the American River.

The resulting gold rush developed a new class of men in the West, the prospectors and miners. As the richer California diggings played out many of these men moved out to search the West for more. Some of them headed north, first to the Fraser River⁴ and Cariboo country, then to the Cassiar in northern British Columbia where discoveries were first made in 1874.

Hundreds of men came north to the Cassiar and many of them wintered at Wrangell, on the Alaskan coast. During the off season they did some prospecting along the coast and in 1876 discovered gold on Shuck River, at Windham Bay. This was the first paying discovery in Alaska. In 1879, there was another minor discovery, at Silver Bay, near Sitka. This drew George Pilz and others from California and other gold fields and about a hundred Cassiar miners from Wrangell, among them Joe Juneau and Richard Harris.⁵

In September 1880, George Pilz hired Joe Juneau and Richard Harris to prospect the land on the Gastineau Channel. Juneau and Harris arrived on the channel and discovered placer⁶ gold and quartz, near the mouth of what is now called Gold Creek.⁷ They staked the first claims at the mouth of Gold Creek on October 4, 1880, and proceeded up the creek, staking claims as they explored its banks.⁸ On October 18, the thirteenth anniversary of the transfer of the territory from Russia to the United States, they staked a 160-acre townsite which they named Harrisburg.⁹ A boom town of approximately three hundred people developed by the end of 1881.¹⁰

⁴ For additional information of the 1858 Fraser River gold rush and Jewish prospectors, see Norman B. Stern, Editor, "A Western Canadian Report of 1859," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. IX, No. 1, October 1976, pp. 63-65.

⁵ Bob De Armond, "And A Town Grew," *The Alaska Sportsman*, August, 1960, pp. 34-35.

⁶ Placer gold is recovered through placer mining. Placer mining involves obtaining gold by using water to wash the soil. Collecting the soil and washing it involves the use of heavy hydraulic equipment, dredges, sluice boxes, and panning. See, Garnet Basque, *Methods of Placer Mining* (Langley, British Columbia: Mr. Paperback, 1983).

⁷ Bob DeArmond, "And A Town Grew," *The Alaska Sportsman*, August, 1960, p. 34.

⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

⁹ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 35.

As early as the summer of 1880, twenty men traveled from Sitka to the head of the Lynn Canal (Skagway), and crossed the elevation of land, later known to thousands of miners as the Chilkoot Pass, on their way to the headwaters of the Yukon.¹¹ Reportedly, none struck it rich, but some found enough gold to begin annual visits to the Yukon. Many of them settled in Juneau during the winters. In 1887, they discovered the Fortymile, the first real gold find in the Yukon Valley.¹² A few years later in 1893, they discovered gold at Birch Creek, 240 miles down the Yukon River from Fortymile, which led to the building of Circle City, the interior's first gold town.¹³

The Robert Goldstein Family

The first Jewish residents in Juneau were Reuben (Robert) Goldstein and his son Charles, who arrived in 1884/5.¹⁴ They were not, however, the first Jewish land claimants in Juneau. That distinction belongs to Samuel Goldstein -- no relation to Robert -- who was in Sitka as early as May 1869.¹⁵ Goldstein operated a general store in Sitka.¹⁶ His advertisement appeared in *The Alaska Appeal*:

¹¹ Ibid., p. 36.

¹² Ibid., p. 36.

¹³ William R. Hunt, *Alaska: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1976), p. 60.

¹⁴ *The Daily Alaskan Empire*, Juneau, Vol. LV., No. 8250, November 3, 1939, p. 1.

¹⁵ Robert N. De Armond, *The Founding Of Juneau* (Juneau: Gastineau Channel Centennial Association, 1980), p. 160.

¹⁶ Jews were well thought of in Sitka. Reverend Sheldon Jackson, a missionary spoke respectfully about Mr. Cohen, "a Jew who keeps a store." See Rudolf Glanz, *The Jews In American Alaska (1867-1880)* (New York: Dr. Rudolf Glanz, 1953), p. 45. In C. L. Andrews, *The Story of Sitka* (Seattle, 1922), p. 85, the author writes "there are many names well known in Alaska by the 'Old Timers,' as: . . . A. Cohen, Miss P. Cohen, Miss H. Cohen, D. Ackerman, L. Caplan. . . ." Additional advertisements in April 4, 1879 *The Alaska Appeal* read: "Henry Thein, Groceries and general merchandise, Sitka, Alaska."

Sam'l Goldstein. Dealers in Groceries, dry goods and hardware, Sitka, Alaska.¹⁷

During the Cassiar rush he moved to Wrangell,¹⁸ but soon he returned to Sitka. On December 8, 1880, a claim was entered for Samuel Goldstein at the corner of Second and Seward Streets, which is by coincidence the approximate site of the present Goldstein Building (built by Charles in 1913-1914).¹⁹ Samuel Goldstein let the land claim lapse, however, and never resided in Juneau.²⁰

Robert Goldstein was born in Russia in 1831. He left as a child to find work in the fur markets of London.²¹ Sometime afterward, he traveled to Canada to ply his craft. Robert married Anna and together they raised eight

"Provisions, Dry Goods and Hardware, Cheap for Cash. Lazar Caplan, Sitka, Alaska." In the July 1879 issue: "A. Cohen, Dealer in General Merchandise, Sitka, Alaska."

¹⁷ *The Alaska Appeal*, April 6, 1879.

¹⁸ Fort Wrangell is three hundred thirty miles southeast of Sitka. Above in chapter one, note 32, Wrangell appears in reference to Benjamin Levy. Advertisements for Jewish owned establishments appeared in *The Alaska Appeal*, April 6, 1879: "Bernheim & Marx, dealers in General merchandise, Wrangell, Alaska." "J. Frohman, Provisions and General Merchandise, Sold Cheap for Cash, Wrangell, Alaska." And in the July 1879 issue: "Benjamin Levy, Dealers in General Merchandise and Mining Goods, Wrangell, Alaska."

In the September 11, 1916, *Anchorage Daily Times & Cook Inlet Pioneer*, an interesting obituary appeared. "MRS. SAMUEL KOHN, PIONEER ALASKA WOMAN IS DEAD. (Juneau Dispatch) Mrs. Samuel Kohn, a pioneer woman of the north, died at the government hospital at 2 p. m., today, the result of cancer from which she had been a sufferer for some months. Mrs. Kohn was born at Wrangell 52 years ago, and was a pioneer woman of the north, sharing uncomplainingly, the hardships of earlier days with her husband. She was highly respected by all who knew her."

The obituary dates her birth in 1864, three years before the transfer of Alaska from Russia to the United States. After the transfer ceremony in 1867, Benjamin Levi was reported to have gone to Wrangell to open a general store. There is no source material to indicate that Jews lived in Wrangell before 1867. Mrs. Samuel Kohn may have been an Alaskan native who married Samuel Kohn in Wrangell.

¹⁹ Robert N. De Armond, *The Founding Of Juneau* (Juneau: Gastineau Channel Centennial Association, 1980), p. 160.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

²¹ Stanton H. Patty, "Juneau's leading lady recalls adventuresome beginnings," *The Seattle Times*, Sunday, March 23, 1980, p. D 1.

children. Goldstein was persuaded to invest in a salmon-saltery on the Sacramento River which failed and left him broke.²² Belle Goldstein, the youngest of the eight children, recalls her father telling her mother, "we've been hearing stories about wonderful furs in Alaska, I think we should go there."²³ So in 1883, at the age of 52, Robert journeyed with his 14 year old son Charles to the new gold camp of Juneau. Anna Goldstein soon followed with the rest of the family.

Goldstein became the first fur trader in Juneau.²⁴ He built a trading post on the beach of Gastineau Channel presently occupied by South Franklin Street. The family lived on the second floor of the building. Belle²⁵ remembers Indian traders, who arrived in canoes stacked high with furs -- fox, sable, beaver, mink, marten, and an occasional fur seal. Robert Goldstein traded with the Tlingit Indians; Haidas Indians, who canoed hundreds of miles north from British Columbia; and those who lived in the Stikine River country.

The post issued tickets in exchange for furs, in denominations no smaller than \$1.00. The tickets were then tendered to purchase goods in Goldstein's store. No credit was given, with the exception of 'old-timers' who were known to be responsible. Goldstein also outfitted gold prospectors. In Belle's words, "he grubstaked²⁶ everybody that came along."²⁷

²² Ibid., p. D 1.

²³ Ibid., p. D 1.

²⁴ Tom Locke, "Grubstaking the Great Land," *The Great Lander Shopping News*, Anchorage, Alaska, Vol. 10, No. 30, July 26, 1978, p. 2.

²⁵ Born Bella Goldstein, she never liked the name, and preferred calling herself Belle.

²⁶ To grubstake is to outfit a prospector on condition of participating in the profits of his discoveries.

²⁷ Tom Locke, "Grubstaking the Great Land," *The Great Lander Shopping News*, Anchorage, Alaska, Vol. 10, No. 30, July 26, 1978, p. 2.

One of Belle's favorite stories recounts how, at the age of two, she was stolen by Indians.²⁸ Luckily, her parents noticed in a timely fashion, and were able to overtake the Indians' canoes. The Indians claimed Belle had hidden in one of the canoes. She had a different explanation, simply put, the Indians "loved white children, especially with curly hair."²⁹

During the Iditarod³⁰ gold rush, one of the older brothers, Isidore,³¹ joined in the prospecting. One year, Belle and her sister Minnie decided to visit Isidore. After a long and arduous journey, they arrived. There in Iditarod, Belle met her future husband, Robert W. Simpson,³² whom she married in 1914. She was a very astute businesswoman. She was artist Sydney Laurence's first promoter in Alaska. Belle ran a very successful gift shop called The Nugget. In 1946, she built the Simpson Building, a two-story

²⁸ Ibid., p. 2. This story was also corroborated during discussions with State Supreme Court Justice Jay Rabinowitz, in Fairbanks, Alaska, August 8, 1990.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

³⁰ Gold was discovered, December 25, 1908, in Iditarod, by two prospectors: W. A. Dikeman and John Beaton. They struck gold on Otter Creek, a tributary of the Haiditarod River. See, *The Great Lander: Shopping News & Sourdough Saver Classifieds*, Anchorage, Alaska, Vol. 11, No. 9, February, 28, 1979. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box D, File Folder 40.

The *Iditarod Nugget* newspaper, October 19, 1910, provides evidence that a sizable number of Jews stamped there.

"YOM KIPPUR DULY OBSERVED The great Jewish fast day, Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement, began on Wednesday evening at sundown, and ended on Thursday evening at sunset. Services appropriate to the event were held on Wednesday evening and on Thursday morning in Isaacs Bros. & Co.'s store, Isaac Baylis (Bayles) acting as rabbi. Both services were largely attended by the Jewish residents of the city."

³¹ Goldstein was not a determined prospector, he was a businessman. He opened "Isadore Goldstein, Ladies and Mens Furnishings." In the October 19, 1910, *Iditarod Nugget*, we find this advertisement: "20 Per Cent. 20 Per Cent. For ten days only, on all ladies' goods, including leather and felt shoes, at Goldstein's, First ave." For a wonderful picture of his store front in Iditarod, see, "City Sets Loussac Day To Honor Philanthropist," *Anchorage Daily Times*, July 10, 1962, p. 6. The picture also shows: "Isaacs Brothers," which Ike Bayles managed; "City Drug Store," owned and operated by Zachary Loussac; and Robert Simpson "Matchmaker, Engraving." Simpson was a non-Jew.

³² Simpson's store was only two buildings up the street from her brother's store.

poured concrete structure which still stands today. Interestingly, it stands next to her brother Charles' building on Seward Street.

There is very little in the sources to indicate that she considered herself much of a Jewess. In a 1955 publication of notable Alaskans, she listed herself a member of the Presbyterian Church.³³ But in one newspaper clipping, commemorating Juneau's First Bar Mitzvah, it reads "Belle Simpson, the first Jewish woman to be born in Juneau."³⁴

Belle, Charles, and Isidore were the only family members for which biographical information was available. Charles was born in London, England in 1869. In 1883, he entered Alaska, at the age of 14, with his father, but the family moved to Sacramento shortly thereafter.³⁵ To illustrate how influential the Goldstein's were in Juneau, note the following front page article from *The Daily Alaskan Herald* of November 3, 1939.

GOLDEN WEDDING ANNIVERSARY IS HAPPINESS TALE
"Don't Fight" Is Secret of Goldstein's Married Bliss

Tomorrow's Golden Wedding anniversary of Juneau's most prominent pioneer couple, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Goldstein, has every element required of a story written in childhood -- enduring love, happiness, success, and admirable position in the community.

In the year 1883, when California itself was still struggling in frontier progress, "Laura" and "Charlie" sat across from each other in their eighth grade schoolroom.

³³ Edmond C. Jeffery, Editor, *Alaska -- Who's Here, What's Doing, Who's Doing it -- 1955* (Anchorage: The Jeffery Publishing Company, 1955), p. 177.

³⁴ *Southeast Alaska Empire*, Juneau, Alaska, Monday, May 26, 1975. The caption for the picture reads, "JUNEAU'S FIRST BAR MITZVAH -- Thirteen-year old Alan Gross became Juneau's first bar mitzvah, or 'son of the law,' Saturday in initiatory synagogue ceremonies held in the Gold Room of the Baranof Hotel. Pictured on his right are his parents, Avrum and Sheri Gross; on his left are Belle Simpson, the first Jewish woman born in Juneau, and Rabbi Morris Hershman of San Francisco, who holds the Torah from which Alan read Hebrew scripture for the ceremony. This was the first time the ceremony had taken place in Juneau's history."

³⁵ David and William Tewkesbury, *Tewkesbury's Who's Who In Alaska and Alaska Business Index, Vol. 1947 I* (Juneau: Tewkesbury Publishers, 1947), p. 27.

That was the beginning of this courtship.

But let us see another picture. In 1885, when Juneau was only a few years named and the Klondike was not even thought of, Charles Goldstein arrived in Juneau with his father to join him in business where the I. Goldstein store now stands.

Young Charles liked Alaska, saw future here, but felt something lacking. He returned to San Francisco, and on the 24th of November, 1889, school days sweethearts Laura and Charles were married, "just kids," but "happy and hopeful."

In 1898, the Goldsteins returned to Juneau and young Charles Goldstein launched into business of his own with a general store where Krafft's Cabinet Shop now stands.

A year and a half later he moved his business into the McGrath Building where Hollmann's Pharmacy does business today. After six years in that location, Goldstein moved to the opposite corner, bought the lease of Kaufman Brothers ready-to-wear two story business, then a year later bought the property itself.

In 1914, on that site, Charles Goldstein, a soundly established Alaskan business man, erected the Goldstein Building which was razed by fire this spring. It was Alaska's first building with elevator and the first building of concrete.

Today, after February's disastrous blaze, four gaunt walls are all that remains of the once magnificent structure, but Charles Goldstein, who envies his wife's "pep," is completing plans for rebuilding a new Goldstein Building on the site of the old structure next spring.

Tomorrow night the many friends the Goldsteins have made in Juneau, will call between 9 and 11 o'clock in the evening at the Governor's Mansion to wish them continued happiness and good health.

Incidentally, the Goldstein's advice to young married couples is "don't fight, be good to each other."

And anyone will tell you the Goldstein's are as much in love today as they were in that San Francisco schoolhouse in 1883 when they first fell in love.³⁶

The Goldstein Building was rebuilt during the period May 1945 to July, 1946.³⁷ The building still stands today at 130 Seward Street. The

³⁶ *The Daily Alaska Empire*, Vol. LV, No. 8250, Juneau, Alaska, November 3, 1939, p. 1.

³⁷ R. N. DeArmond, *Old Gold: A Collection of Historical Vignettes* [The 50th Anniversary of Juneau Radio Station K I N Y], 1985.

Kaufman Brothers, mentioned above, who were bought out by the Goldsteins, appear in an earlier newspaper article. By the tone of the article, Kaufman Brothers must have been a sizable company.

July 14, 1904

KAUFMANS WILL LEAVE

There is general regret expressed that the enterprising firm of Kaufman Bros. have decided to retire from the local field. The firm has been closely identified with the business and commercial growth of Southeast Alaska, for the past eight years. In 1896 they occupied the old stand on the corner of Second and Franklin Streets, later they took the building which is now occupied by the post office. . . . In 1906, Leo G., and Nate G. Kaufman were succeeded by Sam G. and Isa. G. Kaufman, who had up to that time been in charge of the Skagway store. The two former managers went to Whatcom where they opened one of the largest and best stocked ladies' specialties houses on the Pacific coast.³⁸

Isidore Goldstein was born February 1, 1883 in San Francisco.³⁹ Soon after his birth, mother Anna Goldstein and the remainder of the children traveled up to Juneau. Isidore was a successful merchant. He married Carol Kahn of San Francisco, August 8, 1926.⁴⁰ The two bore one child,⁴¹ Robert William who became the owner of the Juneau Marine Supply Company. Most interesting about Isidore is that he served four terms as a Juneau councilman, and six terms as Juneau's mayor.⁴² Evergreen Bowl, Alaska's

³⁸ *Daily Alaska Dispatch*, July, 14, 1904.

³⁹ David and William Tewkesbury, *Tewkesbury's Who's Who In Alaska and Alaska Business Index, Vol. 1947 I* (Juneau: Tewkesbury Publishers, 1947), p. 28.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 28. See also Robert N. De Armond, *Old Gold: A Collection of Historical Vignettes* (The 50th Anniversary of Juneau Radio Station K I N Y), 1985. In the vignette on the Goldstein Building, DeArmond states "his two sons were born" in San Francisco. Unfortunately, De Armond did not disclose their names.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

first childrens' playground, was established in Juneau during Isadore's tenure as mayor.⁴³

The William David Gross Family

Another family long associated with Juneau is that of William David Gross. Mr. Gross was born in Russia on December 25, 1879.⁴⁴ As a young child, his parents, Zalmain and Annie, brought the family to Seattle. Prior to the Klondike Gold Rush, Gross arrived in Dyea,⁴⁵ Alaska on the ship *City of Seattle*. There he opened Red Front, a clothing store.⁴⁶ When the Klondike strike occurred, he closed shop in Dyea and reopened under the same name in Dawson, Yukon Territory.⁴⁷

In 1899, on a buying trip to Seattle, he observed crowds of people watching animated photographs which were projected on a screen.⁴⁸ Gross purchased a projector, four 1,000-foot reels of film, and returned to Dawson.⁴⁹ He introduced motion pictures to the residents of Dawson in early 1900. Gross screened three showings nightly, each of 15 to 20 duration, and charged \$1.00 for admission.⁵⁰ He sold his business in 1904, to attend the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, Missouri.⁵¹ During this trip, Gross visited St. Paul, Minnesota, then the best source of heavy clothing for work

⁴³ Bernard Postal, *The Jews Of Alaska* (unpublished manuscript, 1968), p. 10. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box C, File Folder 35.

⁴⁴ David and William Tewkesbury, *Tewkesbury's Who's Who In Alaska and Alaska Business Index, Vol. 1947 I* (Juneau: Tewkesbury Publishers, 1947), p. 30.

⁴⁵ Dyea is a few miles north of Skagway, at the mouth of the Taiya River.

⁴⁶ David and William Tewkesbury, *Tewkesbury's Who's Who In Alaska and Alaska Business Index, Vol. 1947 I* (Juneau: Tewkesbury Publishers, 1947), p. 30.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

in extremely cold temperatures.⁵² Later that same year, laden with new stock, he returned to Dawson and joined the stampede to Fairbanks.⁵³

In Fairbanks, Gross established Gross Clothing Store and introduced the population to nightly motion picture shows.⁵⁴ He lived in Fairbanks from 1904 until 1910, when he sold his business to attend the July 4, 1910 Jeffries-Johnson heavyweight boxing championship in Reno, Nevada.⁵⁵

In the fall of 1910, Gross returned to Alaska Territory, however this time he took up residence in Nome.⁵⁶ He introduced nightly motion picture shows until the summer 1911, when he departed Nome.⁵⁷ Gross recalled, that neither plot nor continuity was prevalent in early motion picture shows. Most presented children crying, people on horseback, moving trains and vessels, and flags blowing in the wind.⁵⁸

William Gross established The Coliseum Theatre, the territory's first picture house in Ketchikan, in the fall of 1911.⁵⁹ In the succeeding two years, he opened Coliseum Theatres in Wrangell, Juneau, Petersburg, Skagway, Haines, Douglas, and Sitka.⁶⁰ The Coliseum Theatre in Juneau, destroyed by fire in 1940, was replaced by the Gross 20th Century, which still stands today.

⁵² Ibid., p. 30.

⁵³ At Fairbanks, in 1908, the Jews gathered and founded a congregation. Gross was not among the men who joined.

⁵⁴ David and William Tewkesbury, *Tewkesbury's Who's Who In Alaska and Alaska Business Index, Vol. 1947 I* (Juneau: Tewkesbury Publishers, 1947), p. 30.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 30.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 30.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 30.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 30.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 30.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 30.

In 1909, Gross and his wife were married in Fairbanks.⁶¹ During their lives together, they adopted and reared five children. One member of the Gross family as well as other Jews are buried in the Evergreen Cemetery.

Evergreen Cemetery

This, Juneau's municipal cemetery, was established May 23, 1907.⁶² Juneau historian Robert De Armond writes:

Juneau's first burying ground was on Chicken Ridge in the vicinity of Main Street. Nearly 100 graves occupied that part of the ridge in 1887 when it was staked as a mining claim. A cemetery association was then organized which selected the present site, named it Evergreen Cemetery and improved it, with local residents contributing either money or labor. Between 1889 and 1892 all except 39 of the graves were moved from Chicken Ridge and the last of the old graves were moved to the new cemetery about 1915.⁶³

There is no Jewish section of the cemetery. Jews are buried in what appears to be the Masonic section and a section recently deeded to the Jewish Community by the Catholic Church. Among the Jews who are buried here, we find markers for Maurice D. Plotnick (d. 1984), and Abe H. Romick (d. 1988). Romile Gross (1939-1980) is buried in the Gross Family Mausoleum.⁶⁴

The Evergreen Cemetery has some intriguing tombstones. There were three with stars of David engraved upon them, but with ostensibly non-Jewish names: Jimmie Jack (d. 1940), August Lindell (d. 1940), and Ludwig

⁶¹ *The Alaska Sportsman*, February, 1958, pp. 28-29.

⁶² Robert N. De Armond, *Some Names Around Juneau* (1980), p. 18.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁶⁴ Only one of the six burial niches in the mausoleum is occupied. And unfortunately, the mausoleum is not well maintained.

Myhre (d. 1945). It would be pure conjecture to suggest reasons why these men or their families chose such tombstones. A peculiar tombstone marks the grave of Robert Cockburn 1880-1941, his nickname was "Jew Bob."

THE KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH: DAWSON CITY, YUKON TERRITORY

Before the discovery of gold at the Klondike River,⁶⁵ it was known by the Indians for plentiful salmon.⁶⁶ The Indians caught the salmon at the mouth of the river, by driving stakes into the water to form a fence, which forced the fish to enter traps.⁶⁷ This process, as explained by Agnes Rush Burr, gave the Klondike its name.

These stakes had to be hammered into the gravel of the river bed and the Indians called the stream Trondig, or Hammer-water, Tron meaning hammer, and tiuck or diuck, pronounced tig or dig, meaning water. This name . . . gradually became corrupted to Klondike which eventually came to stand for the whole district.⁶⁸

Juneau miners had been going to the Yukon for years before George Carmack made his discovery in August 1896, which sparked the madness of the great Klondike Gold Rush.⁶⁹ One of the legends of Carmack's discovery goes like this: Carmack and some Indian companions were hunting moose at Bonanza Creek. He shot a moose and took a piece of it to the stream to wash. While doing this, he saw gold in the water. He grabbed his pan and washed out more "nuggets than he had ever seen in a single pan."⁷⁰ Carmack staked

⁶⁵ The Klondike River is a tributary of the Yukon River in Canada's Yukon Territory.

⁶⁶ Agnes Rush Burr, *Alaska: Our Beautiful Northland of Opportunity* (Boston: The Page Company, 1919), p. 111.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 111-112.

⁶⁹ Bob De Armond, "And A Town Grew," *The Alaska Sportsman*, August, 1960, p. 37.

⁷⁰ Agnes Rush Burr, *Alaska: Our Beautiful Northland of Opportunity* (Boston: The Page Company, 1919), p. 114.

a claim and so did the Indians along with him. The news soon spread of the discovery, and forty thousand (some say one hundred thousand) men and women, from all points on the globe, set out to "strike it rich."

Some of the first news of the strike, was brought back to San Francisco on July 15, 1897 by *The Excelsior*, a steamer operated by the Alaska Commercial Company.⁷¹ She, on July 28, 1897, was the first vessel to leave San Francisco for Saint Michael after the start of the Klondike stampede.⁷² Once in Saint Michael (on Alaska's West Coast), it was a 1,700 mile, twenty-two day voyage against the current of the Yukon River to Dawson.⁷³

The Alaska Commercial Company had a small trading post at Dawson, and they quickly built a larger store and several warehouses to stock the influx of argonauts.⁷⁴ The company also built a sawmill at Dawson to supply lumber for buildings, sluice boxes,⁷⁵ and other needs. The small steamers the company had been operating on the Yukon River were now insufficient to meet demand, so they ordered four large stern-wheelers.⁷⁶

Miners trekked a variety of routes to Dawson, either via: the Stikine River and Lake Teslin; the Chilkoot or White Pass; Saint Michael and the Yukon River; the Mackenzie River and the great Arctic Plain; some even

⁷¹ Rudolf Glanz, "From Fur Rush to Gold Rushes," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. VII, No. 2, January 1975, pp. 101-102.

⁷² Ibid., pp. 101-102.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 102.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 102.

⁷⁵ A sluice box is a long, sloping trough with perpendicular grooves in its bottom. Water is directed into the sluice box, running over the gravel or sand to be sluiced. Gold flakes or nuggets are heavier than dirt, gravel, or sand. Therefore, as the water runs down the sluice, it carries away the dirt and etc., and the heavier gold falls into the grooves on the bottom of the sluice.

⁷⁶ Rudolf Glanz, "From Fur Rush to Gold Rushes," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. VII, No. 2, January 1975, pp. 101-102.

crossed the interior from Valdez or Cordova.⁷⁷ The least dangerous was the stern-wheeler from Saint Michael. However, those who could not bear the twenty-two day voyage, took a shorter, but much more difficult journey, namely, packing in overland from Skagway through the Chilkoot Pass.

Prospectors and merchants were attracted from all over the world by the fabulous reports from the Klondike, Jewish prospectors and merchants among them. One letter, written by Michael Eschwege, from the White Pass on the Skagway trail was printed in the *Jewish Chronicle* of London:

January 28, 1898

The names of our party Charles Eschwege of Bow Road, London, Michael Eschwege, son of the former . . . David Marks, East India Road . . . Joseph Kaufman, also of East London and . . . Emanuel Franks, late secretary and treasurer of the Bulawayo [Rhodesia] Hebrew Congregation . . . We are the only Jews upon the trail, and up to now have met only civility and courtesy.⁷⁸

It was even reported that "there was a Jew on the trail who came all the way from Jerusalem with an outfit."⁷⁹ In a letter from Charles Rosener, a young Jewish merchant in Dawson, he writes to his parents about the first Jewish Services at Dawson in 1898. He gives us a rich description, not only of the interesting, albeit temporary, Jewish community, but into the period itself.

As in every village and hamlet throughout the world did the sons of Israel congregate yesterday for worship. So did the Jews of Dawson honor the day and raise their voice in prayer. With the exception of a very limited number the Jews now dwelling on the

⁷⁷ Agnes Rush Burr, *Alaska: Our Beautiful Northland of Opportunity* (Boston: The Page Company, 1919), p. 115.

⁷⁸ *The Jewish Chronicle*, London, March 11, 1898.

⁷⁹ Rudolf Glanz, "From Fur Rush to Gold Rushes," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. VII, No. 2, January 1975, pp. 103. See also Sverre Arestad, editor, "Questing for Gold and Furs in Alaska," *Norwegian American Studies*, Vol. 21, 1962, pp. 91f.

banks of the Yukon are of Russian and Polish nativity, and these men, from what I witnessed yesterday and today, would prove true to their faith were they at the North Pole. You know my leanings towards orthodoxy; but now I am really a Minna Street Jehudi [location of Congregation Beth Manachim Streisand, San Francisco, a traditional synagogue].

Almost all our people as well as the gentiles dwell here in tent-covered houses, and there is, you will believe, as yet no temple, no lofty dome overlooking the Yukon and the Klondike. For the benefit of those who desired to worship the God of their fathers on Rosh Hashanah, my partner and I offered the use of our store as a place of congregation, which offer was gladly and thankfully accepted. We moved our worldly chattels, from our summer location to our present swell winter quarters Friday afternoon, the day before New Year. All the goods were placed in the three back rooms, and the store proper was given up for services. That evening about forty of the brethren responded and worshipped according to their custom. Two of the more learned alternated in chanting the prayers though all present seemed to know the services by heart, the reading being, of course, entirely in Hebrew and orthodox to the extent of eliminating not a single word.

Prayerbooks there were in plenty and a few tallethim [prayershawls] as well. Services were also held Saturday forenoon and evening and will continue this (Sunday) morning and noon. Our new quarters were thus consecrated with the New Year's service, and, as one of the congregation said to me today, we should be proud of the distinction, and really we are. If no hall can be secured for the Day of Atonement we shall again hold services in our store.

It seems good to know and to feel that, in this far distant land, we can at least do something towards the service of Almighty. The news of this, the first Jewish service held in Dawson, will soon travel all over the world, to prove that neither distance nor conditions can break the ties that unite all Israel, and up here we feel how very little forms of service interfere with the religious union in which we are all enfolded.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Charles S. Rosener, "First Jewish Services At Dawson, Yukon Territory -- 1898," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XI, No. 2, January 1979, pp. 143-146.

Robert Bloom, who in 1898 arrived in Dawson, recounted that the Day of Atonement services were indeed held in the Yukon Pioneer Hall.⁸¹ Bloom also recalls the first Jewish burial in Dawson. In 1902, a young Jewish prospector drowned while working on the Fortymile River. Robert Bloom claims to have officiated at the young man's burial in the Jewish cemetery at Dawson.⁸² It is named "Beth Chaim," Hebrew for cemetery, but literally meaning "House of Life."⁸³

Jewish communities, from the earliest times, have organized associations for the burial of their brethren. In fact, this is usually one of the first functions a Jewish community addresses. The Jews of Dawson were no different, and organized themselves as The Hebrew Congregation of Dawson.⁸⁴ The precise date upon which Dawson's Jews organized is not known, but as early as October 15, 1902, the president and secretary of the congregation wrote a letter to F. Gosselin, Dominion Land Agent for Yukon Territory, requesting a grant of two lots for a Jewish cemetery.⁸⁵ H. Pinkiert, the president, and Abe Isaacs, the secretary asked that the congregation be issued a patent for lots 16 and 17 in block 17 of the East Dawson Addition to the Townsite of Dawson.⁸⁶ As Mr. Norton B. Stern explains:

⁸¹ Jessie S. Bloom, "The Jews Of Alaska," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XV, No. 2, November 1963, p. 98.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 98 The first Jewish burial in Dawson was in 1900, according to Robert Bloom. But actually, it occurred in 1902, as indicated in a letter from H. Pinkiert and Abe Isaacs, the president and secretary of the "Hebrew Congregation of Dawson."

⁸³ Norton B. Stern, "The Jews In Yukon Territory And Their Cemetery," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XIV, No. 4, July 1982, p. 358. See also, Cyril Edel Leonoff, *Pioneers, Pedlars, and Prayer Shawls: The Jewish Communities In British Columbia And The Yukon* (Victoria, British Columbia: Sono Nis Press), 1978, p. 73.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 358.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 358.

The letter indicated that a committee had previously met with Gosselin and had been told to select the lots the congregation desired for a Jewish burial ground. Also, there was a feeling of urgency in the request, for Pinkiert and Isaacs observed that "it is our desire to bury one of our brethren on said ground within the next day or two. . . ." And they undoubtedly did perform the burial at that time, though they had no way of knowing that it would be almost eleven years before the land would be finally approved officially as a Jewish cemetery owned by the Hebrew Congregation of Dawson.⁸⁷

Although we do not know the name of the Jewish prospector who died in 1902, we do know the name of the other Jew buried in the cemetery. He was Solomon Packer, who died on February 26, 1918, aged fifty-seven.⁸⁸

The Canadian census of 1901, showed 163 Jews lived in Yukon Territory.⁸⁹ Moreover, in the first Alaskan and Yukon business directory, issued in 1903, Dawson posted over sixty Jewish businesses, the most of anywhere.⁹⁰ Very soon thereafter, most left to join the gold rush in Fairbanks. The Canadian historian, Mr. Arthur Daniel Hart, wrote that the Jewish population in Yukon Territory "did not grow," and "gradually

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 358.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 361. See also, Yukon Archives, photograph no. 1824, Dawson, Cemetery (Jewish), Innis-Taylor Collection.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 357. See also, Arthur Daniel Hart, *The Jew in Canada* (Toronto and Montreal, 1926), p. 78.

Another prospector who journeyed to Yukon was Henry Marcoc Zimmermann. He left San Francisco in 1898, staked a claim on Selwyn Creek with a nephew, Arthur Zimmermann, and mined for the next forty years. He joined the gold rush in Nome for a period of time, but returned to Dawson. Refer, "A Prospector In Yukon Territory," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, January 1982, p. 182. See also, Cyril Edel Leonoff, *Pioneers, Pedlars, and Prayer Shawls: The Jewish Communities In British Columbia And The Yukon* (Victoria, British Columbia: Sono Nis Press), 1978, p. 71.

⁹⁰ Rudolf Glanz, "From Fur Rush to Gold Rushes," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. VII, No. 2, January 1975, pp. 103.

decreased every year."⁹¹ By 1911, there were 41 Jews in Yukon Territory, and by 1921, only 8 remained.⁹²

Robert Bloom was among those who stampeded to Fairbanks in 1903. Fairbanks, and his life there accompanied by wife Jessie and children, will be the subject of chapter four.

THE NOME GOLD STRIKE AND ALASKA'S FIRST JEWISH ORGANIZATION

The sands of Nome, on the Seward Peninsula in western Alaska, held untold riches, which were discovered in 1898. In July, a boat containing some prospectors en route to Golovin Bay, capsized at the mouth of Snake River.⁹³ The men prospected a bit and found some gold, but not in proportion to what they hoped to find in Golovin Bay, so they continued up to Golovin.⁹⁴ As it turned out, there was not much gold at Golovin Bay. Many returned to Nome, and in September, with the ground freezing and the snow falling, a good amount of gold was discovered.⁹⁵

The news soon spread to other mining camps, and in the spring of 1899, miners arrived from as far away as Dawson. None of them knew that the mother lode had yet to be found. Agnes Rush Burr described the unearthing:

... so the story goes, one of the newcomers had scurvy and went to the beach to take the old time whaler's cure of sun and salt

⁹¹ Arthur Daniel Hart, *The Jew in Canada* (Toronto and Montreal, 1926), *op. cit.*

⁹² Ibid., p. 496. See also, Norton B. Stern, "The Jews In Yukon Territory And Their Cemetery," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XIV, No. 4, July 1982, p. 357.

⁹³ Agnes Rush Burr, *Alaska: Our Beautiful Northland of Opportunity* (Boston: The Page Company, 1919), p. 196.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 196.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 196.

water. He employed his time, in his free, open-air sanatorium in panning, and thus discovered Nome's golden sands that brought a rush of men and women here from many parts of the world.

The beach was "No Man's Land," for the government had reserved the stretch between the sea and high water for wharfage purposes. No claim could be worked anywhere by any one. This lack of title or ownership led of course to quarrels and much disorder until the matter was taken in hand by a miners' meeting and the decision was made that each man should have to work as his own, as much ground as he could reach with his shovel from the edge of the hole where he was digging.

But the news of this public, instead of private, ownership of the land, and of the fact that the gold could be easily washed out, because of the abundance of water right at hand, made many believe that fortunes could be made over night, and . . . brought a tremendous number of people. . . .⁹⁶

As a result, within a few months, fifteen thousand people, with all sorts of machinery, overflowed the beaches.

The worth of Nome's gold strike was impressive. In 1899, the first year of the boom, gold output from the coastal sand was \$1,023,000 and \$1,500,000 from interior sites.⁹⁷ As one might expect, many Jewish merchants set up shop in Nome, to outfit the abundance of miners. A photograph taken in late 1899, showed this sign:

A. Dinkelspiel, Alaska Outfitting, clothing, tents, shoes, groceries and hardware.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 197.

⁹⁷ Rudolf Glanz, "From Fur Rush to Gold Rushes," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. VII, No. 2, January 1973, pp. 105. See also, L. H. Carlson, "The First Mining Season in Nome, Alaska -- 1899," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 16, 1947, p. 164.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 105. See also "Alaskan Magazine Expedition . . . Cape Nome from Skagway, November, 1899," *Alaskan Magazine*, Vol. I, 1900, p. 49.

According to these figures, each Nome prospector averaged \$168.20 of gold. It is evident that some struck it rich and others went broke.

Dinkelspiel also placed an advertisement in *The Nome Gold Digger*, proclaiming,

Don't talk about prices for goods! Dinkelspiel will be the criterion for prices as soon as his stock arrives from San Francisco and Seattle.⁹⁹

According to Rudolf Glanz, at least thirty-five Jewish names were found in the Nome section of the 1903 Alaska-Yukon business directory.¹⁰⁰ The names of some of Nome's Jewish residents were: Abramsky, Bayles, James W. Bursick, Caplin, J. M. Davidson, Goldberg, Goodfriend, Greenberg¹⁰¹, Grumbaum, Max R. Hirschberg, Lazarus, Levin, Levy, Liebes, Lipman, Albert J. Lowe, Lustig, Otto S. Moses, Polsky, Rose, Roth, Moses Rosencranz, Rosenfeld, Rubenstein, Rubin, Samuels, Segal, Leo Seidenverg, Abraham Simpson, W. A. Sternberg, and Bernard Stone.¹⁰² Jews engaged in merchandising, freighting, shipping, and supplying services for ships.¹⁰³

The Nome Hebrew Benevolent Society

⁹⁹ *The Nome Gold Digger*, June 6, 1900.

¹⁰⁰ Rudolf Glanz, "From Fur Rush to Gold Rushes," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. VII, No. 2, January 1975, p. 105.

¹⁰¹ This was probably Herbert Greenberg. In the *Seward Weekly Gateway* of July 26, 1913, note the following: "Charging that his wife had been dazzled by a display of wealth and alienated from him by Herbert Greenberg, a wealthy Nome mining manager, Robert Bonnett of Seattle, has commenced suit against Greenberg for \$25,000 damages."

¹⁰² Rudolf Glanz, "From Fur Rush to Gold Rushes," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. VII, No. 2, January 1975, p. 105. See also, "A Western Picture Parade," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XIII, No. 1, October, 1980, p. 43. See, *Alaska-Yukon Gazetteer -- 1903*. See also, E. S. Harrison, *Nome and Seward Peninsula* (Seattle, 1905), loc. cit.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 105. See also, issues of the *Iditarod Nugget* and *Seward Weekly Gateway* between the years 1908 and 1913.

In 1901, Alaska's first Jewish organization was founded in Nome. The Nome Hebrew Benevolent Society was established with sixty charter members.¹⁰⁴ The first meeting, held in the office of Lazarus Solomon, was conducted by Max Roth and H. L. Jaffe, the congregation's temporary president and secretary.¹⁰⁵ During the course of the evening, the following were elected permanent officers: Max Roth, president; Sylvain J. Lazarus, secretary; Sam Bayles,¹⁰⁶ treasurer; and Messieurs Finkelstein and Dinkelspiel, trustees.¹⁰⁷ A committee was appointed to confer with the trustees of the local Masonic Lodge to obtain part of their cemetery for a Jewish burial ground.¹⁰⁸ The congregation had a Torah scroll,¹⁰⁹ said to have been the first in Alaska, and asked Sam Bayles to serve as cantor for the High Holy Days.¹¹⁰

The Leo Seidenverg Family

The following several paragraphs profile the life of Leo Seidenverg, members of his family, and Jewish friends throughout the territory. The

¹⁰⁴ Rudolf Glanz, "From Fur Rush to Gold Rushes," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. VII, No. 2, January 1975, p. 105.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹⁰⁶ Sam Bayles was the brother of Isidore "Ike" Bayles. According to the August 9, 1911, *Iditarod Nugget*, Sam visited his brother in Iditarod. "Sam Bayles, brother of councilman I. Bayles, who arrived here recently from Bakersfield, Cal., will be manager for Isaacs Bros., & Co., during the coming Winter. Councilman Bayles expects to go Outside for the Winter." See below, the section on Anchorage for information on Ike Bayles.

"Outside" is the term Alaskan use in reference to places outside of Alaska.

¹⁰⁷ Rudolf Glanz, "From Fur Rush to Gold Rushes," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. VII, No. 2, January 1975, p. 105.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁰⁹ This was probably the Bayles family Torah scroll which they donated to the Jewish Community of Anchorage in 1957. See below, the section on Ike Bayles in Anchorage.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106. Also note, Sam's brother Ike Bayles, was reported to have fulfilled the same function in Iditarod and Anchorage.

story is reconstructed from an interview¹¹¹ with his son Edward, who was nicknamed Babe.

Leo Seidenverg left Russia in 1896, and worked his way across Europe to the Port of Hamburg. He spent an undetermined amount of time working in Hamburg and saved money for transatlantic passage. Upon arrival in America, Seidenverg worked his way to Seattle and then north to Nome in 1900.

Seidenverg went to Alaska because he had a sister there. She had married a gentleman by the name of Finkelstein¹¹² (mentioned above) who operated a mercantile store there. In Babe's words:

He didn't know anything about it, period. He was just trying to find his sister, that's why he headed for Alaska, he knew nothing about the country. Of course when he got to Nome and he worked for Finkelstein for two years, then he (saw) the opportunities, the Gold Rush days and gold country there, naturally he stayed there. He made several fortunes and lost (them), but it was the main idea of (everybody) . . . in the country in those days . . . to make money.

In 1900, Seidenverg opened a second-hand business in Nome. The sources do not reveal if this was, or was not, in partnership with Finkelstein. In 1902, he had accumulated enough capital to begin a small fur trading company called Bon Marche. The company became quite successful, and in 1917, Seidenverg began trading with Siberia. He had small vessels which cruised the Bering Sea to trade with the Russians. In 1918, Seidenverg bought the *Bender Brothers*, a large ship able to voyage from Seattle to

¹¹¹ Transcript of Bernice Bloomfield interview with Edward (Babe) Seidenverg. Recorded in the early 1970s, *op. cit.* Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library. Box B. File Folder 25.

¹¹² In 1906, the Finkelsteins moved to Cordova and opened a general store. The copper mines were very active at that time.

Nome, and then to Siberia. Seidenverg had stations in Nome, Anawier, and on the Kamchatka Peninsula. Profits from fur sales were split between Seidenverg and the Russian government, 60% / 40%. Of particular interest is this story: Apparently during the 1917 Russian Revolution, Seidenverg's two ships were seized and he thrown in a Russian jail for several years.¹¹³ Upon his release, he continued fur trading with Russia, but it was not until 1959 that the Russians made a token payment for the confiscated ships.

Seidenverg's first wife died in 1937. In 1939, he married again, this time to Ethel Kirschbaum. In 1942, they moved to Anchorage and bought his brother Harry's clothing store. In 1951, he entered into a partnership with his step-sons Alvin G. and Melvin Kirschbaum. The store is currently known by the name Seidenverg and Kays.

Leo Seidenverg's son Edward (Babe) was born in Seattle in 1910. Babe was two months old when he arrived in Nome via steamer. According to Babe Seidenverg, 90% of Nome's inhabitants were white, particularly Swedish and Norwegian, 10% were Eskimo. He was the only Jewish child in the primary school grades. Concerning other Jews in the arctic country, Babe told Ms. Bloomfield:

In the early days, I can remember as a kid, . . . we used to have a fellow that was half Jew and half Swede. His name was Shaky, . . . he was always around the house. . . . As kids we enjoyed him, he was a real fine old gentleman.

And then up in the Kotzebue¹¹⁴ area you got the Magids Brothers, there was Sam Magids and Boris Magids. And of course, Bess, Boris' exwife, after he passed away she married an old time pilot up there by the name of John Fross. As far as I know, she's still alive

¹¹³ "Seidenverg And Kays Gets New Owner, Building, Keeps Name," *Anchorage Daily Times*, November 13, 1974.

¹¹⁴ Kotzebue is a large Eskimo village located on the northwest shore of Baldwin Peninsula in Kotzebue Sound, 26 miles above the Arctic Circle.

in Juneau. But she was quite a character. She was a real early day character and drank like a fish and would go out and get drunk and everything Boris and his brother Sam were real fine gentlemen, they were fine Jewish people.

Babe also spoke of man by the name of Greenberg, who was actually the father of Boris and Sam and lived in Candle.¹¹⁵ The Seidenverg's sent Babe and his brother to Seattle to a secondary school. Babe returned to Nome in 1928, out of a sense of responsibility to his mother. His brother never returned to Nome.

During his flying days with Pan American Airways, Babe discovered Jews even further north. He began working for Pan American in 1929, based in Nome. In those days:

It was just a bunch of old junk heaps as far as airplanes were concerned. We were the only airline that was ever established in Alaska We used to be called Pacific Alaskan Airlines, a subsidiary of Pan American Airlines.

They didn't go to Seattle in those days. They operated out of Nome, they operated out of Fairbanks, they eventually operated out of Anchorage.

We flew all over the arctic. We had mail contracts, and we hauled freight and passengers.

Up in the far North, as far as you can go, I used to fly up there with Jerry Jones, a pilot from Pan American. There were quite a few fellows up around Point Hope and Wainwright that were Jewish people and married . . . Native women and had children and so forth.

I'd say money was probably the reason for them getting into the country and of course when they married Native women they were stuck there.

Babe knew Ike (Isidore) Bayles, Robert Goldstein, and Sam Applebaum.

¹¹⁵ Candle was an early mining town. It is located in the northeast quadrant of Seward Peninsula, approximately 190 miles northeast of Nome.

I knew Ike for years, and years, and years. A wonderful guy. I knew . . . Charlie Goldstein, . . . out of Juneau (he) was really a fine man.

Charlie Goldstein was a fur buyer for years and years in that country and also had businesses in Juneau. They used to have a combination hardware store and fisher boat craning, boat equipment and stuff.

Oh, I knew Sam years ago. He used to be out buying fur, and of course when I was a young fellow I was out buying fur. And in those days there was nothing to be made (from) fur but money. Fox at that time. Skin was used in the Parisian market for clothing and things . . . and they used to bring a ridiculous price on the exchange.

Asked about his father's sense of Jewish observance, Babe confided, "there was no place to practice anything," but my father would have done more given the opportunity. "I doubt that I would" concern myself with it, even if there had been a place to practice.

Babe Seidenverg married Vashti E. Godwin on May 15, 1931.¹¹⁶ He was a member of the Northwestern Alaska Chamber of Commerce from 1929-1932, a member of the Nome City Council from 1932-36, and served as the mayor of Nome twice, 1937-38 and 1945-46.¹¹⁷ Babe took over stewardship of Bon Marche Stores from 1932 to Nov. 18, 1946, when fire gutted the building which housed the store and their living quarters.¹¹⁸ In September 1946, he left Alaska to sell clothing for Levi Strauss and Company.

¹¹⁶ David and William Tewkesbury, *Tewkesbury's Who's Who In Alaska and Alaska Business Index, Vol. 1947 I* (Juneau: Tewkesbury Publishers, 1947), p. 74. There is no information on Vashti E. Godwin, but it might be conjectured that she was not a Jewess.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

FAIRBANKS

The last of the significant gold rushes was in the Tanana River valley. In 1901, Fairbanks was a small trading station of a few log houses and stores.¹¹⁹ Agnes Rush Burr recounts:

Then Felix Pedro found gold on a near-by creek. It was an odd coincidence that several seasons before, when going through this section with a few comrades on their way to Circle, Pedro found gold. But the party was in an almost starved condition, there was no trading post then, and haste had to be made. So the gold was abandoned. In fact, Pedro did not even take sufficient note of it to remember the exact location. Other miners, hearing of the discovery, tried to locate the rimrock he had sighted but were not successful. It was not until 1902 when he returned, brought possibly by the memory of his former discovery, and again found gold, that the rush in this district started. Whether this paystake was the same as his original discovery neither he nor any one else knew.¹²⁰

The town of Fairbanks was incorporated in 1903. Prospectors trekking over land, coming up the Yukon River, or over the mountains to Dawson, stopped there for supplies.¹²¹ By 1904, the town had grown significantly. That year, the federal offices were moved from Eagle¹²² to

¹¹⁹ Agnes Rush Burr, *Alaska: Our Beautiful Northland of Opportunity* (Boston: The Page Company, 1919), p. 144.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 144.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 144.

¹²² Eagle, on the Yukon River, is only a few miles from the Alaskan/Canadian border. It had its beginnings in the early 1880s, when Francois Mercier, a fur trader for the Alaska Commercial Company, established his Belle Isle trading post. Fur traders were followed by gold seekers, and by 1898 Eagle's population was 1,700. The town population included missionaries, the United States Army (Fort Egbert), and Federal Judge James Wickersham.

Eagle was the interior's first incorporated city in 1901. By 1910, Eagle's population had dwindled to 178, due to gold strikes in Fairbanks and Nome. Judge Wickersham and the Third District Court moved to Fairbanks in 1904. Fort Egbert was abandoned in 1911.

Fairbanks, and Federal Judge James Wickersham took up residence in the new town.

Many Jews came to Fairbanks for the gold rush, though most left for the gold fields of Ruby in 1907 and Iditarod in 1910. From the gold fields they traveled south, beginning in 1913, to Anchorage in anticipation of economic opportunities at the newly established construction camp of the Alaska Railroad.

THE ALASKA RAILROAD, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ANCHORAGE, AND ITS JEWISH PIONEERS

Today, Anchorage is the largest city in Alaska, and possesses the largest Jewish population, estimated to be 2,000.¹²³ From the very beginning, Jews played a major role in city politics and philanthropy. Jewish names and businesses were prominent in stories and advertisements of the local newspapers.¹²⁴ Three Jews of particular distinction were: Leopold David, Anchorage's first mayor; Isidore Bayles, president of the *Anchorage*

¹²³ Rabbi Harry L. Rosenfeld, Congregation Beth Shalom, Anchorage, Alaska.

¹²⁴ These are many of the Jewish names (n) and businesses (b) which appeared in the *Anchorage Daily Times*, *Anchorage Daily Times & Cook Inlet Pioneer*, *Cook Inlet Pioneer & Knik News*, and *Knik News* between 1915 and 1919: A. Abrahams (n), M. Abraham (n), S. R. Abraham (n), Mr. and Mrs. George Carrol (n, b), Dr. Morris S. Coble (b), Lena Cohen (n), Anna Diamond (n), H. C. Feldman (b), Finkelstein & Shapiro (b), Mr. and Mrs. Isaac H. Fleischmann (n), Mabel Fleischmann (n), A. Fredenberg (n), Celia Friedman (n), Jacob Gottstein (n, b), David Gross (b), Isaac Hamburger (n), Fred Isaacs (b), Mr. and Mrs. N. N. Jaffe (n), Jaffe & Bayles (b), A. Kaplan (n), Harold Koslosky (b), I. Koslosky (n), Janis Marvin Koslosky (n, b), Lena Koslosky (n), Ben Levin (n), Mrs. Ben Levin (n), Sam Mandel (n), L. R. Moses (n), Louis Rosenthal (n), Mrs. Alfred Samuels (n), Mr. Arthur Samuels (n, b), Elizabeth and Helen Samuels (n), Harry Seidenverg (n, b), Seidenverg & Freyd (b), A. A. Shonbeck (n, b), Mrs. A. A. Shonbeck (n), Raymond W. Silver (n), Sol Silverman (n), Barney Simon (b), Mrs. B. Simon (n), Wiseman (b), Henry Wolf (n).

Daily Times; and Zachary J. Loussac, the city's most significant philanthropist.

What were the environmental factors which attracted people to Alaska and Anchorage? The earliest pioneers were attracted to Alaska by her plentiful furs. From the earliest times, Alaska's economy was based on fur trading, this changed in 1880, with the discovery of gold at Juneau. Gold remained important to the economy, but there was a new impetus for economic development on the horizon, namely the Alaska Railroad.

There were several railroads constructed in Alaska prior to the Alaska Railroad. The earliest, built in the period 1898 to 1900, was the White Pass and Yukon Route, which proceeded from Skagway to the Yukon River at Whitehorse, Yukon.¹²⁵ Another major line was the Copper River and Northwestern Railroad, built between 1906 and 1911, from Cordova, on Prince William Sound, north to a huge copper ore deposit in the Wrangell Mountains.¹²⁶ A third railroad, incorporated in the state of Washington in 1902, was the Alaska Central.¹²⁷ Its goal was to provide a route which lay entirely in U.S. territory. The prospective railroad was to travel in the direction of the Klondike, Fairbanks, and Nome goldfields.¹²⁸ The planned southern terminus was Seward, then northward through the Susitna Valley, Broad Pass, and on to the northern terminus at the Tanana River. From the banks of the Tanana, passengers would board riverboats to the goldfields.

In 1903, when gold was discovered on the Chena River, the developers decided to extend the route north to Fairbanks. Construction began on

¹²⁵ Stan Cohen, "The History of railroading in Alaska: since 1898," *The Railroad News*, Volume 3, Number 3, July, 1990, p. 1. See, Stan Cohen, *Rails Across The Tundra, A Historical Album of The Alaska Railroad*.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

August 23, 1904 in Seward.¹²⁹ Over the next several years, the Alaska Central Railroad Company had financial difficulties, and in 1908 was reorganized as the Alaska Northern Railway Company.¹³⁰ By 1910, track had been laid up to Kern Creek, on Turnagain Arm, (south of present day Anchorage), but funds ran out and construction halted.

In 1914, a federal survey party from the Alaska Engineering Commission (AEC), set up a field headquarters near the mouth of Ship Creek.¹³¹ They filed a report which encouraged U.S. Government ownership and operation of the railroad.¹³² Anticipating President Woodrow Wilson's favorable reaction to their engineering report, they left a small crew behind to build a mess hall and hospital during the winter.¹³³ On April 9, 1915, President Wilson announced the government would assume responsibility for building the Alaska Railroad. Even before the President's decision had been rendered, a squatter's settlement (tent city) developed. By June, more

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 1.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 1.

¹³¹ Michael E. Carberry, "Patterns of the Past," *The Alaska Journal*, Autumn, 1979, p. 22.

Before the summer of 1915, the area that is now Anchorage was known as Ship Creek. The settlement was built on the banks of that stream. When larger boats began to ply the upper reaches of Cook Inlet, the waters just off Ship Creek became known as "Knik Anchorage." It was from this point that small craft could reach the town of Knik or the settlement of Ship Creek. The lighter and smaller craft which unloaded supplies from the steamships gave rise to another name -- Ship Creek Landing.

But it was the U. S. Post Office Department which gave the town the name "Anchorage." In April 1915, shortly after President Wilson selected the route of the government railroad, preparations for a post office were made. Roydon Chase was appointed postmaster. He made it clear, mail was to be sent to "Anchorage."

¹³² The Alaska Engineering Commission found the Ship Creek site desirable because it was a convenient staging area from which to build the railroad to the Matanuska coal fields. In addition, the site was roughly midway between Seward and Fairbanks. As a harbor, it did not have special advantages, in fact wide-ranging tides, siltation, and the mud flats posed significant problems.

¹³³ "Conditions at Ship Creek," *The Knik News*, March 6, 1915; and "Latest About the Railroad," *The Knik News*, March 27, 1915.

than 2,000 people packed into the settlement.¹³⁴ The promise of railroad construction attracted sourdoughs and would-be entrepreneurs from all over the territory.

Leopold David

Leopold David arrived at Ship Creek in May 1915.¹³⁵ He was born in Nordhausen, Germany on August 21, 1881.¹³⁶ In search of a better life, his parents brought the five children (Hannah, Clara, Martha, Max, and Leopold) to Brooklyn during the 1880s.¹³⁷ The Davids owned a soap factory.

After the death of his parents, Leopold and Max joined the U. S. Army to fight in the Spanish-American War (1898). According to numerous sources, Leopold was not old enough to enlist, so he changed his date of birth from 1881 to 1878.¹³⁸ They served in the Philippines during 1901, Max died there in March. After assignments in Fort Columbus, New York and Walla Walla, Washington, Leopold was assigned to Fort Egbert, Alaska on October 31, 1904.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ Michael E. Carberry, "Patterns of the Past," *The Alaska Journal*, Autumn, 1979, p. 22.

¹³⁵ From Leopold David's application for membership in the Benevolent And Protective Order Of Elks, 1918. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box A, File Folder 8.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*

¹³⁷ From the personal notes of Bernice Bloomfield, 1977. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box A, File Folder 10.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, *op. cit.* From a conversation with Carolyn David Butler, Leopold and Anna David's daughter.

A number of Alaskan sources state Leopold David was born in New York, 1878. The sources do not relate who cared for his sisters after their parents death. Caroline David Butler remembered that Hannah (the youngest) "was sent back to Germany when mother and father died in New York. Later she lived in Holland. I have met my cousins there. They were hidden for years by Dutch on the German border, and along with Hannah, lived through the war. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box A, File Folder 10, *op. cit.*

¹³⁹ Leopold David's Hospital Corps Card. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box A, File Folder 7.

At Fort Egbert, David held the rank of Sergeant First Class, Hospital Corps, U. S. Army. On January 30, 1905, he was dispatched on a mercy mission to Circle City, where a diphtheria epidemic had broken out among the Indians. His official report¹⁴⁰ recounted weather conditions on the trail of 25 degrees below zero (the weather he wrote, "was not very cold"), blowing snow and accumulations of several feet which obliterated the trail, problems with his sled dogs, the manner of life among the Indians, how he treated the cases of diphtheria, and his return to Fort Egbert on April 6. He received a Certificate of Merit accompanied by the following letter.

Fort Egbert, AK
September 2, 1905

Sergeant,

I take much pleasure in forwarding to you your Certificate of Merit awarded to you by the President of the United States, in recognition of your distinguished service last winter in connection with the relief of the diphtheria stricken Indians during the Arctic storm. While the honor confirmed by the certificate, upon you individually, is so well deserved, yet as a soldier your conduct as well as your reward for it has brought upon the Army of the United States and upon the profession of arms, generally that honorable renown, which stimulates righteous pride and inspired further heroic actions. And in congratulating you, we of the Army, therefore, now share with you the honor conferred without having shared the hardships and sufferings through which it was won. You have the good wishes of all at Fort Egbert.

Yours respectfully,
Major (unreadable)
3rd U. S. Infantry, Commanding¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ A transcript of David's official report is available in Box A, File Folder 7.

¹⁴¹ Transcript of interview with Caroline David Butler, p.24. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box A, File Folder 13.

Leopold David was honorably discharged in September 1905.¹⁴²

Upon his discharge, David settled in Seward.¹⁴³ His Army experience as a pharmacist's assistant enabled him to become manager of the Seward Drug Company. Like many pharmacists of that time, his knowledge of medicinal ingredients brought him the title "doctor." In numerous articles of the *Seward Weekly Gateway* between 1905 and 1911, we read about "Dr. David." In fact, the December 25, 1909, *Seward Weekly Gateway*, carried an advertisement for Leopold David as a "physician and surgeon."

During his time in Seward, David met Anna Karasek, they were married on November 10, 1909.

David-Karasek Wedding

Dr. Leopold David and Miss Anna Karasek were quietly married in the social hall of the steamer Yucatan at 10 o'clock last night. Rev. L. H. Pedersen performing the ceremony. Mrs. David was formerly principal of the Seward Public schools and enjoys a large circle of friends in this town. She reached Seward on the Yucatan. Dr. David is manager of the Seward Drug Company and enjoys great personal popularity. Dr. and Mrs. David have taken the Boe residence on Second Ave.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Leopold David's Hospital Corps Card. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box A, File Folder 7.

¹⁴³ Two other Jews who lived in Seward were: Leon Urbach and Sol Urie.

Leon Urbach was born in 1885, in Sidney, Nebraska. In 1915 he settled in Seward and ran a dry goods business which his son still operates today. He was a past president of the Seward Chamber of Commerce, Master of his Masonic Lodge, and on the Draft Board. During the Eisenhower Administration, he went to Washington, D.C. as the Alaska Draft Board Delegate, and was decorated by the President. Interview with Larry Urbach, son of Leon Urbach, February, 1991.

Sol Urie was born in the Bronx, New York, on January 9, 1900/01. His family came from Austria. The family name was actually Ury, but the midwife changed the spelling on his birth certificate. He was trained as a baker. At the age of fifteen, he ran away from home to join the Army. He was stationed in Alaska with the WAMCATS (Washington and Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System). After the First World War he settled in Seward and operated the Seward Bakery until the Second World War. Interview with Lee McAnerney, step-daughter of Sol Urie, February, 1991.

¹⁴⁴ *Seward Weekly Gateway*, November 13, 1909.

Anna Karasek was a non-Jew. The Davids raised two children: Caroline and Leo Jr. Caroline, in her 1977 interview with Bernice Bloomfield, stated "I didn't realize that our family was Jewish" and she was certain, neither did her brother. See, Transcript of

He also earned a law degree and passed the Washington State Bar by correspondence.¹⁴⁵ In 1909, the Davids temporarily moved to Susitna Station, where he served as the Deputy U. S. Marshal.¹⁴⁶ The June 19, 1909 *Seward Weekly Gateway* carried the following story of local import:

MARSHAL DAVID REACHES SEWARD

Deputy Marshal L. David of Susitna reached Seward this morning, bringing with him two prisoners, William Foster, charged with insanity, and Sepple Kaster, bound over by Commissioner Farris on a charge of selling liquor to natives. David departed in a launch from Susitna, came down to Sunrise, secured William Snooks as a guard, and came over the Johnson Creek road to mile 34 on the Alaska Central. Missing the train, the party came to Seward by handcar.

Marshal David reports considerable mining activity in the Susitna country. The benches on Cache Creek are showing up extremely rich. The river steamer Alice successfully made the trip to Indian river, the head of navigation on the Susitna, and landed supplies for a trading station to be established there by the A. C. Company.

The Davids moved to Knik on June 1, 1910. There, he was appointed United States Commissioner,¹⁴⁷ a post he held until 1921. As Commissioner, David recorded legal instruments (deeds, mining claims and the like) and served as ex-officio probate judge.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, he continued in the pharmacy business, and was active in Knik as head of the Chamber of Commerce and the Commercial Club. In 1921, David went into private law practice with L. V. Ray. In the February 8, 1922, *Anchorage Daily Times*, they bought the following advertisement. "RAY & DAVID, Attorneys at Law,

interview with Caroline David Butler, pp. 15, *op. cit.* Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box A, File Folder 13.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁶ *Seward Weekly Gateway*, March 13, 1909.

¹⁴⁷ *Seward Weekly Gateway*, March 18, 1911.

¹⁴⁸ Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box A, File Folder 8, *op. cit.*

Offices At Anchorage and Seward." Ray managed the firm's business in Seward and David ran the Anchorage office.

When Leopold David arrived at Ship Creek in May 1915, it had developed from a bustling tent city into a townsite. As the U. S. Commissioner and District Recorder, his signature was affixed to virtually every land transaction.¹⁴⁹ In newspaper advertisements he stopped using the title "doctor," apparently he preferred "attorney at law." From 1923 until his death in 1924, Leopold David was listed as "Judge."¹⁵⁰ In Anchorage, he held memberships in numerous fraternal organizations, including the Elks, the Moose Lodge, the Shriners, and the Masons.¹⁵¹ He served as a trustee on the board of the *Anchorage Daily Times*, became director of the Bank of Anchorage, and was on the Board of Regents for the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines (the predecessor to University of Alaska, Fairbanks).¹⁵²

Leopold David became the first mayor of Anchorage. He had often turned down his friends who asked him to run for public office, but this time he relented. In the "Minutes of the First Regular Meeting of the City Council of the City of Anchorage, Alaska, November 26, 1920," it states:

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁰ *Anchorage Daily Times*, 1923-1924, *op. cit.*

In a letter from Mrs. Ray (widow of L.V. Ray) to Bernice Bloomfield, she writes that even though commissioners were not judges, apparently they were called "judge" because they held court. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box A, File Folder 10, *op. cit.*

¹⁵¹ Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box A, File Folder 8, *op. cit.*

¹⁵² Ibid., Box A, File Folders 8 and 12, *op. cit.* See, "Leopold David Nominated For College Board," *Anchorage Daily Times*, March 29, 1923. Also, "Regents Accept College Annex," *Anchorage Daily Times*, October 15, 1923.

By unanimous vote Leopold David was elected President of the Council and ex officio Mayor of Anchorage.¹⁵³

He was elected to two terms,¹⁵⁴ thus serving as Anchorage's mayor from November 26, 1920 to April 11, 1923.

Leopold David died on November 21, 1924, at the age of forty-five.

The next day's newspaper read:

A GOOD MAN

The one paramount subject in Anchorage today is the death of Judge David. While mostly every one knew that he had not been well for the past few weeks, no one realized that there was any danger and all expected to see him around in a few days as usual.

Judge David was Anchorage's most outstanding figure. He knew more about the town; and the country and about the people of the city and vicinity than did any other and his individuality, ability and activity was and always will be generally recognized as long as any of the pioneers of this section survive.

As a good citizen, the Judge was the last word. Virtually hundreds of people hereabouts remember him today for some substantial kindness he has done them in the days past, and these acts of kindness were always without noise or ostentation. Perhaps the man with the best and most finished education of any in the community, his talk and attitude was always humble, and the friends that mourn for him count among them as many of the unsuccessful as it does those who have won regard in a worldly way.

Ever since the old Knik days, Judge David has been the big man of this section of Alaska. As an official and professional man he was such that his past performances will be an example for those who follow him. But more as a devoted husband, a loving father and the kindest of friends will his name ever be recalled by the hundreds of people who knew him here. And with all of these sterling qualities he was a man with the keenest sense of humor; one who recognized the frailties of human character and was ever on the lookout for the smallest point to say in favor of any one he knew. By his death Anchorage loses in favor of any one he knew. By his death Anchorage

¹⁵³ *Minutes of the First Regular Meeting of the City Council of the City of Anchorage, Alaska, November 26, 1920.* Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box A, File Folder 8.

¹⁵⁴ According to one source, he was elected to three terms. See, *Ibid., op. cit.*

loses one of the most able lawyers in the Division and an ideal American Citizen.¹⁵⁵

L. V. Ray, David's law partner and Otto Wahlgren, his brother-in-law, were scheduled to sail the *S. S. Yukon* to Anchorage. However, due to rough seas on the Gulf of Alaska, they were delayed, as was the funeral. David was buried in a Masonic service on December 7, 1924.¹⁵⁶ Leopold David and his wife Anna, are buried in the Masonic section of the Anchorage Cemetery.

Isidore "Ike" Bayles

Isidore "Ike" Bayles was another extremely important person in the development of Anchorage. Bayles was born, February 22, 1876, in Libau, Lithuania,¹⁵⁷ the son of Herman and Edith Bayles.¹⁵⁸ He lived in Victoria, British Columbia prior to the Klondike Gold Rush. After entering Alaska, he married Beatrice in 1909, they raised two daughters, Edith Rosa and Dorothy Progress.¹⁵⁹

In 1898, Bayles joined the Klondike stampede and hiked¹⁶⁰ over the White Pass to Dawson.¹⁶¹ There, he opened a business and remained for six years.¹⁶² Although the sources do not specify which type of business, one

¹⁵⁵ *Anchorage Daily Times*, November 22, 1924.

¹⁵⁶ "Anchorage Pays Final Tribute -- Leopold David," *Anchorage Daily Times*, December 8, 1924.

¹⁵⁷ "Ike Bayles, Pioneer Anchorage Merchant Dies In San Francisco," *Anchorage Daily Times*, June 1, 1956. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box A, File Folder 16.

¹⁵⁸ David and William Tewkesbury, *Tewkesbury's Who's Who In Alaska and Alaska Business Index, Vol. 1947 I* (Juneau: Tewkesbury Publishers, 1947), *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*

¹⁶⁰ The White Pass and Yukon Railroad was not finished at the time Bayles set out for Dawson.

¹⁶¹ "Isadore Bayles," *Anchorage Daily Times*, January 3, 1950.

¹⁶² Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box B, File Folder 16, *op. cit.*

might conjecture it was a clothing store, since he later operated clothing stores in Fairbanks, Iditarod and Anchorage. Several items in the *Iditarod Pioneer* and the *Iditarod Nugget* referred to Bayles' business and those of other Jews. In Fairbanks and Iditarod, he was in business with the Isaacs Brothers (Abe and Charles).¹⁶³

Returning to Fairbanks

Abe Isaacs, the well known clothier, and gents' furnisher, is on his way back to Fairbanks to send down more of his first class goods. Abe will stay in Fairbanks and Mr. Ike Bayles will come down here to attend to the business at this point. We will be glad to welcome Ike.¹⁶⁴

ISAACS BROTHERS CHOOSE QUARTERS

Having selected the lot between the present locations of I. Goldstein and Loussac's drug store on First street, Ike Bayles, member of the firm of Isaacs Brothers & Co., is making preparations to go ahead with the erection of a frame building there, 24 by 30 feet, in the back part of which will be situated living quarters for himself and family.¹⁶⁵

Bayles was active in various civic organizations throughout his life. Early evidence of this is found in Iditarod, where he was the vice-president of the Iditarod Masonic Club.¹⁶⁶ He also took an active role in the 1911 drive to incorporate Iditarod.

Incorporation Election Set for April 11

Fairbanks, Jan. 25. -- In the matter of the incorporation of the town of Iditarod, Judge Overfield yesterday afternoon signed the order for the holding of an election at Iditarod on April 11 to determine if the town is to be incorporated, and for the further purpose of electing a city council.

¹⁶³ Ibid., *op. cit.*

¹⁶⁴ *Iditarod Pioneer*, July 10, 1910.

¹⁶⁵ *Iditarod Pioneer*, August 21, 1910. For a wonderful picture of the store, see, "City Sets Loussac Day To Honor Philanthropist," *Anchorage Daily Times*, July 10, 1962, p. 6.

¹⁶⁶ *Iditarod Nugget*, February 1, 1911.

... The election board appointed for the April election, consists of George W. Albrecht, A. E. Light, and I. Bayles. . . .¹⁶⁷

As a result of that election, Iditarod incorporated and Ike Bayles become one of the seven men to sit on Iditarod's first city council. In fact, of the fifteen candidates, he received the second highest vote total.¹⁶⁸ As a point of interest, Zachary J. Loussac, who later became Bayles' lifelong friend in Anchorage, was elected to the Iditarod Board of Education.

Jewishly, Ike Bayles was more committed than most of his co-religionists. He owned a Sefer Torah and conducted religious services in Iditarod, a function he would also fulfil in Anchorage.¹⁶⁹ There is ample evidence in the 1910 Iditarod newspaper:

JEW'S OBSERVE FAST DAY LAST WEEK

Last Wednesday evening and Thursday morning, short prayer exercises were held at Isaacs Bros. store where, under the leadership of Ike Bayles, assuming temporarily the office of Rabbi, the orthodox Jews of the city indulged in solemn observance of Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement. . . .¹⁷⁰

YOM KIPPUR DULY OBSERVED

The great Jewish fast day, Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement, began on Wednesday evening at sundown, and ended on Thursday evening at sunset. Services appropriate to the event were held on Wednesday evening and on Thursday morning in Isaacs Bros. & Co.'s store, Isaac Baylis (Bayles) acting as rabbi. Both services were largely attended by the Jewish residents of the city.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ *Iditarod Nugget*, March 22, 1911.

¹⁶⁸ *Iditarod Nugget*, April 12, 1911. See also, *Iditarod Nugget*, March 22 through April 12, 1911, *op. cit.*; *Iditarod Nugget*, April 19, 1911.

¹⁶⁹ Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box B, File Folder 16, *op. cit.*

¹⁷⁰ *Iditarod Nugget*, October 16, 1910.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, October 19, 1910.

Although the newspaper wrote "Isaac Baylis," it was a mistake. The writer simply confused Ike with Isaac, or some such thing. Baylis was another typographical error.

Bayles also led a Passover Seder in the spring of 1911. This particular item in the *Iditarod Nugget* provides the names of other Jews who lived in Alaska.

The Passover Season.

The Jewish Passover, which corresponds to the Easter season, began on last Friday evening, and ended on Saturday evening, although the whole week is observed by the Jewish people. Services were held at A. B. Rome's store, I. Bayles officiating. After the services there was a dinner, especially prepared by Mrs. M. Wolf, of Discovery, Otter, who is in town, the guest being Messrs. I. Bayles, A. B. Rome, N. Rome, Albert Wile and Mr. and Mrs. M. Wolf.¹⁷²

As stated above, Bayles and the Isaacs Brothers operated a clothing store in Fairbanks, as early as July 1910. They were, however, in Fairbanks almost two years earlier. In 1908, Robert Bloom of Fairbanks asked the Jews in attendance for Rosh HaShanah to sign their names and contribute money to defray "the expenses of holding the annual New Year & Yom Kippur services."¹⁷³ Thirty-eight names appear on the pledge sheet, including Isidore Bayles, Abe Isaacs, Charles Isaacs, A. B. Rome, N. Rome and M. Wolf.

Ike Bayles arrived at Anchorage in 1915. He opened I. Bayles Clothiers at the corner of 4th and D Streets, when Anchorage was still a tent city. Everything written about I. Bayles Clothiers, gave the impression that Bayles had no partners, however in newspaper advertisements of the day we find reference to Nathan Jaffe.

¹⁷² Ibid., April 19, 1911.

¹⁷³ Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box D, File Folder 40. The original document is reported to be at the University of Washington Archives.

JAFFE & BAYLES. Quilts. All Sizes and Quality. From \$2.50.
All Wool Blankets, in Vicuna, Mottled and Gray. From \$5.00.
Sheet Blankets From 90c.
JAFFE & BAYLES, Cor. Fourth and D Street.
The Home of Hart, Schaffner and Marx Good Clothes.¹⁷⁴

THE BEST and LARGEST

... We handle good reliable merchandise, and our reputation of 18 years in business in Alaska is back of everything we sell. Our motto is a dollar's worth of merchandise for every dollar spent in our store.

Every boat is bringing in our fall stock and a visit to our store will convince you that we have the goods. ...¹⁷⁵

There is also a Jaffe and Bayles advertisement in the December 5, 1916 issue of the *Anchorage Daily Times*.

As was his custom in Iditarod, Bayles participated in Anchorage community organizations and in local governance. He was a member of the first Anchorage City Council in 1920, and served a total of eight terms in office.¹⁷⁶ In 1925, he invested in the *Anchorage Times* and served as its President from 1935 until his retirement in 1950.¹⁷⁷ He served for nearly twenty years as chairman of the finance committee of Anchorage's July Fourth celebrations, and was a member of several clubs and lodges.¹⁷⁸ After retirement, Bayles moved to San Francisco to live with his daughter Dorothy. He died on May 31, 1956, and is buried in San Francisco.

¹⁷⁴ *Anchorage Daily Times*, June 8, 1916.

¹⁷⁵ *Anchorage Daily Times*, August 15, 1916.

¹⁷⁶ "A RESOLUTION HONORING ISADORE "IKE" BAYLES, A PIONEER ANCHORAGE BUSINESSMAN AND CIVIC LEADER, BY DEDICATING A PUBLIC THOROUGHFARE IN HIS HONOR," Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box B, File Folder 16.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*

¹⁷⁸ "Isadore Bayles," *Anchorage Daily Times*, January 3, 1950.

One year after Ike Bayles' death, his daughters returned to Anchorage to bestow a precious gift upon the Jewish community -- Ike Bayles' Torah scroll. The *Anchorage Daily Times* captioned the picture:

TORAH PRESENTED ANCHORAGE JEWISH COMMUNITY

Miss Dorothy Bayles¹⁷⁹ of San Francisco (center) yesterday presented as a permanent possession of the Anchorage Jewish Community, the rare Torah owned by her late father, I. Bayles, longtime Anchorage businessman. The Torah is a scroll bearing the Old Testament in Hebrew. It is the only one in Alaska and is kept at Chapel No. 1, Elmendorf, for use in Jewish services. David Green (right) accepted the Torah as custodian in behalf of the local Jewish Community. It is being held by Z. J. Loussac, longtime friend of the Bayles family. The scroll is the gift of Miss Bayles and her sister, Mrs. Edith Martin of Los Angeles.¹⁸⁰

As a lasting tribute to Ike Bayles, the City of Anchorage, in 1977, passed a resolution of honor and dedicated a public thoroughfare in his name. "Ike Bayles Way" and "Bayles Plaza" are located at Anchorage's Sunshine Plaza Mall, not far from his original store location of 4th and D streets.¹⁸¹ The large bronze memorial plaque reads:

Ike Bayles' contributions to Anchorage were hallmarks in the development of the community. Born in Lithuania, he first came to Alaska in 1899. Soon after the creation of the Anchorage townsite in 1915-6, he opened his clothing store near this location. He was instrumental in the incorporation of this city, served on the school board, completed eight terms on the City Council, was active in the Jewish Community, was president of the Anchorage Daily Times and fostered aviation in Alaska. Altogether, he served Alaska and Anchorage for over 50 years in promoting orderly growth and sound government.

¹⁷⁹ Miss Dorothy Bayles died in February 1958, at the age of 42.

¹⁸⁰ *Anchorage Daily Times*, June 20, 1957. The actual presentation occurred on June 19, 1957.

¹⁸¹ Bayles' original store was destroyed in the 1964 Good Friday Earthquake.

Zachary J. Loussac

Zachary J. Loussac, son of Vladimir and Rosalie,¹⁸² was born on July 13, 1882 in Pokrov, Russia, about 30 miles from Moscow.¹⁸³ His father was a successful manufacturer of picture frame molding, and hoped to afford a better education and professional training for his children.¹⁸⁴ Business was good until the 1890s, when German mouldings of superior quality, decreased the demand for Vladimir Loussac's product. There also were "problems" for young Zachary at school. As an engineering student at the Imperial Polytechnical Institute at Moscow, he was branded a revolutionary by the faculty.¹⁸⁵ According to Loussac, his revolutionary activity consisted of reading Marx, Engels, and pamphlets published by socialists and anarchists. Loussac explained:

I never went for anarchism, they were blowing up stores, shops, and government buildings. But I did go for some phrases of the socialist program as a means of improving the lot of the Russian people. I attended meetings of students and others who had as their objective the changing of the government, but we never talked of violence. Our legislative branch had no power. We were governed entirely by the Tsar's regime and the Greek Orthodox Church.¹⁸⁶

Loussac's activities were labeled revolutionary, because before the 1917 Revolution, there was no Bolshevism in Russia. Loussac discovered that he was under surveillance and was on the list for banishment to Siberia. He did

¹⁸² David and William Tewkesbury, *Tewkesbury's Who's Who In Alaska and Alaska Business Index, Vol. 1947 I* (Juneau: Tewkesbury Publishers, 1947), 48.

¹⁸³ "City Sets Loussac Day To Honor Philanthropist," *Anchorage Daily Times*, July 10, 1962, p. 4.

¹⁸⁴ As a point of interest, on p. 10, it reads: "Loussac's father was a rabbi in Russia." There is no other material referring to Loussac's father as a rabbi.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

not wait for the order to be filled. Loussac fled to southern Russia to visit his grandmother and crossed the border into Germany.

In Germany, Loussac had no money and thus found it impossible to continue work on his engineering degree. It was 1899, and he thought about emigrating to America.

I wrote an uncle who had gone to the United States in 1898 and asked him to send me a ticket so I could do the same. It was quite customary among our people to do things like that.

My uncle had a small mercantile business in El Reno, Oklahoma. He sent me the ticket and I left for New York City in 1900.¹⁸⁷

Upon his arrival to New York City, Loussac secured employment as a drug store errand boy in a Russian neighborhood on the lower East Side. Little did the eighteen year old immigrant know that the drug business would be the mainstay of his economic career for the next forty-two years. One day as Loussac worked in the pharmacy, he met a man who was going to the Klondike to join the gold rush. He was impressed with this man.

I liked the man -- the way he walked, the way he talked and his dreams of digging gold out of the hills. I decided I wanted to go too. But like many others, I got the idea that the Klondike was in Alaska. I set my goal for Alaska.¹⁸⁸

In 1901, Loussac quit his job, took the little bit of money he had, and hopped railroad boxcars to the West. He bribed the brakeman periodically so he could stay in the deluxe boxcars, and meted out money for sandwiches. Unfortunately, the trip took longer than Loussac had expected, and he ran

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

our of money in Great Falls, Montana. There, he found work in a drug store.

Loussac remembered:

I had a lucky break. I asked the town druggist for a job. He didn't particularly want me. And ordinarily he wouldn't have talked to me about it. But it happened that his clerk had turned up drunk and the druggist fired him. The store had many problems and the druggist was so hard pressed that he welcomed me to his one-man staff. I worked there for six months.¹⁸⁹

Loussac saved enough money to travel back to New York City. On the way, he stopped to visit his uncle in El Reno, Oklahoma. His uncle wanted Loussac to work in the business with him, but he respectfully declined. He recounted:

He was kind and generous and had a fine business, small as it was. . . . but for me that was no career. Business was frowned on in my family. It was a professional life that I had been taught to seek. . . . I returned to New York in 1901 and enrolled in the New York College of Pharmacy. To pay for my education and to live while I went to the college, I worked in a drug store every night.¹⁹⁰

In 1903, Loussac graduated and became the pharmacist in the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel drug store. However, he still had dreams of going to Alaska and striking it rich. Several years later, in 1907, two tall men wearing big western hats entered the pharmacy. Intrigued, Loussac asked them to tell him all about the wild west. The men, Senator Stuart of Nevada, and Senator Piles of Washington, were only too pleased to oblige Loussac. Moreover, they encouraged Loussac to follow his Alaskan dream. He said:

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

That was enough for me, I quit my job, took my pharmacist license off the wall, peeled some bills off my \$450 bankroll and bought a ticket to Seattle.¹⁹¹

Loussac's railroad passage to Seattle was quite enjoyable, but hard times met him there. He had to wait three months for a steamboat to Alaska, and during the delay, entirely depleted his savings. At long last, Loussac boarded ship for Vancouver, British Columbia, with continuing passage to Nome. The voyage from Vancouver lasted forty-two days, two weeks of which the ship, *Transit*, was icebound. Loussac disembarked *Transit* and stepped ashore at Nome, July 12, 1907.¹⁹²

At Nome, Loussac tried his hand at gold mining. He entered into an unsuccessful partnership and it became painfully evident that he was not cut out to be a prospector. He left Nome broke and went back to Seattle in October 1907.¹⁹³ Loussac returned to his chosen vocation, working for drug stores in the cities of Seattle and San Francisco until the summer of 1908. Undeterred by his misfortune in Nome, Loussac journeyed to Haines, Alaska, where he hoped to give prospecting one more attempt. There, he managed a drug store, and waited for word of a gold strike.

In 1909, word came of the great gold discovery at Iditarod, in the Alaskan interior. Loussac hardly knew the location of Iditarod, but his interest was peaked. He entered into a short partnership with Jimmy Fay, who owned the building in which the drug store was a tenant. This partnership, however, was not for prospecting purposes, instead Loussac and Fay opened a drug store in Iditarod. His store was adjacent to Ike Bayles', and the two of them forged a friendship which lasted their lifetimes.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 6.

Loussac's pharmacy in Iditarod was destroyed by the great fire of 1911, which engulfed the entire business block.¹⁹⁴ He rebuilt the building. The April 12, 1911, *Iditarod Nugget* followed Loussac's progress.

City Drug Store Building.

Z. J. Loussac's new City Drug Store building is practically completed and it is in every way a credit to its enterprising owner and the town. The building is two stories in height, and the interior is . . . Washington fir. The drug store is commodious and nicely arranged to meet the demands of the trade, and when Mr. Loussac's new fixtures arrive and are in place, there will be no neater store in the north. . . .

Loussac's new store was magnificent, but in the spring of 1911, when many miners did not return to Iditarod, the town and Loussac went broke. In 1912, now thirty years old, he returned to Seattle, but found no work there.¹⁹⁵ In San Francisco, the Owl Drug Company hired Loussac. The income was modest, but it allowed him to begin payment of his Iditarod debts. While Loussac was in San Francisco, he joined a club of Alaskans. The purpose of which

. . . was to promote a man named Strong for appointment as governor of the territory of Alaska. He got the appointment and soon after he took office at Juneau, he invited me to come there . . . a drug store needed a man.¹⁹⁶

In the spring of 1913, Loussac arrived in Juneau. Within the year, he purchased his own drug store.¹⁹⁷ By 1915, Loussac's attention was drawn

¹⁹⁴ *Iditarod Nugget*, April 5, 1911. See, *Seward Weekly Gateway*, April 15, 1911. For a wonderful picture of the store, see, "City Sets Loussac Day To Honor Philanthropist," *Anchorage Daily Times*, July 10, 1962, p. 6.

¹⁹⁵ "City Sets Loussac Day To Honor Philanthropist," *Anchorage Daily Times*, July 10, 1962, p. 7.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8. Interestingly, it was Mrs. Jimmy Fay, the widow of Loussac's Iditarod partner, who loaned him the \$3,500.

away from Juneau and in the direction of Knik Arm, the construction site of the Alaska Railroad. In 1916, he traveled to Anchorage.

I came out and looked around. I came across my old neighbor at Iditarod, Mr. Bayles. He was thinking of putting in a men's store just like the one he had in Iditarod. We went together and bought a lot at Fourth Avenue and D Street. He built his men's store and I built my drug store next door, just like Iditarod. We each had buildings about 25 by 50 feet.¹⁹⁸

Loussac continued:

My Anchorage store grew fast and I found I couldn't be in two places at once, so I sold my Juneau store and moved to Anchorage to live. This was June 1916. There was still a tent city on the Ship Creek flats, but the business establishments on Fourth Avenue were taking shape.¹⁹⁹

In the November 4, 1916, *Anchorage Daily Times*, there is a lengthy advertisement which illustrates Loussac's business acumen. Under the heading: "Loussac's Daily Gossip," there is a list of upcoming community events, and a wide variety of items in stock. The list of events was obviously of great interest to the local residents. By this time, Loussac already had two locations. The advertisement finishes, "Loussac's Drug Stores, 4th and D St., 4th and H st., Immediate Delivery. In subsequent ads, "Loussac's Daily Gossip" includes the sub-heading "Cents and Sense."²⁰⁰ For several weeks at the beginning of a new year, he would title his column "Full

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

²⁰⁰ Evangeline Atwood, *The Loussac Story* (A pamphlet prepared for the dedication of the Loussac Public Library, 1955). Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box B, File Folder 23.

Steam Ahead!" and proceed to tell what a wonderful year he had experienced and how he anticipated the new year to be even better.²⁰¹

Loussac continually offered special services to his customers. For example, in the early days when business was not as brisk as it became during World War II, he provided a writing desk, paper, and envelopes without charge.²⁰² Thus, anyone could drop by one of his stores and write a letter. He guaranteed mail orders were sent out the same day they were received, invited customers to come in and play the latest phonograph records, and shipped in fresh cut flowers (a real luxury in the pre-aviation days).²⁰³

Loussac served three terms as Anchorage's mayor, during the years 1947-1950.²⁰⁴ His involvement in community organizations was broad and deep. He served as president of the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club, Pioneer Lodge (Igloo #15), the Anchorage Times Publishing Company, and the League of Alaskan Cities (president and founder). He held membership in Pioneers of Alaska, Alaska-Yukon Pioneers, Alaska Housing Authority, Elks, Masons, Shrine and Knights Templar,²⁰⁵ B'nai Brith,

²⁰¹ Ibid., *op. cit.*

²⁰² Ibid., *op. cit.*

²⁰³ Ibid., *op. cit.*

²⁰⁴ Edmond C. Jeffery, Editor, *Alaska -- Who's Here, What's Doing, Who's Doing it -- 1955* (Anchorage: The Jeffery Publishing Company, 1955), p. 119.

²⁰⁵ "City Sets Loussac Day To Honor Philanthropist," *Anchorage Daily Times*, July 10, 1962, p. 14. There is an interesting item about Loussac and the Knights Templar.

"When Z. J. Loussac became a member of the Masonic lodge he followed his usual custom of doing the usual things in an unusual way. He took degrees that Jews rarely, if ever, seek.

However, he surprised local Masons when he undertook the Knights Templar degrees, in which ceremonies are based on the New Testament. He had completed Scottish Rite work which is based on the Old Testament.

"It was just curiosity," he explained. "I wanted to see why I couldn't do it. I found there was only one question that might have been embarrassing. It was, 'Are you willing to defend Christianity?' I thought that over and realized that Christianity has

and the Zionist Organization of America. During the World War II, he served as chairman of the War Bond Drives.

In October of 1946, Z. J. Loussac created the Loussac Foundation. The newspaper called him "one of the greatest benefactors in Anchorage," others broadened the scope to include the entire state.²⁰⁶ The *Anchorage Daily Times* wrote:

Loussac gave up approximately half of all the property he owned to give the foundation a start. He assigned title to his half of the Loussac-Sogn building to a trust under which all proceeds from the building would be available for "social, cultural and recreational purposes in Anchorage, especially for youth."

... the public library. ... Funds from the foundation are paying the entire cost of the building, which came to about \$500,000.²⁰⁷

When Loussac announced the establishment of the foundation, he said:

The people of Anchorage have been good to me. Everything that I earned came from here and I want it used here. I hope the property can be maintained and operated so that the revenue will be perpetual. ...²⁰⁸

Loussac remained a bachelor until March 26, 1949, when at the age of sixty-six, he married Mrs. Ada Harper.²⁰⁹ He retired and they moved to Seattle in 1953. He died there on March 15, 1965, at the age of eighty-

always defended me so why shouldn't I defend Christianity. So I answered 'Yes' and had no difficulty because I was a Jew. ..."

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁰⁹ The ceremony was performed by Commissioner Walsh. The sources do not reveal Mrs. Loussac's religion. They bore no children together, she had one son, Jerry Harlan Harper, attending Washington State College at that time.

two.²¹⁰ This tribute to Zachary Joshua Loussac, in the *Anchorage Daily Times*, epitomized the reaction to his death.

This city will always be a better place to live because Mr. Loussac made it that way. He helped shape it from a tent city to Alaska's largest. He left a permanent imprint and the community is grateful.²¹¹

²¹⁰ "Former Mayor Z. J. Loussac Dies In Seattle At 82," *Anchorage Daily Times*, March 16, 1963. There were several obituaries, however, in this one, it stated: "The funeral will be . . . followed by cremation and interment at Anchorage at a later date." There is no record of such an interment in the Anchorage Cemetery.

²¹¹ "He Loved The City That Was Good To Him," *Anchorage Daily Times*, March 16, 1963.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FOUNDING OF FAIRBANKS -- ROBERT AND JESSIE BLOOM -- Bloom Opens a Store in Fairbanks -- Chevra Bikur Cholim -- Jessie Spiro Bloom -- The Alaska Railroad -- Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines -- The Development of Agriculture in the Tanana Valley -- The Development of Aviation -- The Rigors of Life and the Blooms' Jewishness -- Jessie the Suffragette -- The First Kindergarten in Fairbanks -- The Founder of Alaska's First Girl Scout Troop -- THE BLOOMS OPENED THEIR HOME TO JEWISH G.I.s -- Bloom Officiated at Fairbanks Weddings -- Fairbanks' First Circumcision -- Jessie Corresponded With Mothers of G.I.s -- Jewish Burials in Fairbanks -- Tzedakah

THE FOUNDED OF FAIRBANKS

In 1901, Captain Elbridge Truman (E. T.) Barnette secured passage by steamer from Saint Michael to Tanana Crossing (Tanacross), the halfway point on the Valdez to Eagle trail.¹ Barnette intended to open a trading post there. The steamer, however, could not navigate the shallow, swift waters of the Tanana River. The steamer captain, with Barnette's protestations filling his ears, decided to veer from the Tanana into the slower Chena River. He navigated up the Chena as far as possible, and dropped off Barnette and his supplies near the present site of 1st Avenue and Cushman Street.² A year

¹ *The Milepost 1990 42nd Edition* (Bothell, Washington: Alaska Northwest Books, 1990), p. 319.

² *Ibid.*, p. 319.

There are some who say Mr. Abe Spring, an Austrian Jew, had a part to play in the founding of Fairbanks. Mr. Spring was born in Krakow, Austria, in 1858. At an early age he left for London, where he married and had a son. Spring voyaged to New York City in 1883, settled in Seattle in 1889, and trekked north to Alaska in 1897. In 1900, Spring prospected in interior Alaska. At the end of that prospecting season he wintered in Circle City, where he met Captain E. T. Barnette. Captain Barnette discussed with Spring his plans to open a trading post on the Tanana River. Spring, who had a working knowledge of the interior river systems, enthusiastically encouraged Barnette to proceed with his scheme. Meta Buttnick, "A Note of History," *The Synagogue Tribune: Congregation Bikur Cholim-Machzikey Hadath*, Seattle, September 1986, p. 4.

later, Felix Pedro, an Italian prospector, found gold on Pedro Creek, about sixteen miles north of Barnette's trading post.³

At the beginning of the gold stampede, Fairbanks⁴ was a small trading station. It soon became a boom town which attracted prospectors and entrepreneurs alike. Many Jews joined the stampede and established places of business in the "golden heart of Alaska." Documents indicate Jews gathered together for worship services as early as September 27, 1908. On that day, the second day of Rosh Hashanah 5669, thirty-eight men signed their names and became "charter members of the Chevra Bikur Cholim, of Fairbanks, Alaska."⁵ Robert Bloom, one of the original signatories, called Fairbanks "home" for seventy years. This chapter, in large measure, is a tribute to Robert, his wife Jessie, and the Yiddishkeit they nurtured in Fairbanks.

While in Fairbanks, Spring was a trader and studied law in his spare time. In August 1902, he was authorized to practice by Federal Judge James Wickersham. He incorporated Fairbanks and was its first attorney. Spring was active in civic and Jewish affairs. He organized the Tanana Electric Company in 1905. In 1906, he organized a minyan which obtained a Torah from Seattle and held High Holy Day services. Spring moved to Seattle in 1914. There, he was an active member of Seattle's Bikur Cholim Synagogue and served five terms as its president. *The Jewish Transcript*, July 23, 1926, p. 1.

³ There is a monument to Pedro at 16.6 mile on the Steese Expressway north of Fairbanks. The inscription reads: "FELIX PEDRO -- ON JULY 22, 1902 IN THE CREEK OPPOSITE HERE MADE THE FIRST DISCOVERY OF GOLD IN THE FAIRBANKS DISTRICT. Dedicated by the Pioneers of Alaska, Igloo No. 4. July 22, 1952. Felice Pedroni locally known as Felix Pedro. Born Fanano, Italy, April 16, 1858. Died Fairbanks, Alaska, July 22, 1910."

⁴ Wickersham suggested the town be named Fairbanks in honor of Indiana Senator Charles Fairbanks, later vice-president of the United States under Theodore Roosevelt.

⁵ Jessie Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Flat File, Cabinet 5, Drawer 3. *op. cit.*

ROBERT AND JESSIE BLOOM

Robert Bloom was born October 15, 1878, in Shavli, Kovno, Lithuania.⁶ As a young boy the family moved to Dublin, Ireland.⁷ In 1896 Bloom's Uncle Semach in Seattle, sent him a steamer ticket. Bloom left Dublin, in 1897, to live with his uncle. Before long, he was "bitten by the gold bug" and joined the 1898 Klondike Gold Rush. Bloom, ever the pragmatist, joined the stampede with more than a pack full of dreams, he took a stock of goods to sell in Dawson. He, and thousands of other hopefuls, steamed to Skagway and walked the Chilkoot Pass to Dawson.⁸ Upon arrival in Dawson, Bloom alternated between peddling, from which he made a living, and prospecting, by which he always lost money. In 1899, Bloom tried his luck in Nome, but

⁶ Jessie Bloom letter to Dr. Jacob R. Marcus, September 30, 1962, *op. cit.* The Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Fairbanks Archives, Box 5, File Folders 30-41.

⁷ In actuality, Bloom arrived in 1886, to join his father who previously had moved to Dublin. Bloom's mother and three younger brothers -- Meyer, Solomon, and Zelick (1880-1910) -- did not arrive in Dublin until 1894. Jessie Bloom letter, October 3, 1974, American Jewish Archives, Box 12, File Folder 6, *op. cit.*

Meyer went to Alaska and worked with Bob. Meyer "took charge of the store Bob had in Ruby following our marriage (1912), closed the store in 1917 when he joined the Alaska Contingent and left for the Outside in September of 1917. Meyer was let out of the Army in February of 1919, on account of the fire in Fairbanks, when we were burnt out and Bob needed his help. Meyer told us that the others in his battalion remarked that they would suggest to their folks that they set a fire, if they really want a discharge for them. Meyer subsequently joined his mother and brother in Johannesburg, South Africa, and he married Sam Abelson's niece. . . ." According to Jessie, Sam Abelson was a close friend of Bob's in Ruby. Jessie Bloom letter to Bernice Bloomfield, November 11, 1974. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box B, File Folder 18.

A photograph of Bloom's Ruby store is in Box 7, File Folder 66, Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Archives.

⁸ According to State Supreme Court Judge Jay Rabinowitz, Bob Bloom loved to tell about his experiences on the trail to Dawson. Bloom said he was once part of a group driving cattle to Dawson. Upon arrival, the cattle were to be slaughtered for meat as needed. Before the cattle were driven into Dawson, Bloom went into town and bought grain options at a low price. After they drove the cattle into Dawson, grain was in high demand, and Bloom sold his recently acquired grain options at a good profit. Interview with Jay Rabinowitz, Fairbanks, Alaska, August 8, 1990.

soon returned to Dawson no richer than he had left it.⁹ Bloom decided to stop prospecting and concentrate on business. During his five years at the mining camp he built up a relatively successful business.

Robert Bloom became an active member of the Dawson Jewish Community. He attended Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) services which were held in the Yukon Pioneer Hall.¹⁰ He also claims to have officiated at the first Jewish burial in Dawson. In 1900, a young Jewish prospector drowned while working on the Fortymile River. Bloom oversaw the young man's burial in the Jewish cemetery at Dawson.¹¹ Another indication of his Jewishness was attested to by Mrs. Boas (later of Fairbanks), who remembered Bloom baking matzoh in Dawson.¹²

Bloom Opens a Store in Fairbanks

In 1901, the Dawson mining camp had a Jewish population of 163.¹³ By 1903, many of the miners began to stampede to the gold fields of Fairbanks. Bloom joined them in the Spring of that year. He loaded his stock on a sled and mushed his dog team along the river trail to the Interior of Alaska.¹⁴ He arrived at the newly organized mining camp in July 1903. There is little about Bloom from his own hand. However his wife Jessie produced an impressive collection of charming reminiscences. She wrote:

⁹ From conversations with Meta Buttnick, Robert and Jessie's daughter, January 1991.

¹⁰ Jessie S. Bloom, "The Jews Of Alaska," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XV, No. 2, November 1963, p. 98.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹² Meta Buttnick, January 1991.

¹³ Norton B. Stern, "The Jews In Yukon Territory And Their Cemetery," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XIV, No. 4, July 1982, p. 358.

¹⁴ Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Fairbanks Archives, 1970-1971 Correspondence file, *op. cit.*

The first thing Robert did -- when he had his dogs fed -- was to pitch a tent. And even before he had the last peg in, some of the prospectors, lured there by the news of the Strike, were anxious to procure an outfit to go prospecting -- he had his customers help him dig out the tree stumps on the banks of the Chena -- and in a short time he was in business there (on Front Street).¹⁵

Bloom opened his store on Front Street¹⁶ in Fairbanks, and continued in business until 1942.¹⁷ We find an early entry for "Robert Bloom Hardware" in the 1907-8 Polk's Alaska-Yukon Business Directory. In 1909, Robert Bloom became a naturalized citizen of the United States.¹⁸

Chevra Bikur Cholim

The Jews of Fairbanks gathered together in 1908 to form a congregation of sorts. In essence, Chevra Bikur Cholim¹⁹ was a response to

¹⁵ Ibid., *op. cit.*

¹⁶ In other reminiscences, Jessie wrote: "The Store had been located on Front Street from 1904..." Jessie Bloom, *Watching Alaska Grow* -- a manuscript of reminiscences completed November 1951. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 13, File Folder 4, p. 128.

¹⁷ Although Bloom was not much of a miner in Fairbanks, he did own a mining claim in Ester, eleven miles south of Fairbanks. Today the claim is still producing some gold, and is being mined by Walt Wigger, a family friend.

¹⁸ Robert Bloom's Certificate of Naturalization. Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Archives, Box 3, File Folder 20.

¹⁹ Chevra means brotherhood. Bikur Cholim (visiting the sick) is a religious duty. In the early 1800s, Jews formed Hebrew Benevolent Societies to care for the ill of their communities. Some communities chartered a special Bikur Cholim Society to visit those confined to the house by illness.

In the late 1880s, a few young Jewish immigrants in Seattle organized an informal club to visit and care for members in time of illness. On November 17, 1891, the members incorporated as a benevolent and charitable society named Bikur Cholim. Originally, Seattle's Bikur Cholim was not a congregation. According to the articles of incorporation, it was a "benevolent society for the care of the sick," whose responsibility it was "to furnish medicine, nurses and physicians as required and to furnish a cemetery and suitably bury the dead." It was not until May 28, 1900, that Bikur Cholim amended its corporate document to read: "a benevolent, benefit and religious society for the dissemination of religious instruction and for the purpose of maintaining a house of worship." Meta Buttnick, "Congregation Bikur Cholim-Machzikay Hadath of Seattle," *Western States Jewish History*, Vol. XXII, No. 2, pp. 137-139.

the social conditions in which the Jews found themselves. The small group of Jews in Fairbanks organized to worship occasionally, but more significantly to ensure that others of the faith would take care of them, if they fell ill, or bury them if they died. As mentioned above, the first such chevra in Alaska was the Nome Hebrew Benevolent Society, chartered in 1901. The second chevra and first worshipping congregation in Alaska, was brought into being by the following thirty-eight Jewish men who gathered on the second day of Rosh Hashanah 5669, September 27, 1908, and affixed their signatures:

The undersigned hereby subscribe their names to be Charter Members of the CHEVRA BIKUR CHOLIM, of Fairbanks, Alaska.

Isidore Bayles*#; Abe Stein*; M. Wolf*; R. (Robert) Bloom*; unreadable; Leo Dowit; W. M. Wise; D. (David) Hurvitz#; Abram Moskovitch; N. Rome; H. Ross; D. H. Jonas*; Simon Marks#; A. J. Weiss#; B. (Ben) Simson; unreadable; Louis Levy;²⁰ Barney Simon; A. B. Rome; Morris Friedman; M. (Meyer) Bloom; D. Bloomfield; A. Lerkin; B. (Barney) Elster; unreadable; H. Boas*; M. (Marcus) Rosenthal*; Chas. Isaacs; Abe Isaacs*; L. (Louis) Golden*; S. Asheim; Sam Stein*#; L. Marymont; Harry Friend; Morris Rac...?; Chas. A. Phillips; S. Shafkin; Sam unreadable.²¹

²⁰ According to Jessie, Louis Levy was the nephew of Barney Simon. He packed in over the Chilkoot Pass. He married Selma Levinson from Seattle, and they lived in Fairbanks until 1918. In that year, Selma went to Seattle and soon gave birth to a son. Louis was to follow, but developed the flu and died in Fairbanks. Jessie Bloom letter to Bernice Bloomfield, February 18, 1975. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box B, File Folder 18.

²¹ Jessie Bloom Collection, the American Jewish Archives, Flat File, Cabinet 5, Drawer 3, *op. cit.*

* Names verified in "Name authority file for Fairbanks, Alaska Newspapers, from 1908 through February 1914." * Names verified in "Index of births, deaths, marriages, and divorces in Fairbanks, Alaska Newspapers, 1903-1930."

On Kol Nidre 5669, many of the same men assembled to pray as a congregation. At least thirty-three were present and signed a document pledging financial support for the new chevra.²²

Fairbanks, Oct. 4, 1908

The undersigned hereby contribute the amounts set opposite their respective names, for the purpose of defraying the expenses of holding the annual New Year and Yom Kippur services of this year.

R. (Robert) Bloom \$5; M. (Meyer) Bloom \$5; Isidore Bayles \$5; unreadable \$5; Abe Stein \$5; D. H. Jonas \$5; Simon Marks \$5; Barney Simon \$10; A. J. Weiss \$2; H. Ross \$2; A. B. Rome \$10; Ed Friedman \$10; Simson Bros. \$5; Leo Dowit \$5; D. (Dave) Hurvitz \$5; D. Bloomfield \$5; unreadable \$5; A. Lerkin \$1; Abram Moskovitch \$1; B. (Barney) Elster \$5; Leo Wile \$5; H. Boas \$5²³; M. Wolf \$5; M. (Marcus) Rosenthal \$5; Abe Isaacs \$5; Chas. Isaacs \$5; L. (Louis) Golden \$5; S. Asheim \$5; Sam Stein \$5; L. Marymont \$5; W. M. Wise \$5; S. Shafkin; unreadable \$5.²⁴

The name Chevra Bikur Cholim was selected as result of Bloom's association with Seattle's Congregation Bikur Cholim. In 1897, when Bloom arrived in Seattle to live with his uncle, Bikur Cholim was the only orthodox congregation in the city, so he joined.²⁵ Furthermore, Bloom maintained his membership in the congregation while he resided in Dawson and Fairbanks.

In his own way, Bloom was a very devout Jew. This is illustrated by

²² There were more than thirty-three in attendance. The signature "Simson Bros." may have accounted for all four of the brothers, Abe, Ben, Lipman, and Alec, thereby raising total attendance to thirty-six.

²³ Meta Buttnick remembers her father saying "Boas was the Baal Keriah" (Torah reader) for the congregation.

²⁴ Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box D, File Folder 40. The original document is reported to be at the University of Washington Archives.

The Simson Brothers and Barney Simon had large stores in Fairbanks, and other Jews had smaller businesses. This was reported by Yael Rozenstain who lived in Fairbanks in the mid-1910s. See, Yael Rozenstain, "Memoirs of an Alaskan Merchant," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. IX, No. 3, April 1977, pp. 253-261.

²⁵ Meta Buttnick, January 1991.

his actions in 1904. In that year, Bloom "came out from Klondike" to Seattle "to purchase some merchandise for his store in Dawson."²⁶ While there, he learned of the death of his father, Pesach. Bloom stayed in Seattle, so that during the succeeding eleven months, he could be part of a minyan²⁷ and say Kaddish²⁸ for his father.

Another indication of Bloom's strong Jewish identity is that he had a Torah scroll. A possession not many Jews acquire. In fact, he brought it by dogsled from Dawson in 1904. Apparently, he did not use the Torah until the Second World War, when he was appointed civilian chaplain for the Jewish G.I.s in the Alaskan Interior.²⁹

Jessie Spiro Bloom

Bloom met Jessie Spiro, his bride to be, when they were children in Dublin. As a matter of fact, Robert and Jessie were second cousins. Jessie

²⁶ Jessie Bloom letter to Rachel Ibbetson, October 3, 1974, Bloom Collection. American Jewish Archives, Box 12, File Folder 6, p. 37.

According to Jessie, Bob made numerous business acquaintances which later served him well. Meta Bloom Buttnick maintains, Robert Bloom went to Seattle in 1904, not in 1903 as Jessie wrote. The 1904 date is cited in accordance with Ms. Buttnick's wishes.

²⁷ A minimum of ten Jewish males, above the age of thirteen, is needed for congregational worship, public Torah reading, or to say Kaddish. This group of ten is called a minyan. Reform and Conservative Jews count men and women in a minyan.

²⁸ The Kaddish is employed in Jewish liturgy to mark the conclusion of sections of the service. Over time however, it became an indirect prayer for the departed. It is a doxology, a hymn of praise to God. Although recited in memorial to the dearly departed, it contains no reference to the dead.

²⁹ Letter to Bernice Bloomfield, April 20, 1973. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box B, File Folder 18.

Jessie wrote: "we had that Torah all through the years we were in Fairbanks, and it was only when Bob was appointed Chairman of the J.W.B. for Alaska, very shortly after Pearl Harbor and we were holding services that we used that Torah. He subsequently brought it out here and I believe he gave it to Philip Katsman who conducts services here in West Seattle, a very good friend of ours."

was born on December 15, 1887.³⁰ In April 1909, Jessie joined her older brother Abram at London. There, she entered a Copying Office, learned shorthand, typing, and was a secretary for the Cooper Hewitt Company.³¹ She was strong willed, independent minded, a Suffragette and Zionist.³²

Jessie and Robert did not cross paths again until 1910. In November of that year, Bloom's brother, Zelick, died. Bloom walked the three hundred fifty miles from Fairbanks to Valdez, steamed to Seattle, traveled by train to New York, and secured passage to Southampton. He arrived in Dublin just before Christmas 1910. Jessie and Abram returned to Dublin for the long Christmas weekend. Jessie noted:

Bob was in the house and we had a nice chat. Mother was home, but Abram was out with some of his friends. Bob asked me if I would like to go for a walk, and I went. That was a walk I shall never forget. I talked to him about the family, and the big hang up was my remaining in London and being a Suffragette. Mother was in favor of my remaining, but Father thought that I should return to Dublin. However, I had no intention of returning to Dublin, having tasted freedom and earning my own living. I could not envisage having to account for my activities during my absence from home. Bob agreed with me, and told me that he was in favor of equal rights for women, and that Washington State had given women the vote. In fact, he seemed to know more about the movement in the States than I did.

... I had my twenty-third birthday shortly before I came home, and Bob gave me a hundred dollar bill for a birthday present, need I say more? I had never had that much money in my life, and I felt like a millionaire. ... When we arrived home I told Mother how good

³⁰ Birth Certificate, American Jewish Archives, Flat File, Cabinet 5, Drawer 3, *op. cit.*
As a point of interest, in many of the sources Jessie Spiro's birth date was listed December 21, 1887. Jessie herself explained in a letter to Dr. Jacob R. Marcus (September 30, 1962), that she was born on December 21, 1887, the seventh candle of Channukah, but she was not certain of the date.

Jessie was the youngest of four children. She had two brothers, Abram and Charlie, and a sister Rose.

³¹ Jessie Bloom letter to Rachel Ibbetson, October 3, 1974. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 12, File Folder 6, p. 9.

³² *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*

Bob was and also told her of his gift. She was very touched, but did not say very much. There was no thought of his being interested in me, he was just one of those lucky Americans who had more money than we had in Ireland. . . .³³

In March 1911, before his return to Fairbanks, Bloom desired to ask Jessie for her hand in marriage, but he could not muster the courage.³⁴ After his departure, he sent his proposal parcel post. Jessie consented, and in March of 1912, Bloom returned to Dublin. They were married in May.

On June 1, the newlywed couple began the journey to Alaska. First, they voyaged the Atlantic, then they rode several trains from New York to Seattle. Jessie described the Seattle to Fairbanks leg of the journey.

There were several ways of getting into the Interior of Alaska from the States, but they all took a great deal of time. When we came in, in July of 1912, we took the usual Summer Route, that was to take an Alaska Steamship Company vessel from Seattle as far as Skagway, . . . the White Pass Railroad as far as Whitehorse at the head of the Yukon, and from there take a Steamer to Dawson in the Yukon Territory. Then change to one of the Northern Commercial Boats which took us as far as Tanana, and there we changed again to a boat that took us as far as Fairbanks. With all those changes it is not surprising that the journey took us eighteen days.³⁵

Jessie arrived in Fairbanks to find very few Jews. The community of miners and merchants, who affixed names to the September 1908 Charter of Chevra Bikur Cholim, left for newer gold fields. Many stampeded to Iditarod when gold was discovered in December of 1908. Others went to Ruby in the

³³ Ibid., p. 17.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

³⁵ Jessie Bloom, *Watching Alaska Grow* -- a manuscript of reminiscences completed in November 1951. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 13, File Folder 4, p. 68.

gold strike of 1910. The last real Jewish gathering in Fairbanks had been the 1910 Passover Seder at Barney Elster's. In Jesse's words:

Mrs. Elster was a true mother in Israel, and with the help of some of her Gentile friends, she put on a real *hemishe* (family type) seder.³⁶

The Elsters left Fairbanks the following year. When Jessie arrived in Fairbanks in 1912, only a handful of Jews remained. She explained:

Those of military age departed during the First World War. Among those remaining were the Simson Brothers, Abe, Ben, Lipman, and Alec. We, the Blooms and the Simsons, were the only Jewish families in town for many years. There were no regular worship services from 1912 until 1939.³⁷

Bloom's store was a place where homesteaders congregated when they were in town. Mary Lee Davis, a close friend and author of several books on Alaska, called it "The Intellectual Delicatessen."³⁸ Problems and issues of the day were frequently discussed, in addition to tales of pioneer life. Bloom sold a wide variety of items, including: hardware; guns; ammunition; trappers' and hunters' supplies; harnesses; and etc.³⁹ He stored stock and customer items in several warehouses around town in order to minimize loss by fire. This was common business practice due to the constant fire hazard. Almost every building was constructed of wood, and every dwelling, of course, kept a stove burning for warmth and cooking. Bloom experienced

³⁶ Jessie Bloom, "The Jews Of Alaska," *American Jewish Archives*, Vol. XV, No. 2, November, 1963, p. 99.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

³⁸ Mary Lee Davis was the wife of John Allen Davis, Superintendent of Mines.

³⁹ Robert Bloom business receipt. Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Fairbanks Archives, 1934 Business Correspondence file, *op. cit.*

fire damage in 1906 and in 1907.⁴⁰ Jessie wrote about feeling tied to the house on account of that hazard.

As we talked Bob told me that he was more concerned about fires than any other hazard we faced in that great land, saying: "We can protect ourselves against forty below zero if we have to go outdoors, dress warm.

When our children were born, he would not hear of babysitters for them, and suggested that we try and stay with them until the youngest child could take care of herself and get outdoors without any help. It was 1923, (before) Bob would consent to me leaving the girls alone in the house. I resented that very much, because it tied me to the house, especially during the long winter nights when I wanted to take a walk. . . . he never closed the store before ten, apart from that most of the other mothers who had children the same ages as ours did not have any scruples about having babysitters.⁴¹

In 1919, fire ravaged Fairbanks, destroying the business block. Whereas the fires of 1906 and 1907 only damaged Bloom Hardware, this fire completely gutted the store. Meta, the Blooms' eldest daughter, vividly remembered:

I and my three sisters were sleeping in one room in our house on 3rd Avenue. Mamma came in and woke us up and said, "Girls, there is a very bad fire and Daddy's store is burning. You'll have to get up because this house may catch fire." She put Ruth, a baby; and Olga, 16 months older, in the sled -- she put her sable cape on Debby, and her beaver coat on me. She tucked her sterling silver in the foot of the sled and we walked around. The sky was full of burning coals. The neighbors, Mrs. Sharp Watkins, among them, were taking their things out of their houses. "Auntie Sharp," as we called her, said, "Mrs. Bloom watch that coal! It might drop on the children!" And Mama said, "I'm watching it!"

⁴⁰ Meta Buttnick letter to Renee, September 13, 1985. Jewish Congregation of Fairbanks Archives. Meta Bloom Buttnick file.

⁴¹ Jessie Bloom letter to Rachel Ibbetson, October 3, 1974. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 12, File Folder 6, pp. 54-55.

We were put to bed at "Doctor's" house on 7th and Cushman. Doctor was Dr. Aline Baskerville, who brought me, Olga, and Ruth into this world. (Debby was born in Dublin).

Early the next morning, we were home again and the Knuppes were having coffee in our house. (Martin Knuppe owned the Model Restaurant with Gus Burglin and Tom Youel.) Telegrams were coming from the factories and wholesalers Outside⁴² where Daddy bought, telling him that his credit was good and they stood ready to supply him, and they did.⁴³

Without hesitation, Bloom began rebuilding his store. In fact, he was the first one to build on the recently charred block of real estate. His faith in the Camp was unwavering, and provided confidence to others that Fairbanks could rebuild.⁴⁴

Bloom was a rugged individualist, and a hard nosed merchant, but quite sensitive to the needs of pioneers. He knew that pioneers and prospectors did not earn income on a steady basis, thus he engaged in business as follows:

Central Alaska, July 12, 1933

Fairbanks, Alaska
Mr. R. Bloom
Friend Bob,

I am building a Cabin hear (sic) and I need 29 - 10 foot Sheets of Sheet-Iron for Roofing. Will you trust me for it for a year. I will pay you sometime inside of a year. I my (sic) be able to pay part of it this fall, but am not sure. If you can see your way clear to let me have it, give it to John-Palm-Truck-Driver Mr. Loftus as soon as possible. I am not working for wages at present, but am in hope to get a month or two this fall. . . .

Yours very truly, John F. Lake⁴⁵

⁴² "Outside" is the term Alaskans use to refer to anyplace outside of Alaska.

⁴³ Meta Buttnick letter to Renee, September 13, 1985. Jewish Congregation of Fairbanks Archives, Meta Bloom Buttnick file.

⁴⁴ Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Archives, Jessie Bloom Correspondence file 1970-1971, *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Archives, Robert Bloom Business file 1916-1933, *op. cit.*

Several years later, Bloom went to Dublin. He left in September 1938 and returned in March 1939.⁴⁶ During that time, Jessie operated the store,

I was in charge of the Store. . . . I did not worry about doing any business, I was just a custodian, I really had a good opportunity to get the atmosphere of the Store. In fact, Bob's idea was to keep it open so the Sourdoughs would have a place to come and to swap yarns, etc. It was a good experience for me, because (until then, I did not) fully appreciate how much the Store meant to the community.⁴⁷

The Alaska Railroad

Judge Wickersham was Alaska's elected delegate to Congress and a close personal friend of Bloom. Whenever he came into town, he stopped by "The Intellectual Delicatessen" for conversation and to gauge the pulse of the camp. Wickersham was instrumental in influencing the Government to build a railroad north to Fairbanks. As Jessie remembers:

He was constantly harping on the necessity of the Government building the Railroad in Alaska. And to his credit be it said, that in spite of a great deal of opposition, he managed to get a Bill through Congress in February of 1914, which enabled the people of the Territory to plan on a railroad being built from the Coast to the Interior.

. . . one must remember that there were no radios, and there were no automobile roads, and the only means of transportation within the Territory during the winter was to walk, or by dog team. And during the summer, by polling boat up the various rivers and sloughs.

⁴⁶ Jessie Bloom letter to Bernice Bloomfield, March 6, 1974. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box B, File Folder 18.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, *op cit.*

When word came to Fairbanks that the Bill had passed Congress, there was great rejoicing in the camp. . . .⁴⁸

The future railroad had great economic importance to Fairbanks. The town had survived on placer mining since 1903, and needed a new economic infusion. Many of Fairbanks' miners stampeded to Iditarod in 1908, and to Ruby in 1910, leaving her short of manpower.⁴⁹ Jessie described the problem:

... wages were so high in other industries that it did not pay to mine, the Camp was at its lowest ebb. The population dwindled to about four hundred, from four thousand. It seemed only those of us who had children, and were afraid to take any risks remained in camp. All the young men enlisted in the Army, or were drafted, and the older men went to Seattle, and other cities, and engaged in the industrial field, helping the war effort. But the construction of the railroad and the payroll that it brought to the Camp, saved it from becoming a ghost town.⁵⁰

The railroad was completed in 1923, and President Warren G. Harding traveled up to Alaska and drove in the golden spike at Nenana.

Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines

In 1915, Wickersham announced that, under the Land Grant Act, he could bring a college to Fairbanks.⁵¹ Many of the locals scoffed at the idea, but Bloom staunchly supported it.

The naysayers grew louder when the site for the College was picked. The proposed site was four miles west of town, on a scenic hill, with a

⁴⁸ Jessie Bloom letter to Rachel Ibbetson, October 3, 1974. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 12, File Folder 6, pp. 69-70.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 78.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 78.

⁵¹ Jessie Bloom, "The Jews Of Alaska," *American Jewish Archives*, Vol. XV, No. 2, November, 1963, p. 106.

beautiful view, but not very accessible at that point in time. Nonetheless, the cornerstone was laid in 1916, and the College opened in September 1922. Jessie described the opening ceremony:

... on a bright September morning in 1922, the children from the Public School, about two hundred, were all lined up on either side of the hill where the College was built. The members of the Faculty, the Board of Regents, and the Governor passed through the Body Guard. The opening ceremony was performed by the Governor in a very simple speech.

The College is built on a hill about four miles outside of Fairbanks, and the Foot Hills of the McKinley Range are plainly visible in the distance. The clear, sharp, frosty air, the evergreen trees, the sense of freedom that one gets in wide open spaces, all tended to give the proceedings an air of dignity and promise. . . .⁵²

Although the College was opened as an agricultural and mining institution, mining received greater emphasis. Especially after the Russian Revolution and its concomitant eviction of foreign mining capital. Mining companies scrambled to discover alternative placer mining operations. The United States Smelting and Refining Company came to Fairbanks and opened a subsidiary called Fairbanks Exploration (F.E.). As F.E. developed and grew, so did the mining department of the College.⁵³ Not surprisingly, the agricultural department of the College and its Experimental Station sank into oblivion.

Wickersham prevailed on Bloom to accept an appointment to the Board of Regents. Bloom served on the board from 1922-1925. We find

⁵² Jessie Bloom, "Contrasts," Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Archives, Box 5, File Folder 31. *op. cit.* A photograph of the opening ceremonies is in Box 7, File Folder 66.

⁵³ Jessie Bloom, "The Jews Of Alaska," *American Jewish Archives*, Vol. XV, No. 2, November, 1963, p. 107.

Bloom, and Anchorage's Leopold David, mentioned in an Anchorage newspaper article.

REGENTS ACCEPT COLLEGE ANNEX

Judge David Returns From Board Meeting -- 128 Students Enrolled.

The Board of Regents of the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines, Thursday night accepted the three story addition to the college, which was recently completed, and transacted other routine business, according to Judge Leopold David, Anchorage member of the board, who returned Saturday. The regents decided to hold their meetings thrice annually hereafter.

Others attending the meeting were Charles E. Bunnell, president of the college; Mrs. Luther C. Hess, E. M. Keys, J. A. McIntosh, Robert Lavery, Robert Bloom and Morton Stevens.

The addition, 53 by 82 feet in dimensions, and including a tank house, is as large as the original college building. It will cost \$33,000 when completely equipped. . . .⁵⁴

In 1961, Bloom was made an honorary member in the University Alumni.⁵⁵ In 1970, as a sign of continued support for the institution, Robert and Jessie donated several gold objects and coins, Russian artifacts, and antique guns.⁵⁶ Today, Bloom gold is still on display in the University of Alaska Museum in Fairbanks.

The Development of Agriculture in the Tanana Valley

The Fairbanks Daily-News Miner of September 23, 1963, printed a large photograph of Robert Bloom with this caption:

⁵⁴ *Anchorage Daily Times*, October 15, 1923, *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ Jessie Bloom, "The Jews Of Alaska," *American Jewish Archives*, Vol. XV, No. 2, November, 1963, p. 108.

⁵⁶ *Anchorage Daily Times*, September 18, 1970, p. 18.

WHEAT HARVESTED -- Robert Bloom, pioneer Fairbanks businessman, saw a dream come true Friday when 80 acres of Siberian wheat were harvested at the Mike Yankovich farm. The strain of wheat was first planted in the Tanana Valley about 50 years ago, Bloom said. During the past four years Bloom was able to gather together enough of the seed to grow more seed. This year he had enough to plant the 80 acres. A firm believer that the Tanana Valley could and will produce a hearty wheat, Bloom hopes more experimental farming will follow and Fairbanks will eventually grow most of its own produce.

Robert Bloom was a merchant, not a farmer, but he did play a supporting role, financial and emotional, in the early agricultural development of the area. The farmers, none Jewish, did a remarkable job of raising wheat and vegetables in the extremely short Interior summer.

An Executive Order dated March 22, 1906, set aside 1,400 acres of land at Fairbanks for an Alaska Agricultural Experiment Station.⁵⁷ Little work was done until July 1907, when Mr. C. C. Georgeson, special investigator for the Department of Agriculture in Alaska arrived in Fairbanks. Mr. J. W. Neal was appointed superintendent of the Fairbanks Station, a position he undertook from 1908-1917. The purpose of the experimental farm was to demonstrate the feasibility of general farming in the Tanana Valley. His most impressive results grew from the Romanov strain of Siberian spring wheat. 1912 produced a particularly good yield.

Mr. John Adelman, an early homesteader across the Chena Slough, made his living cutting timber on his homestead. When he had cleared enough land, he planted and harvested various kinds of produce. Adelman, with Neal's assistance, experimented with a number of grains.⁵⁸ From the

⁵⁷ Letter from United States Senate Committee on Appropriations to Jessie Bloom, March 5, 1963. Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Fairbanks Archives, 1960-1969, Correspondence file.

⁵⁸ The Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Archives, Agriculture file, *op. cit.*

very early days of the Fairbanks Camp, there was an Agricultural Fair, to which Homesteaders and others were encouraged to bring goods. In 1911, Adelman entered his grains in the Tanana Valley Agricultural Fair at Fairbanks.⁵⁹

Mr. Falconyn Joslyn, part owner of the Tanana Valley Railroad, was especially impressed with the grains and commented to Adelman, "let me take this Outside with me, so I can show the Eastern fellows that Alaska is not an icebox."⁶⁰ Joslyn was on his way Outside in an attempt to raise capital to extend his railroad, which ran from Fairbanks to the Creeks.⁶¹ He hoped that the grain would prove the Interior had a diversified future. Joslyn took a sample of the grain to the fairs in St. Paul, Minnesota and New York. There apparently was no provision for an exhibit of Alaskan cereals at either fair, but the exhibit managers in St. Paul were so impressed, they made a special award. The inscription on the large cup read:

Presented by the St. Paul Association of Commerce to John Adelman for the best display of cereals from Alaska at the Northwestern Land Show, St. Paul 1911.

The *Seward Weekly Gateway* of October 5, 1912 reported:

John Adelman of Fairbanks won a large silver cup for the best display of Alaskan cereals at the Northwestern Land Exhibit at St. Paul. Mr. Adelman's place is above Graehl, and there he raised the array of cereals last year that was first exhibited in Fairbanks and then forwarded to the New York and St. Paul fairs.

⁵⁹ Ibid., *op. cit.*

⁶⁰ Ibid., *op. cit.*

⁶¹ The term "Creeks" means Mining Camps.

The cup was in the possession of Robert and Jessie Bloom during their lifetimes. Jessie remarked, it "played an important part in convincing many of the skeptical during the 30's that we really did grow wonderful grains in the Tanana Valley."⁶²

Mr. Milton D. Snodgrass succeeded Mr. Neal as superintendent of the Experimental Station from 1917-1922. Snodgrass had previously been in charge of the Experimental Station at Kodiak, but after the Katmai Volcano eruption in 1912, that station was abandoned. He arrived at a critical time in the development of Interior agriculture. When, in 1917, the United States entered the First World War, residents of the Interior saw an opportunity to further develop agriculture. Jessie explained,

We realized that if we could feed ourselves with what we grew in the Tanana Valley, we would be better able to contribute to the war effort. . . .⁶³

Snodgrass helped the farmers organize the Tanana Valley Farmers Association, and encouraged them to plant wheat. He urged the Alaska Road Commission to build Farmers' Loop Road to ease the transport of produce into town. He also had the confidence of a number of merchants and was able to convince many to buy stock in a mill. The mill was erected in a warehouse which was the property of the Farmers Association and, was quite close to the railroad tracks. Robert Bloom bought ten shares of stock.⁶⁴

The residents of the Tanana Valley used the flour ground from the local wheat all through the First World War and on until 1923. In that year, a series of events began which soon ended wheat production in the Tanana

⁶² The Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Archives, Agriculture file, *op. cit.*

⁶³ Jessie S. Bloom, "The Jews Of Alaska," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XV, No. 2, November 1963, p. 101.

⁶⁴ Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Archives, 1919-1934 Personal file, *op. cit.*

Valley. First, dissention arose among the farmers. Moreover, the Station was put under the jurisdiction of the, newly opened, Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines. The College encouraged mining at the expense of agriculture. And ironically, the seed from which the wheat was grown, was lost.

"Old-timers" remembered the Tanana Valley's wheat, but few of the newcomers believed wheat could be grown in the Interior. If it were not for the Adelman Cup, there would have been no proof. Local wheat was a fading memory, until Robert Bloom met up with Snodgrass at the 1957 Matanuska Valley Fair.⁶⁵ The two talked about the economy of the Territory, and wondered about prospects for the future should the Federal Government reduce fiscal support and defense spending.⁶⁶ Both recalled the famous Tanana Valley wheat of the First World War, and decided to start up a new planting. They inquired of farmers throughout the Tanana Valley, but found no seed. Fortunately, in May 1958, Snodgrass found a Matanuska dairy farmer who had some of the seed. Snodgrass sent three hundred pounds to Bloom in Fairbanks, who in turn had his friend Robert K. Lavery⁶⁷ plant it on the Yankovich Ranch near the University.⁶⁸

Jessie detailed:

The wheat was sown on June 5th, and was harvested on the 12th of September. It was displayed at the Tanana Valley Fair. The flour was sent to the Fishers Flouring Mills in Seattle, and was found to be rich in all the properties that go to make good bread. The Fishers Flouring Mills sent the flour back to Fairbanks, where it was

⁶⁵ Jessie S. Bloom, "The Jews Of Alaska," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XV, No. 2, November 1963, p. 102.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁶⁷ Robert K. Lavery is the son of Bloom's long-time friend Robert (Bob) Lavery.

⁶⁸ The Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Archives, Agriculture file, *op. cit.*

made into a loaf of bread, and at the present time it is in cold storage being kept for a special occasion, when it will be thawed out and eaten with due ceremony.⁶⁹

The yield in 1958 was exceptional, and the crop was kept mainly for seed. The next year more ground was planted, and so on through 1960-1961.⁷⁰ Sometime between September 1958 and September 1963, Bloom and his collaborators received a trophy cup for their work.⁷¹ The inscription read, In Recognition Of The Best Farm And Garden -- Tanana Valley. In September of 1963, Bloom received a letter and Certificate of Merit from Governor William Egan for "fruitful and successful efforts to revive interest in the wheat-raising possibilities of the Tanana Valley."⁷²

The 1963 newspaper caption spoke of Robert Bloom's dream that the Tanana Valley produce a hardy wheat. Jessie, writing in the same year, believed locally grown wheat would strengthen the new state's economy.

Flour is now shipped in from the "mainland," and the cost of living is very high; bread is flown in by air. Since bread is the staff of life, we feel that, when we have an active group of young homesteaders who are encouraged to grow their food in the Valley, we will be able to reduce Alaska's high cost of living and will have done something towards eliminating the artificial economy now prevalent in our state due to inflated military spending.⁷³

⁶⁹ Ibid., *op. cit.*

⁷⁰ Jessie S. Bloom, "The Jews Of Alaska," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XV, No. 2, November 1963, p. 103.

⁷¹ There is a VHS videotape copy and original silent film entitled "Wheat Harvest." In the film Robert Bloom, Mike Yankovich and Jim Yankovich harvest the wheat at the Yankovichs' farm. They also hold the trophy cup. Unfortunately, there is no date on the trophy. The date is likely September 1963, because the suit and hat Bloom wears in the newspaper photo matches the suit and hat in the silent film. Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Archives.

⁷² Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 3, File Folder 14.

⁷³ Jessie S. Bloom, "The Jews Of Alaska," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XV, No. 2, November 1963, p. 103.

The Development of Aviation

Jessie recollected that the first aeroplane to come into the Territory was in July 1913.⁷⁴ The Fourth of July Committee planned to pay for a flying demonstration by charging two and a half dollars admission to the ball park. People refused to pay such an exorbitant fee, they stood and watched from outside the ball park.⁷⁵ The flight was not very impressive, the aviator stayed up in the air for only a short time. Apparently, there was little excitement about the exhibition, and it was soon forgotten.

Then came the First World War, and the 1921 New York to Nome flight attempt. The Army's Black Wolf Squadron, undertaking the challenge, was scheduled to stop in Fairbanks on their way from Dawson to Nome. The residents of Fairbanks received information from the Army Signal Corps Station that the planes were approaching. The anticipation was palpable, then people caught the first glimpse of the low, swooping planes. After a safe landing and short rest, the planes continued on their journey to Nome. The age of aviation had come to Alaska's Interior.

Business was slow in Fairbanks during the early 1920s. At the end of the First World War, a veteran pilot by the name of Ben Eilson, came to Fairbanks to teach science at the High School.⁷⁶ One day, Eilson was in "The Intellectual Delicatessen" speaking with Bloom, when in walked William F. Thompson. Thompson was the editor of the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* and a journalist of considerable skill. He proposed that the best way to improve Fairbanks' economy was to make it the supply headquarters for the

⁷⁴ Jessie Bloom, *Watching Alaska Grow* -- a manuscript of reminiscences completed in November 1951. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 13, File Folder 4, p. 88.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁷⁶ Jessie Bloom letter to Rachel Ibetts, October 3, 1974. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 12, File Folder 6, pp. 103-104.

outlying districts.⁷⁷ Thompson continued, since Eilson was a veteran pilot and had the option of purchasing a surplus "Jenny" -- the plane used in the First World War -- Eilson could apply for one, and they all could start a business.⁷⁸

Eilson applied for the "Jenny," while Bloom, Robert K. Lavery, Dick Wood and others put up the money.⁷⁹ The plane arrived, Eilson assembled it, and the maiden flight was in the summer of 1921. Jessie wrote:

The first trip . . . was from Fairbanks to Nenana and Dick Woods the banker went up with Ben. We were all very excited when they left, and though Nenana was only fifty miles away, we wondered when they would come through, by telegraph from the Signal Corps, that they had landed. It seemed to be a comparatively short time until we heard that they were over the town of Nenana, but they did not land. They turned around and came back to Fairbanks. We greeted them like heros when they landed on the ball park, which now became the local airport. From that modest beginning, aviation was off to a fine start in the Interior. The Fairbanks Aeroplane Company was formed, and carried cargo from 1923, right on to the end of the Second World War.⁸⁰

Thompson gave this flight wide publicity in the Alaska press, and cabled the story Outside. As a result, Hubert Wilkins, a well-known arctic explorer, contacted Eilson to inquire if he might accompany Wilkins on a

⁷⁷ Jessie S. Bloom, "The Jews Of Alaska," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XV, No. 2, November 1963, p. 108. Also note, that in the Interior there were very few roads, and the navigable season for river transportation was limited to four months. Livengood, one of the busiest camps at that time, was only ninety miles north of Fairbanks. It took nearly a week to reach it by boat during the summer, and two full days over the winter trail.

⁷⁸ Jessie Bloom letter to Rachel Ibbetson, October 3, 1974. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 12, File Folder 6, p. 104.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 104.

⁸⁰ Jessie Bloom, *Watching Alaska Grow* -- a manuscript of reminiscences completed in November 1951. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 13, File Folder 4, pp. 91-92.

flight over the North Pole.⁸¹ Eilson accepted the offer, and on their second attempt, they were successful.

The Fairbanks Aeroplane Company then hired another pilot by the name of Noel Wein. Ben Eilson and Noel Wein subsequently became famous pilots in Alaska aviation history.

The Rigors of Life and the Blooms' Jewishness

Robert and Jessie raised four daughters in Fairbanks -- Meta, was born April 1913; Deborah, December 1914; Olga, May 1917; and Ruth, September 1918. Jessie provides a delightful description of the events surrounding Meta's birth and neonatal suggestions of the day.

April 5th, 1913. It was a Friday, and the Sabbath Candles were lit and the Blessing said. Bob came home for supper, and I said, "I think I'm going to have the baby." He said, "well, let us go, but put out the candles." I had never put out the Sabbath Candles before, and I asked him if it was alright, since I considered it a sin. But he said, "forget it, can't leave candles burning, you know what fire means in here. We cannot take that risk." So we started out, it was still daylight, but was forty below on account of the wind. We walked to the hospital, about ten blocks. . . .

And so at nine the following morning (April 6th), Meta arrived. Bob came in, and . . . said "she has a nice smile." That evening, the News-Miner announced her arrival calling her "Bloom's wonder."

I was in the hospital for ten days, . . . and when Bob called for me with the dog team, belonging to one of his friends, to take me home, I was full of high spirits. The baby was doing very nicely. Dr. Aline Beegler was a great advocate of breast feeding, in fact she told me that it was a must for babies born in Fairbanks. She would not trust the milk from the local dairy because there was no inspection. But of course the various baby foods, like Carnation Milk, and Nestles Milk were alright.

⁸¹ Jessie S. Bloom, "The Jews Of Alaska," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XV, No. 2, November 1963, p. 109.

On the Sunday morning when she (Meta) was one day old, the Church Choir came in and sang hymns. It was the custom of the Mission. The Church was attached to the Hospital. It was lovely to hear the singing, and I told the Rector, that I liked the idea of my little Episcopalian Jewess being greeted by music so early after her arrival.⁸²

Throughout the history of our people, this question has been asked: What is Jewish culture and Jewish religious observance? An answer is, Jewish culture and religious observance is whatever Jews do, and however Jews live. With so few Jews in Fairbanks, how is one to describe pioneer Jewish cultural and religious life? Quite simply, Jewish culture and religious life was defined by the Bloom family. In Jesse's reminiscences we read:

September 6, 1937. New Year's Day. Bob and I went to visit a friend who had a Mink Ranch on the Tanana River, six miles up from Big Delta, way in the most remote part of the Territory. Bob always kept the Store closed for the two days Rosh Hashanah, and also for the one day, Yom Kippur. He has found that it is easier for him to worship, if he leaves the Town, so no one bothers him to go to the Store, or consults him on any other business.

I recollect way back in 1918, on Yom Kippur. He had the Store closed, and the train was due to leave for the Creeks about ten minutes before Bob had decided he would break his fast. One of Bob's customers wanted some goods to take out with him on that train, so he arranged for the train to leave fifteen minutes late, so that Bob would have time to get this customer his goods.

We took that kind of thing as so much part of our everyday life, that it was not until many years later, that we fully appreciated the significance of how much it showed the respect for the other fellows beliefs.

New Year's Day! Tradition dies hard. Once we went to Shul, prayed among our fellow men. Now we are alone. God is good, he is everywhere, just as much in this Mink Ranch at Paradise Point on the Tanana River as in the wonderful architectural structures. I ask not

⁸² Jessie Bloom letter to Rachel Ibbetson, October 10, 1974. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 12, File Folder 6, pp. 55-56.

for a manifestation of his presence, I feel it with me. The absolute of peace, in these tranquil surroundings with my beloved.⁸³

Entries from October 4, 1938, reveal additional insights about the Fairbanks Jewish community, Jesse's religious beliefs, the plight of European Jewry, and Palestine.⁸⁴

Tuesday, October 4. Erev Yom Kippur. Though there are no indications of the solemnity of the Holy Day that is rapidly approaching around here, I feel within me a sense of something deeper than the mere superficial bond of race and family. Up here on the last Frontier -- one of the very few professing Jews in this Camp, where there are about twenty Jews in all -- this feeling of tradition is brought home to me; how through the ages the torch of liberty and of democracy has been kept alive by being wedded to religious observance. Perhaps it would be simpler to throw off the shackles of orthodoxy, instead of keeping the Store closed tomorrow, just to come in as usual, instead of fasting. Yet, I feel I would be losing some deep physical and spiritual experience. The physical comes through abstaining from food, the spiritual from a sense of being one with all of "God's chosen" throughout the civilized world.

⁸³ Jessie Bloom, *Watching Alaska Grow* -- a manuscript of reminiscences completed in November 1951. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 13, File Folder 4, p. 122.

⁸⁴ Jessie was a Zionist. Her earliest recollection of the movement dated from 1909-1910, when she heard Israel Zangwill speak in London. In February 1911, she joined the Dublin Chapter of the Young Zionists. In Alaska, she "had little time to think or talk about Zionism, too busy with the mere living. . . ." But she and Bob did talk about a Jewish state.

The following story about Bloom is not clearly understandable, but it does illustrate his Jewish convictions. One day in 1919, Bob came home from the Store and told Jessie of a conversation he had with Father Monroe, the Missionary Jesuit Priest connected with St. Joseph's Church. They were discussing the question of the Jewish Homeland. Father Monroe said to Bob, "Now is the time for the Jews to accept Christ they have fulfilled their mission." Bob responded that Jews could not fulfil their mission, they were a live, viable people and moved with the times. Thus their mission was always geared to the times. Jessie wrote: "Anyway, Bob got the best of the argument because it ended up with the Father remarking, 'what is the life of a man in the Catholic Church.' Bob used the argument that the Church was an institution and so could fulfil a mission and be through, but a people like the people of the book, well, well???" Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Archives, Box 5, File Folder 43, *op. cit.*

According to Meta Bloom Buttnick, Robert Bloom and Father Monroe were very close friends, in spite of their philosophical disputes.

At this crisis in the history of our race, it is essential that we take stock of our resources. It is our spiritual resources that will keep us alive. The material rots and decays, the spiritual transcends all. . . .

All the liberties we struggled to attain throughout the ages are being taken from us, while we sit helplessly looking on. But we again renew our professions of Faith, we must once more proclaim from the hilltops that the Supreme Being is SUPREME.

Thursday, October 6, 1938. Yom Kippur is over, but the memory lingers on. The spiritual satisfaction, cannot be evaluated in mere words.

Heard that there has been fighting in Palestine, and that is upsetting, but then, we do have our Faith, and we know that everything will come out for the best.⁸⁵

Robert and Jessie were Zionists and inculcated in their children, the age old longing of the Jewish people to return to Zion. This was especially evident in 1923, at their family Passover Seder, when Meta recited Israel Zangwell's poem "Children of the Ghetto."⁸⁶

The Blooms were strongly committed to Orthodox Judaism. They ushered in the Shabbat with the lighting of the Shabbat Candles and Kiddish,⁸⁷ and held seders the first and second nights of Passover. However, there were practical limits to their religious observances. Jessie once wrote:

You have heard the Yiddish expression, "Es iz shver tsu zayn a Yid" (It's hard to be a Jew), well if it is difficult in a Jewish community, how much more it is in one in which you are the only Jewish family. But we managed to overcome that difficulty to a certain extent by keeping some of the Jewish customs that are part of our home life. We always lit the candles on Friday night, and read a Bible story to the children, before putting them to bed. So, . . . they instinctively

⁸⁵ Ibid, pp. 131-132.

⁸⁶ Jessie Bloom letter to Bernice Bloomfield, February 18, 1975. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box B, File Folder 18.

⁸⁷ Before the evening and morning meals on Shabbat and festivals, Kiddish (sanctification) is recited over wine. Wine is the symbol of joy, for it is "wine that cheers man's heart." (Psalm 104:15)

knew Friday night was different. Then, though we could not keep a Kosher home, we did follow a few basic dietary laws, which tended to show a difference. We did not have any pork in our house, and never served butter and meat at the same time. And when other children came in, and there would be talk about it, our girls knew that they were Jewish, and so did not go to Sunday School, or keep Christmas. Their playmates were all very understanding and would invite them over to their homes to see their trees, and they exchanged presents, since that was an accepted custom, but our girls knew about Hanukkah, and tied that in with Christmas.⁸⁸

Jessie told a story about the Model Restaurant in Fairbanks which served a Bloom Sandwich.⁸⁹ Bloom's namesake was, of course, a ham sandwich which he never had the opportunity to taste. Robert and Jessie greatly appreciated the joke.

Bloom did his utmost to meet the obligations of his religion, but his religious philosophy did not necessitate the observance of all the commandments in the Torah. He preferred a Judaism that appealed to the intellect, "not the kind that depended on the nitty gritty bits of observance for entrance to Heaven."⁹⁰

The Blooms went to great lengths to give their daughters pride in their "Jewish race and culture." Jessie took the girls Outside a number of times so that they might experience and live with other Jewish children. During the years 1923 to 1925, Jessie and the girls went to Seattle. Late in her life, she wrote about those years.

⁸⁸ Jessie Bloom, *Housekeeping in Alaska, forty years ago*. Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Archives, Box 5, File Folder 33, *op. cit.*

⁸⁹ Jessie Bloom letter to Bernice Bloomfield, April 20, 1973. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box B, File Folder 18.

⁹⁰ Jessie Bloom letter to Bernice Bloomfield, October 10, 1973. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box B, File Folder 18.

We arrived in Seattle in October of 1923. We lived in the Jewish neighborhood and the girls went to the Horace Mann School, which at the time had a fair percentage of Jewish pupils. They attended the Sunday School, which had just been established, at the Bikur Cholim (Synagogue).⁹¹

As a Jewish housewife in Fairbanks, Jessie did not mix milk and meat. She observed the dietary laws as best she could. As one might imagine, there was no kosher meat available. In Seattle, she apparently desired to step-up her observance of kashrut, but this attempt was short lived. Jessie reminisced with characteristic humor:

I stayed with Mrs. Jacobs, who kept a strictly kosher house. When I got my own apartment, I kept kosher until one of my ultra orthodox friends asked where I got my meat. I told him the name of the butcher, and he said, even though he calls himself kosher, his meat is questionable. Well, that was enough for me to mix my dishes!

Well to go one further, there was a grocery on Yesler Way where they had a sign in the window, "Kosher." One day I went in, and I noticed that he was selling boiled ham. I asked him how? He said that he used a different knife for cutting cheese than he did for the ham. You cannot imagine how that amused me. . . .⁹²

Remarkably, Jessie and her daughters left Fairbanks and Bob again, this time in June 1928. They traveled to Dublin, Ireland, and Jessie did not return until 1937.⁹³ The extended duration was so the Bloom daughters could go to college. Jessie proudly wrote:

⁹¹ Jessie Bloom letter to Bernice Bloomfield, February 27, 1974. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box B, File Folder 18.

⁹² Ibid. See, Jessie Bloom letter to Rachel Ibbetson, October 3, 1974. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 12, File Folder 6, pp. 111-112.

⁹³ Jessie Bloom, *Watching Alaska Grow* -- a manuscript of reminiscences completed in November 1951. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 13, File Folder 4, p. 98.

Our oldest girl, Meta graduated from Trinity College, . . . in 1934, and left in January of 1935 to join her father in Fairbanks, Alaska. She was appointed to teach English, French, and Latin at the Fairbanks High School, as she had taken three summer courses at the Sorbonne, France. . . . She continued to teach until her marriage in 1939, to Harry Buttnick of Seattle, where she now resides.

The second daughter, Deborah, qualified in medicine in 1938, and was appointed Resident at the Childrens' Hospital, in Harcourt Street, Dublin. . . . In 1939, (she went to) Johns Hopkins. . . she married Israel Kaplan.

Our third daughter, Olga, also qualified in medicine at Trinity College, in January 1940. She remained in England practicing all during the war years, until March of 1946 when she returned to the States. She . . . worked at the University of Illinois, and . . . in Chicago. Married in December of 1948 to Dr. Meyer Backer of Chicago.

Ruth, the youngest remained in England, marrying Joseph Ibbetson, after she had qualified in Architecture, and now she is a Member of the Royal Institute of British Architecture, though she never did much practicing, having acquired a family in due course. They are living in London at present.⁹⁴

As a matter of Jewish significance, it must be recognized that all four of Jessie and Robert's daughters married Jews. Up to this point in the thesis, most of the Jews did not find Jewish spouses and thus intermarried. The fact that their daughters looked for Jewish spouses is a testimonial to the Bloom family and the strength of their Jewish identity.

Jessie the Suffragette

As a young woman in London, Jessie was a suffragette and quite concerned with the role women should play in society. She continued in that capacity after arriving in Fairbanks. In August 1912, the Federal Government granted a Home Rule Bill to the Territory.⁹⁵ One of the first acts

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 99.

⁹⁵ Jessie Bloom, "Contrasts," Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Archives, Box 5, File Folder 31, *op. cit.*

of the Alaska Legislature was to grant suffrage to the women of the territory. Jessie took pride in the territory's actions and recalled the first meeting of the Women of Fairbanks.

The first meeting . . . took place in February 1914, and the contrast between that meeting and those I attended in London, was very great. At the London meeting, every woman present had a fair knowledge of the issue, and knew something about the way in which the Administration was conducted. But at the Fairbanks meeting, the majority of women, knew hardly anything about the Government. It was held in the Courthouse, and there were about a hundred women present, among whom there happened to be three outstanding characters: the first was Mary Gibson, a graduate of Bryn Mawr; Ella Elson, a Socialist Party Organizer; and Viola Kelly, who had come up on her wedding trip with her husband, who was a writer, they were looking for material for their stories. She had been working in Oregon, previous to her marriage, in the cause of Woman's Suffrage, and as Oregon had shortly before acquired the Suffrage, she was still very familiar with the work.

The meeting was called to order by Mrs. Tripp, the wife of a prominent lawyer. . . . Ella rose and spoke very well, tracing the history of Woman's Suffrage in the States, from the time the people of Wyoming were to come into the Federation -- and because their women would not be given equal rights, they refused to go in, as they felt that their women had gone through all the hardships of pioneering with them, and had always had their share in the governing of the Territory. They insisted on them having their say when it was to become a State. Her speech was greeted with loud applause. . . .

. . . Violet spoke for a short time, giving some incidents of the campaign in Oregon.

Mary called on me, introducing me as coming from the real battlefield. I rose and emphasized the fact that we must be careful not to abuse our privilege. We in England were fighting for the Vote and so had acquainted ourselves with the various issues involved, and when we should get it, we hoped we would be able to use it to advantage. But in Alaska, where there had been no campaign, it had been thrust upon us, it was a different matter, we might abuse our great gifts through ignorance. I . . . put a motion to the floor, that we form a Civic Club. The motion carried unanimously, and we adjourned

to arrange about drawing up some rules for the Fairbanks Womens' Civic Club.⁹⁶

The next month, March 1914, the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner reported that the Womens' Civic Club extended an invitation to the candidates for council to appear before the meeting and explain their positions. Jessie made the motion to invite the candidates to address the women voters.⁹⁷

The First Kindergarten in Fairbanks

During the summer of 1918, there was a group of young girls which played with the Bloom girls. A few of them were old enough to start first grade in the fall, but there were five, including Meta and Deborah Bloom, who were not yet six years of age. Jessie suggested to one of the parents that she would be glad to run a little kindergarten at her house. Jessie had always been interested in children's activities and decided to use some suggestions from the Montessori Method.⁹⁸ Class was held from one to three o'clock in the afternoon, at which time older siblings, returning from school, picked up the kindergartners. Jessie refused any fee for her services, but did accept assistance from mothers. One mother baked bread and another helped with mending. The kindergarten was a resounding success, and continued until 1922, when a public kindergarten was established at the Territorial school.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Ibid., *op. cit.* Meta Bloom Buttnick made a correction in the source material. Violet May was corrected to read Viola Kelly.

⁹⁷ "Ladies Name Candidate," *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, March 31, 1914.

⁹⁸ Jessie Bloom letter to Bernice Bloomfield, July 11, 1974. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box B, File Folder 18.

⁹⁹ Jessie S. Bloom, "The Jews Of Alaska," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XV, No. 2, November 1963, p. 114.

At the suggestion of her friend Mary Lee Davis, Jessie wrote to the Bureau of Education in Washington, D. C., concerning teacher certification. Jessie learned that the Bureau had a reading course for kindergarten and primary teachers.

They sent me a copy of their reading course, as well as, the books I needed to read and report on. They allowed two years to complete the course. I told them of my position and wondered if I would be able to do it in two years, but Miss Almira Winchester, who was in charge of that course at the time, wrote back that they would gladly allow me all the time that I felt I needed. I did complete that course, sent in the summaries of my reading, did a written questionnaire, and got a certificate. It was one of the most stimulating courses I ever had.¹⁰⁰

Jessie received the following letter from the Department of Interior,
Department of Education:

May 25, 1921

My dear Mrs. Bloom:

You have answered the test questions for the kindergarten reading course satisfactorily, and in due course of time, you will receive your certificate signed by the Commissioner of Education, and I will also return to you the summaries of the books in the reading course.

Sincerely yours,
Julia Wade Abbot
Specialist in Kindergarten
Education¹⁰¹

The Founder of Alaska's First Girl Scout Troop

Fairbanks' First Girl Scout Troop, organized in the Fall of 1925, emerged from a Sunday School Class.¹⁰² Several girls were meeting in a Girl

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 114-115.

¹⁰¹ Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Archives, Box 5, File Folder 45.

¹⁰² *Girl Scouts in Alaska spanning six decades, 1925-1985*, a pamphlet published by the Farthest North Girl Scout Council.

Scout Troop, led by Mrs. Vernon, wife of the minister of the Presbyterian Church. They had been learning to sew, and decided to broaden the range of their activities. Under the leadership of Mrs. Hjortesburg,¹⁰³ a donation dinner was sponsored, and plans made to write Girl Scout Headquarters in New York. After the dinner, Jessie was approached and asked to assume leadership of the inaugural troop.

When I accepted I knew that I would have all the assistance possible. But it was only as I began to work with the girls, that the full extent of this cooperation was demonstrated. Not only the parents, it seemed, but the whole town was willing and anxious to get back of our movement.¹⁰⁴

That first winter, members of the troop learned to sew, met for occasional cooking bees, and went on afternoon hikes. One of those afternoon hikes became quite a memorable experience. Aviation, at that time in Alaska, was still in its infancy, and quite dangerous. As it happened:

Ben Eilson and Sir Hubert Wilkins had been missing for a few days. As there were no radios, we had no way of knowing where they were. Approaching the Field that day in the course of our hike, we sighted a plane coming in. Since there was no other plane of that type in the Territory, it did not require much imagination to realize that Eilson and Wilkins were coming in for a landing. We hurried towards the Field, and as they landed our troop of Girl Scouts were there, first to welcome them. . . . our girls were extremely proud to think that their troop had been the first.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Mrs. Hjortesburg was the wife of a Fairbanks Exploration executive. This is significant because, according to Meta Bloom Buttnick, F.E. encouraged wives of the executives to become involved in community organizations. Many F.E. wives volunteered in Fairbanks.

¹⁰⁴ Jessie Bloom, *History Of The Fairbanks Girl Scouts 1925-1928*, September 1974. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box B, File Folder 18, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

In the spring of 1926, Jessie was determined to organize a Camp. To raise the requisite funds, an amateur talent show was put on at the Legion Hall (the Old Harmony Hall at Third and Lacey).¹⁰⁶ The Commander of the Legion, Einar Tonseth, donated the hall. Jessie, with assistance from her girls, wrote a thematic play on scouting entitled, "Pickles and Cake."¹⁰⁷ Proceeds from the show covered transportation costs. Twenty girls attended and each paid a fee of \$10.00 for two weeks of camping. Camp commenced on August 8, 1926.¹⁰⁸

At long last departure day arrived. We hired a truck from Sourdough Express, driven by the late Ed Hering, and at 10:30 in the morning all loaded on. Mrs. Stewart and Mrs. Braflaadt had prepared a meal of potato salad and baked ham, so we would not have to start in to cook immediately upon arrival at camp. Some of the proceeds of the show were used to purchase a tent, and we rented a cabin from Jimmy Chisholm, naming it the "Marion."

In those days, the trip out to Birch Lake was much more of an expedition than it is today. The roads being very rough, we developed tire trouble a short distance out, and we had two or three flats between Fairbanks and Birch Lake. It was therefore well after five in the evening before we arrived at our destination.¹⁰⁹

Camp was a resounding success. One of Jessie's favorite stories occurred on the last Friday of camp.

... we were using up our left-overs and had sandwiches of cheese, corned beef, and ham. Deborah Bloom (Jewess), Pat Hering (Presbyterian), and Emma Miller (Catholic) were always together

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ For further information on Fairbanks' First Girl Scout Troop, see Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Archives, Box 6, File Folder 51. See also, "First Scouts Remember Good Times," *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, March 8, 1975, p. A-3.

¹⁰⁸ Jessie Bloom, *History Of The Fairbanks Girl Scouts 1925-1928*, September 1974, Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box B, File Folder 18, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 1.

during Camp, and this afternoon, as usual, turned up together for their lunch. Deborah turned and said: "Ham? I can't eat ham. I am a Jewess. I'll take corned beef." Emma said: "I can't eat meat! This is Friday and I'm Catholic." Pat said: "Thank God I'm a Presbyterian! I'll have one of each!"¹¹⁰

Jessie served as active captain of Fairbanks' Girl Scout Troop from 1925 until June 1928, when she and her daughters, went Outside to Dublin. As a tribute to her, in 1976, the Farthest North Girl Scout Council acquired the Jessie Bloom Training Center.¹¹¹ Presently, the Girl Scouts Resident Summer Camp is called Camp Jessie Bloom and is held north of Fairbanks at thirty-mile Chena Hot Springs Road.

THE BLOOMS OPENED THEIR HOME TO JEWISH G.I.s

On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and brought the United States into the Second World War. About a week after Pearl Harbor, Robert Bloom received a letter from the Jewish Welfare Board in San Francisco. The J.W.B. asked if he would serve as chairman of the Fairbanks Chapter and "look after the Jewish personnel."¹¹² Bloom immediately replied, "Yes." The Blooms' hospitality became legendary among the Jewish servicemen. Robert and Jessie treated the boys like family for the Shabbat, holidays, and festivals. Passover 1941, came soon on the heels of Bloom's appointment as Civilian Chaplain. Jessie retold the events of that evening.

April 1st, 1942. We had our first Seder at the home of the Gibsons. Mrs. Gibson is Jewish, and though her husband is not, he was

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

¹¹¹ *Girl Scouts in Alaska spanning six decades, 1925-1985*, a pamphlet published by the Farthest North Girl Scout Council.

¹¹² Jessie Bloom, *Watching Alaska Grow* -- a manuscript of reminiscences completed in November 1951. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 13, File Folder 4, p. 158.

so very cooperative that it was a pleasure to have the folks meet there. There were ten soldiers from Ladd Field,¹¹³ most of them Sergeant and Master Sergeants, regular Army, and one lad whose home is in Brooklyn, and who was at the University. We went through the whole ceremony, Bob conducting. In the discussion that took place during the meal, the men remarked how similar the situations were at the present time to that which prevailed at the time of the Exodus. It was a very stimulating affair, and we all enjoyed it very much. Even in those eleven men present, there were six different States represented, and also varied backgrounds.

There was a Chaplain who flew in the previous day, and who spoke to Bob about the Seder. He wished to check on supply, etc. Fortunately, Bob had sufficient matzos on hand, from last year, thought the J.W.B. supply came in by air, just in the nick of time. We had plenty of wine, and the menu was gefilte fish, chopped liver, roast beef, potato pudding, green peas, mushroom gravy, mashed potatoes, horseradish sauce, dill pickles, olives, fruit salad, whipped cream. . . .

We used our best linen and silver, and set as nice a table as anyone could wish for, and the guests were grateful. A small collection was made after the service for the Jewish Consumptives' Relief Society.¹¹⁴

The G.I.s had been coming in to talk to us, from time to time, but the Seder was our first opportunity of seeing them all together. From that time on, we held open house for any of the Jewish boys stationed in Alaska. They took full advantage of our hospitality, and we enjoyed every one of them.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Sometime after the Second World War, the name was changed from Ladd Field to Fort Wainwright.

¹¹⁴ Collecting Tzedakah (charitable donations) was also a part of later Bloom seders. In 1944, \$125 were collected and donated to the United Jewish Appeal. Bloom's letter to the U.J.A. mentioned two Jews by name, "Mr. Max Reede, a civilian, and Capt. Bloomenthal of the U.S. Army." Robert Bloom letter to the United Jewish Appeal, May 31, 1944. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 8, File Folder 8.

In the same file folder, there is reference to Bloom's participation in the 1957 U.J.A. Drive, chaired by Zachary J. Loussac of Anchorage.

¹¹⁵ Jessie Bloom, *Watching Alaska Grow* -- a manuscript of reminiscences completed in November 1951. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 13, File Folder 4, pp. 164-165.

When the Fairbanks U.S.O. opened early in 1942, the assistant director was Jewish.¹¹⁶ He and Bloom arranged to hold Shabbat Services every Friday night at Ladd Field. Jessie wrote to a friend about those services:

... the services we held all during the War Years, we never had two alike. We somehow managed to hold on to one or two things that seemed to be important. The slant was orthodox, because Bob could not reconcile himself with any other orientation. Fortunately, we always had enough G.I.s to make a Minyan, if we needed it for Kaddish. If we did not have a Minyan, we could always get the Tenth Man at the Hospital. There were a few times when I went over to the Hospital to look for a Tenth Man and I blush to report that I always found one, and particularly on one or two occasions they were Officers who had "no time to identify" but were glad of the opportunity to help.¹¹⁷

Even the severe winter weather did not deter the men from attending Friday night services. The Blooms decided that it was better to do Kiddish at their house after services, and not at Ladd Field.¹¹⁸ This afforded the G.I.s a leisurely evening to visit at the Blooms and was a buffer against feelings of homesickness.

By July 4, 1942, there was a large number of Jewish servicemen at Ladd Field, most of them from the Midwest, mostly Ohio, Michigan, and Illinois.¹¹⁹ Rosh Hashanah services that year were held in the Masonic Temple.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 165.

¹¹⁷ Jessie Bloom letter to Bernice Bloomfield, November, 18, 1974. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box B, File Folder 18.

¹¹⁸ Jessie Bloom, *Watching Alaska Grow* -- a manuscript of reminiscences completed in November 1951. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 13, File Folder 4, p. 165.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 168.

Saturday, September 12, 1942. There had been quite a little activity around our place, as the boys were to get a three day pass, and they wanted, if possible, to get away from the Field. But the housing shortage is so acute, they were afraid that they would have to return to the Field. However, Bob was able to arrange for sleeping accommodations for quite a number of them. And so between our home, the U.S.O., and the services at the Masonic Temple, the boys began to feel that, after all, they were not so bad off.

Of course, on account of the strict censorship, it was impossible for us to write to their folks to tell them where they were. But I wrote to an old school chum¹²⁰ of mine who lived in Cleveland and mentioned that we had several boys from her town with us. And it seems that they were able to put two and two together. Many of the parents were soon aware of the fact that their boys were in Fairbanks, . . . , because when the boys wrote home about visiting the Blooms, it was then definitely established that they must be at Ladd Field.¹²¹

One such letter sent home was excerpted in a Cleveland newspaper.

Private I. Freed Describes Services He Attended in Letter to Family
. . . the Freed Family, 3094 E. Derbyshire Road, has received a letter (which) says in part:

Dear family: I wish you could have been here this weekend to see for yourself what wonderful services we held in town. It was the first time in 33 years that such services were held here. One of the Jewish citizens, a Mr. Robert Bloom, led the services. Mr. Bloom had his own Sefer Torah, which he brought with him when he first came into Alaska about 40 years ago. All the soldiers had prayer books supplied by the Jewish Welfare Board of Seattle, Washington. Services were both in Hebrew and in English. The most touching prayer of all was the one we read for those we left at home. It has such beautiful sentiment I must let you read it for yourself. I am enclosing it with this letter. The following boys from Greater Cleveland were at services: Pvt. Adolphe Fox, Sgt. Bernard Levy, Pfc. Howard Squires, Pvt. Milton Stern, Pvt. Robert E. Wertheim, and myself.

¹²⁰ This old school chum was Agnes Bernstein Klein. Jessie and she had gone to school together in Dublin. Conversation with Meta Buttnick, February 1991.

¹²¹ Jessie Bloom, *Watching Alaska Grow* -- a manuscript of reminiscences completed in November 1951. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 13, File Folder 4, p. 168.

To make the weekend complete, I met Bob Hope, Francis Langford, Jerry Colonna, and Anthony Romano at the U.S.O. where they put on a show for the boys.¹²²

On September 21, 1942, fifty young men attended Yom Kippur services and arrangements were made for a communal break-fast. The Day of Atonement was particularly solemn that year in Fairbanks. Thoughts and prayers were intensified by the servicemens' separation from home and family. Jessie remembered they discovered a "prayer for the folks at home" in the Prayer Book, and always read it during services.

... we hit on a system of using that particular prayer to the best advantage. We never had a service or gathering of any kind, that we did not find some time to read that prayer, and we always managed to give the honor of reading that prayer to the one whom we felt was the most homesick. It really worked ... as a morale builder.¹²³

At the rear of their house on 3rd Avenue, the Blooms had a small apartment built on in 1921-22. Jessie always called this the Playroom Apartment and the Blooms rented it to a tall Jewish lad from Cleveland. They called him "six foot three," because he was quite proud of his height and careful that no one measured him shorter. "Six foot three" rented the apartment with the understanding that he,

¹²² Unidentified Cleveland newspaper, no date. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 10, File Folder 16. Other Jewish G.I.s who wrote in appreciation of the Blooms or are cited in documents are: Henry Eschwege, Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Archives, Box 5, File Folder 46; Robert Simon, Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Archives, 1960-1969 Correspondence file; and Charles P. Charney, University of Alaska Archives, 1972-1973 Correspondence file.

¹²³ Jessie Bloom, *Watching Alaska Grow* -- a manuscript of reminiscences completed in November 1951. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 13, File Folder 4, p. 169.

would be willing to share it with any G.I. who happened to be passing through, and to whom the privilege of spending a night in town was helpful.

He stuck to his share of the bargain. Many a morning, we would look out through the window, as we were eating breakfast, see several G.I.s coming out of our back porch. How he ever managed to accommodate so many has always been a mystery to us. But as he told us, they bring their own bed rolls, and are willing to sleep on the floor, just to be in town, and be away from the Army for a change.¹²⁴

"Six foot three" had a fair knowledge of Hebrew and assisted Bloom at services.¹²⁵

On March 21, 1943, the Blooms hosted a Purim party. That party was the first event to which Jewish young women came. There were two, Sue who worked for the Signal Corps and Natalie, from the North West Command.¹²⁶ Actually, Natalie came with Hal, a young man she met the night before at a U.S.O. dance. Jessie and some of the boys put on a Purim skit, which did not go over well, but the evening was a welcomed diversion for the thirty-five who attended.

Bloom Officiated at Fairbanks Weddings

In another respect, the Purim party was a smashing success. Seven months later, Natalie and Hal were married by Civilian Chaplain Bloom in Fairbanks. According to Jessie:

There had been a Chuppah¹²⁷ performed in Fairbanks in 1910, and Bob assisted at that one. It was the Chuppah of Pauline Woolfe and

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 170.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 171.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 177. Sue was from Cleveland, and Natalie from Washington, D.C.

¹²⁷ The chuppah or wedding canopy, under which the bridal couple is married, is supported by four poles which are held by four members of the wedding party. The chuppah is symbolic of the future home of the wedded couple.

Lipman Simson, both members of pioneer Alaskan families. (The first casualty of the War, to an Alaskan boy, was the son of that marriage). Bob was very impressed with that ceremony, and when it was over, asked if he might have the Chuppah cloth, which Mrs. Woolfe let him have.¹²⁸

Under that very Chuppah, Bloom performed the wedding ceremony for Natalie and Hal. It was a fine and sunny October morning, a bit chilly, about ten below zero, but "who minds that in Fairbanks, especially on your wedding day?"¹²⁹

The Chuppah went off well, there must have been over a hundred present. "Six foot three" let us have his apartment, for the girls to use as a cloakroom, and also we stayed there with Natalie, until it was time for us to walk into the front room. . . . The four Jewish women in town, were with Natalie as she marched to the Chuppah and all her friends were assembled in the front room, waiting. Every Jewish G.I. who could get off that day was there, and all the officers. . . .

We had a very nice lunch following the ceremony. The J.W.B. wine came in very useful, they did send in a very fine brand, and the Gentile guests were loud in praises of it, as they could not get such nice wine in the local liquor stores.¹³⁰

Soon after the wedding, a Jewish young man, who wanted to marry a Gentile young woman, asked Bloom if he would do the ceremony. Bloom, however, told them he "had no jurisdiction to do that."¹³¹

Bloom did perform one more wedding in October 1943.¹³² Bert, the groom, worked for the Civilian Aeronautics Administration (C.A.A.) in

¹²⁸ Jessie Bloom, *Watching Alaska Grow* -- a manuscript of reminiscences completed in November 1951. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 13, File Folder 4, p. 184.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 185.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 186. Natalie and Hal moved to Chicago, had two children, and kept up regular correspondence with the Blooms.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 187.

¹³² Ibid., p. 187.

Fairbanks. Helen, the bride, flew in from Los Angeles. Robert and Jessie were given only three days notice, but managed to assemble a congregation of some thirty G.I.s.¹³³

The Blooms continued to provide a Jewish environment for the G.I.s and the men took full advantage of the opportunity. Seventy attended the April 1943 Passover Seder.¹³⁴ Rabbi Philip Bernstein, then a Military Chaplain, remembered that Passover and the Blooms:

The Blooms might have remained unknown but for World War II. Suddenly vast numbers of G.I.s descended on Alaska and the Aleutians. Fairbanks was headquarters for the Air Command. Hundreds, probably thousands, of Jews were among them. The Blooms became their parents, their friends, their counsellors, their chaplains, until, and even after, the Jewish chaplains arrived. Innumerable Jewish G.I.s turned to them for friendship, for a loan, for Jewish cooking. When I was in Alaska for Passover 1943, I found that Jessie Bloom was herself chopping up what seemed to be tons of gefilte fish for the military sederim (seders).¹³⁵

To quantify just how much food the Blooms prepared and served for the 1944 Passover seder, there is this letter from the "Office Of The Chaplain," Seattle, Washington.

¹³³ Jessie wrote, "While this was a nice ceremony, it was not quite so exciting as that of Natalie and Hal. We still hear from Bert and Helen, they now have two children and are living in Los Angeles. . . ."

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 178.

¹³⁵ Philip S. Bernstein, "To The Editor: About Jews in Alaska," *The Congress Weekly*, Vol. 23, No. 18, November 24, 1958. Bernice Bloomfield Collection, Anchorage Museum of History and Art Library, Box B, File Folder 18.

21 March 1944

Dear Mr. Bloom:

I know you will be glad to hear that the Passover supplies are well on their way to you. You personally will receive 10 cases of wine, 120 bottles or 24 gallons. In addition, the Post Chaplain will receive 4 cartons of Matzo's or 72 pounds and three cases of wine. So you should be amply supplied for the Passover Seder.

You will be happy to hear that Rabbi Philip Bernstein, executive director of the Religious Committee of the Jewish Welfare Board may be able to visit your city for the Seder and spend a few days there. He knows of the wonderful interest you have taken in our men and how you carried on in spite of many handicaps. My two short visits to Fairbanks have made my admiration for you grow and I know you do not desire any praise. . . .

Cordially,
Edward T. Sandrow
Chaplain Als Dept, Asst.¹³⁶

Two months later Bloom received another letter acknowledging his donations of time and resources to the servicemen. This one was from the National Jewish Welfare Board and concluded by saying,

Because of your noteworthy service and the high regard in which you are held, it is my pleasure to appoint you to membership in the National Army and Navy Committee of the Jewish Welfare Board. I hope you will accept. You will be in the company of a group of distinguished American citizens who have rendered an outstanding service in the war emergency.

Sincerely yours,
Frank L. Weil¹³⁷

The next September, more than one hundred G.I.s attended Rosh Hashanah services held at the Oddfellows Hall, followed by a dinner at the

¹³⁶ Chaplain Sandrow letter to Robert Bloom, March 21, 1944. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 1, File Folder 1.

¹³⁷ Frank Weil letter to Robert Bloom, May 10, 1944. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 6, File Folder 6.

Episcopal Parish Hall.¹³⁸ "Six foot three" hosted five soldiers in the Playroom Apartment over Rosh Hashanah. All of them took their meals with the Blooms and appreciated Jessie's "made to order" eggs.

Fairbanks' First Circumcision

In late September 1944, Chaplain Rosenberg conducted the High Holy Days services in Fairbanks.¹³⁹ At that time, there was a young Jewish couple which worked with the Construction Company, and expected to give birth in October. They asked the Chaplain if they would need a Mohel¹⁴⁰ for the circumcision¹⁴¹ of a baby boy. The Chaplain told them that a Mohel was not absolutely necessary, and that any Jewish doctor at the Field Hospital could perform the procedure. Bob, however disagreed, and offered to send for a Mohel from Edmonton, so that the ceremony would adhere to Orthodox guidelines. This squabble amused Jessie who wrote, "no community is complete without one."¹⁴² She continued:

The baby was a boy, and the Jewish doctor at the Field came to the Town hospital and performed the ceremony. Bob gave Ed, one of our boys, the prayer book so that he could read the prayers. As this was the first baby boy to be brised (circumcised) in Fairbanks, the newspapers made quite a to do about it.

It is interesting, all the same, to note how these things can become factional. Quite a few of the boys came to the house, boys that

¹³⁸ Jessie Bloom, *Watching Alaska Grow* -- a manuscript of reminiscences completed in November 1951. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 13, File Folder 4, p. 182.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 197.

¹⁴⁰ The Mohel is the circumcisor who has been trained to safely perform the circumcision according to Jewish laws and traditions.

¹⁴¹ The covenant of circumcision (brit milah or bris milah) was commanded of Abraham and all his male descendents. See, Genesis 17:9-12.

¹⁴² Jessie Bloom, *Watching Alaska Grow* -- a manuscript of reminiscences completed in November 1951. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 13, File Folder 4, p. 198.

had been invited to the bris, saying that they did not wish to go, since Bob did not think it was right. I had never realized that he had so much influence with them.¹⁴³

On Tuesday August 14, 1945, the Northern Commercial Company's whistle sounded to announce that Japan had surrendered. Gradually, the Jewish G.I. population in Fairbanks declined as servicemen returned to their homes and families. The next Passover Seder, in April 1946, was much smaller.

We had twenty at the Seder. . . and held it at our home. Before sitting down to the Seder, we had the boys davin ma'ariv (evening prayers). Some of the boys wanted to say Kaddish. The Seder was just like a home seder. We sat at one table and Bob sat at the head, with his pillow on his chair for reclining. The youngest G.I., a lad of nineteen, asked the four questions. We were at the part where you open the door for Elijah, when the doorbell rang. We opened the door and found it was the Chaplain, who had heard about our Seder and wondered if he could join us. We welcomed him in, and though he was the only Gentile at the gathering, we went on in our usual traditional fashion.

. . . after the . . . meal, Bob asked "Would any of you boys like to speak?" One G.I. rose and said, "I'm not Orthodox. But gee, it is good to know one can look forward to something like this. My Dad told me to be sure to get in touch with our people when I came overseas. At the best of times, the Army gets very monotonous. . . . So to know that one can attend a Seder like this was a great treat and something to look forward to."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 198.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 205.

Jessie Corresponded With Mothers of G.I.s

Jessie corresponded with several mothers of Jewish G.I.s. The letters Jessie received in return, were filled with gratitude and information on how the war effort affected daily life Outside. One such letter to Jessie, read:

Bruder Dairy Products Co.
10708 Superior Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio

March 17, 1943

My dear Mrs. Bloom:

I've really meant to answer your letter before this, but I have been terribly busy at the office. What with practically everything rationed now, it's quite a headache for the office. . . .

Mrs. Bloom, I don't think you could have paid me a nicer compliment than you did, when you said that you think Adolphe is very much like your Bob was when he was younger. That's the sweetest thing you could have told me, and I love you for it. I'm so glad that you see Adolphe occasionally and that he's feeling alright and looking well. . . .

Sincerely yours,
Bea Fox¹⁴⁵

By 1948, there were very few G.I.s stationed at Ladd Field, but the Blooms hosted a Seder for ten. Three weeks later, on May 14, 1948, the State of Israel declared its independence and set up a provisional government. Robert and Jessie felt the Jews in Fairbanks should commemorate the long held dream of Jews to resettle in the land of Zion.

That evening, we arranged for our own thanksgiving service at the Chapel at the Field. We only had nine present, but we managed to put on a pleasing ceremony, at which we sang Hatikvah. Then we gave

¹⁴⁵ Bea Fox letter to Jessie Bloom, March 17, 1943. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 4, File Folder 2, *op. cit.*

the formal information to the local paper, and they considered it worthy of the front page. So on the front page of the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner there is the item of how we also, hailed the birth of our nation, or perhaps we should say "rebirth."¹⁴⁶

Jewish Burials in Fairbanks

Clay Street Cemetery is the final resting place for many souls in Fairbanks.¹⁴⁷ According to cemetery records and death certificates, only six of those souls are buried in the Jewish section.¹⁴⁸ Of the thirty-eight men who were charter members of Bikur Cholim, only one is buried in the Clay Street Cemetery. His name is David Hurvitz. He died of heart disease, July 15, 1920. His headstone reads:

"David Hurvitz, Born in Kovno, Russia. Died in Fairbanks.
July 15, 1920. Age 57 years."

Hurvitz left no surviving spouse, descendants, parents, or personal property. He did have a sister who lived in Chicago. Hurvitz's headstone was written half in Hebrew, as was one other:

"Mrs. Anna Marks
Died Oct. 29, 1915. Aged 34 Yrs."

Two simple, flat markers identify the graves of:

"Thomas Robin. Age 67 Yrs. Died 9/1/23. Jewish."

"Lena Ferguson. Born ? Died ? Jewish."

¹⁴⁶ Jessie Bloom, *Watching Alaska Grow* -- a manuscript of reminiscences completed in November 1951. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 13, File Folder 4, p. 217.

¹⁴⁷ The first burial in Fairbanks' Clay Street Cemetery was in August 1903. The first Jewish burial of record was 1915. The land, although used as a cemetery, did not belong to the city until 1919.

¹⁴⁸ All information concerning Clay Street Cemetery and the deceased lying therein was gathered from Ms. Karen Erickson of Fairbanks.

Records show Robin was born February 15, 1856, in Romania. Apparently, he was a tailor by trade. The records on Ferguson reveal no date of birth, but specify July 2, 1954 as her date of death. She was married to Harold Ferguson, who died several months before her. There is no record of his burial. Her maiden name was Wishengrad and she one of eight children, three brothers and four sisters survived her.

Neither of the last two headstones has Hebrew script or a religious identification. They mark the graves of:

"Gussie Beckman 1882-1939"

"Mrs. Julia Warren Died June 22, 1929 Aged 53 Yrs"

According to Jessie's diary, on May 9, 1950, Bloom assisted in the funeral service of a Jewish woman.¹⁴⁹ She came to Fairbanks in 1945, was married to a Gentile, and subsequently died in her late forties. Although Jessie did not mention the woman's name, the Blooms were fond of her.

She... worked in one the Dry Goods Stores, it was during the time that the Russians were buying up the town, and as she could speak Russian, her services were in great demand by the Storekeeper. She told us that she was receiving more wages in her position, ... than she had received in all the years she had been working in the States.

The Services were held under the auspices of the Fraternal Order of Eagles, of which she and her husband were members. The floral offerings were so plentiful, that we calculated at least five hundred dollars must have been spent. ... That sum sounds fantastic, but when it is realized that the flowers are all flown in from the States, it is not so strange.

Bob gave a short history of her life, as far as we knew it, and he emphasized her desire to be identified with the members of her race. When the boys (military) were coming to (our) house, she always did

¹⁴⁹ Jessie Bloom, *Watching Alaska Grow* -- a manuscript of reminiscences completed in November 1951. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 13, File Folder 4, p. 223.

her best to help entertain them -- never too tired to help with the preparation of the meals, or the serving, or even the dishwashing. There was a large crowd at the funeral, and the store in which she worked was closed. . . out of respect to her memory. As she had no member of her family in the town, we represented her family, and went along with the husband in the main carriage. She was buried in the Fraternal Order of Eagles Plot, since none of her relatives expressed any preference as to where she should be buried, and the husband wished to have her buried among the "Eagles." Her death was very sudden and we could find no instructions about her burial among her papers.

During the five years she was in Fairbanks, she never missed coming to Bob with a donation, before the High Holidays, and asking Bob to mention her parents names when he was saying "Yizkor."¹⁵⁰

Tzedakah

Tzedakah was very important to Robert and Jessie. Tzedakah, loosely defined, is equated with justice, truth, kindness, ethical conduct, help, and deliverance. It is applied most often to the relief of the impoverished and sick. As evidenced by this chapter, the Blooms generously gave of themselves and of their resources. They fed G.I.s and opened their house to any G.I. in need of warmth and care. This desire to help others was a direct result of their Jewish upbringing. As leaders in the Fairbanks Jewish community, they were often in the position of soliciting donations from others. But they did not ask anyone to donate before they themselves donated.

The Blooms always made tzedakah part of the Passover Seders. In 1942 those who attended made a donation to the Jewish Consumptives' Relief Society. In 1944, the Seder participants donated to the United Jewish

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 223-224. Yizkor (may God remember) is the memorial service prayed on Yom Kippur, the eighth day of Succot, the last day of Passover, and the second day of Shavuot. Yizkor commemorates the memories of dead friends and relatives, and Jewish belief in spiritual life.

Appeal. Some, although certainly not all, of the Blooms' tzedakah recipients included: The Ezrath Nashim Mental Hospital in Jerusalem, The Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel, American Womens Voluntary Services,¹⁵¹ and Saint Joseph's Hospital in Fairbanks.¹⁵²

After a long and full life in Fairbanks, the Blooms bought a house on Puget Sound in Seattle, in 1950. They lived there for more than twenty years. Bob died on April 3, 1974. In addition to all that has been related above, he was the last surviving member of both Igloo Number 4, Pioneers of Alaska,¹⁵³ and the Board of Trustees which opened the Alaska College in 1922.¹⁵⁴ Bloom was a thirty-second degree Mason and Past Master of Tanana Lodge 162 in 1918.¹⁵⁵

Jessie Spiro Bloom not only wrote wonderful reminiscences, but was quite politically active. She wrote to at least a dozen U.S. Senators expressing her opposition to the Viet Nam War, and to Alaska's Senator Gruening¹⁵⁶ in support of his anti-Viet Nam position.¹⁵⁷ She was also concerned about the destruction of Alaska's natural beauty and firmly opposed to oil exploration

¹⁵¹ Jessie worked with a great deal of dedication for the A.W.V.S.

¹⁵² Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 1, File Folder 8; Box 4, File Folder 20; Box 8, File Folder 12; and Box 10, File Folder 16. Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Archives, Box 2, File Folder 9.

¹⁵³ "Pioneer Merchant, gold miner. Robert L. Bloom dies at 95," *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, April 1974, p. 3.

¹⁵⁴ Robert W. Hiatt letter to Jessie Bloom, April 5, 1974. Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 11, File Folder 11.

¹⁵⁵ Bloom Collection, University of Alaska Archives, Box 2, File Folders 11, 16; and Box 3, File Folder 20, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁶ Ernest Gruening was born February 6, 1887 in New York City, N.Y. He was Jewish and was governor of Alaska 1939-1953. In anticipation of statehood, he was elected one of the two U.S. Senator from Alaska (1956).

¹⁵⁷ Bloom Collection, American Jewish Archives, Box 4, File Folder 7, and Box 6, File Folder 12, *op. cit.*

and development. Jessie died November 22, 1980. Both of them are buried at Bikur Cholim-Machzikay Hadath Cemetery in Seattle.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF EACH PRECEEDING CHAPTER -- BRIEF UPDATES OF JUNEAU, ANCHORAGE, AND FAIRBANKS

Chapter One Summary

"Alaska" in the language of the Aleut Indians means "Great Land." That it certainly is. Alaska is more than 2.2 times the area of Texas, the largest state in the Union. She is larger than the 13 original states and measures over 2,000 miles in length and 1,400 miles in breadth.

Until the early eighteenth century, the North Pacific was the least known area of the world. It was the Russians who sought to discover what lay beyond Siberia. Peter the Great (1696-1725) appointed a Danish explorer, Vitus Bering to lead the expedition. Under Bering, two successive Kamchatka Expeditions were commissioned. The first, began in 1725, and was unsuccessful. The second set sail in June 1741 and discovered the western coast of Alaska.

There is circumstantial evidence pointing to Jewish involvement in Bering's discovery. A Russian Jew named Sol Ripinsky, while at Sitka in 1885, met a Greek Orthodox Priest who claimed he was half Jewish. The Priest said, "my name is Moses Salamatop and I am the Greek priest at Unga. One of my forefathers came to Alaska in one of the ships with Vitus Bering in the capacity of an officer, and there were several more Jews in the same expedition."

In the half century after its discovery, Russian fur traders systematically exploited the Aleutian Island chain. However, as the

operating distant from Kamchatka increased, the costs of business drove out smaller operators. By 1770, a few large companies dominated the Aleutian fur trade. In 1799, the Russian-American Company, was granted a lease to harvest fur seals. The Russian-American Company signed three successive leases with the Russian Government, and acquired exclusive commercial rights until 1867.

There was a Jewish role in the economic development and purchase of Alaska. Louis Goldstone, who worked for a San Francisco fur house, acquired information that the Russian-American Company had financial difficulties and that the Russian Government was ready to sell the territory.

Russian Alaska was transformed into American Alaska on October 18, 1867. Benjamin Levi, a young Jewish soldier, raised the stars and stripes over the garrison at Sitka.

Chapter Two Summary

In August 1870, the Alaska Commercial Company won a twenty year lease to harvest fur-bearing animals. How the Alaska Commercial Company came into being is difficult to summarize. Suffice it to say, the seven men who formed the company received a helping hand from "lady luck" in their acquaintances and negotiations. Of particular interest is the fact that four of the original seven partners were Jews. These men were: Louis Sloss, Lewis Gerstle, August Wasserman, and Leopold Boscowitz.

Some written accounts of Jewish Pioneers in Alaska were not favorable. Take for instance the 1868 diary of Emil Teichmann. Teichmann wrote that the Jewish traders in Sitka "carried on a more or less illicit trade with the soldiers and Indians." Although his description of the Jews was not flattering, he did indicate Sitka was full of unsavory characters from all

backgrounds. Teichmann also wrote of Jews who gathered for Sabbath worship and of his surprise to witness such a congregation.

Many Jews were in business in Alaska. This is evidenced by the large number of Jewish merchant advertisements in: *The Sitka Times*; *The Alaska Herald*; and *The Alaska Times*

Jewish Pioneers in the second half of the nineteenth century were not able to successfully organize a Jewish community. The primary problem was a lack of Jews. There is documentation, however, that Jews did gather to celebrate Festivals and special occasions. For example, in the San Francisco newspaper, *The Hebrew*, Mr. L. Caplan, a resident of Sitka, reported that fourteen Jews celebrated a Passover Seder in 1869.

Documentation existed for two Jewish settlers, Alfred Greenbaum and Rudolph Neumann, who worked for the Alaska Commercial Company. Ample source material was available on Sol Ripinsky who came to Alaska in 1884 to teach at a local school. Ripinsky earned quite a name for himself, and has a mountain named after him in the Saint Elias Range.

Chapter Three Summary

Alaska's first gold strike occurred in 1880 at Juneau. The first Jewish residents in Juneau were Robert Goldstein and his son Charles, who arrived in 1884/5. Goldstein was the first fur trader in Juneau. Robert and Anna Goldstein raised eight children, many of whom became very important citizens of Juneau.

The Klondike Gold Rush commenced in 1898. Prospectors and miners were attracted from all over the world to Dawson, Yukon Territory. In 1898, Charles Rosener, a young Jewish merchant, wrote to his family in San Francisco about the first Jewish services held at Dawson. Robert Bloom, later

of Fairbanks, also attended those Yom Kippur services. Bloom claims to have officiated at the first Jewish burial there, in 1902. The Hebrew Congregation of Dawson organized in October 1902. In 1901, 163 Jews lived in Dawson, but soon, many left for Nome and for Fairbanks.

Thousands flocked to the golden sands of Nome beginning in 1899. Many Jewish merchants arrived, numbering at least thirty-five in the 1903 Alaska-Yukon business directory. The names of some of Nome's Jewish residents were: Abramsky, Bayles, James W. Bursick, Caplin, J. M. Davidson, Goldberg, Goodfriend, Greenberg, Grumbaum, Max R. Hirschberg, Lazarus, Levin, Levy, Liebes, Lipman, Albert J. Lowe, Lustig, Otto S. Moses, Polsky, Rose, Roth, Moses Rosencranz, Rosenfeld, Rubenstein, Rubin, Samuels, Segal, Leo Seidenverg, Abraham Simpson, W. A. Sternberg, and Bernard Stone. Alaska's first Jewish organization was established in Nome in 1901. The Nome Hebrew Benevolent Society consisted of sixty charter members. The congregation had a Torah scroll and asked Sam Bayles to serve as cantor for the High Holy Days.

The last significant gold rush was in the Tanana River Valley. Felix Pedro found gold, north of present day Fairbanks, in 1902. The town was incorporated in 1903. Many Jews came to Fairbanks for the gold rush, though most left for the gold fields of Ruby in 1907 and Iditarod in 1910. From the gold fields, they traveled south to Anchorage, in anticipation of economic opportunities at the new construction camp for the Alaska Railroad.

Today, Anchorage is the largest city in Alaska, and possesses the largest Jewish population, estimated to be 2,000. When in April of 1915, President Wilson announced the government would assume responsibility for building the Alaska railroad, people swarmed from all over the territory.

From the very beginning, Jews played a major role in city politics and philanthropy. Jewish names and businesses were prominent in the local newspapers. Three Jews of particular distinction were: Leopold David, Anchorage's first mayor; Isidore Bayles, president of the *Anchorage Daily Times*; and Zachary J. Loussac, the city's most outstanding philanthropist.

Chapter Four

In 1903, Robert Bloom traveled by dog sled from Dawson to the Fairbanks mining district. In 1904, he opened a hardware store on Front Street and was in business there until 1942. Bloom was instrumental in the Jewish life of Fairbanks. On the second day of Rosh Hashanah 5669, September 27, 1908, thirty-eight men gathered and became charter members of Chevra Bikur Cholim. They held services for the High Holy Days that year. Bloom had a Torah scroll which he had brought with him via Dawson.

In 1912, Bloom returned to Dublin to marry Jessie Spiro, his second cousin. They arrived in Fairbanks mid-summer 1912. By that time, there were few Jews left in Fairbanks. Most of them had left for newer gold fields, such as Ruby and Iditarod. There were no regular worship services from 1912 until 1939, when Jewish G.I.s began arriving in Fairbanks.

Robert Bloom was involved, at least indirectly, in most of the important issues of his day. In Bloom's store, Judge Wickersham discussed extending the railroad north to Fairbanks. Wickersham was able to get a bill through Congress in 1914. Wickersham talked with local residents about opening up a Land Grant College in Fairbanks. Bloom was a staunch supporter and served on the first Board of Regents for the Alaska

Agricultural College and School of Mines. He also was involved in early aviation and agriculture in the Interior.

The Bloom's raised four daughters in Fairbanks. To ensure a Jewish environment for them, Jessie traveled with the girls to Dublin staying there from 1928-1937. As a matter of Jewish significance, it must be recognized that all four of Jessie and Robert's daughters married Jews. Most Jewish pioneers in Alaska did not find Jewish spouses and thus intermarried. The fact that the Blooms' daughters looked for Jewish spouses is a testimonial to their family and the strength of their Jewish identity.

Jessie was a suffragette, both in her early years, and in Fairbanks. In 1918, she opened the first Kindergarten in Fairbanks, and in 1925 she was the territory's first Girl Scout Troop leader.

During the Second World War, the Blooms opened their home to all Jewish personnel in the Interior. Robert Bloom served as Civilian Chaplain beginning in the winter of 1941/42. The Blooms' hospitality became legendary among the Jewish servicemen. Robert and Jessie treated the boys like family and hosted them for Shabbat, holidays, and festivals. Bloom officiated at two weddings in 1943. In 1950, he assisted in the burial of a Jewish woman at the Clay Street Cemetery.

After a long and full life in Fairbanks, the Blooms bought a house on Puget Sound in Seattle, in 1950. They lived there for more than twenty years, but made many summer trips to Fairbanks. Bob died on April 3, 1974. Jessie died November 22, 1980. Both of them are buried at Bikur Cholim-Machzikay Hadath Cemetery in Seattle.

Juneau

Today, Jews in Juneau are organized as the Juneau Jewish Community (J.J.C.). As of June 1990, they had a local membership of fifty-five. Members run a wide variety of programs, including Shabbat Pot Luck Dinners, a bi-weekly Religious School, Israeli Folk Dancing, and Festival celebrations. The congregation is especially involved in tzedakah. The second Thursday of each month, J.J.C. serves dinner at The Glory Hole, a local soup kitchen. J.J.C. is also working to raise funds for Operation Exodus, a special United Jewish Appeal Campaign to underwrite new Soviet immigrants to Israel.

The congregation makes yearly arrangements for a rabbi to lead High Holy Day services. In the last couple of summers, J.J.C. has brought in a student rabbi for one week to run a day camp, facilitate educational programs, lead services, and serve as a resource person. J.J.C. offers Jews in Southeast Alaska a caring and supportive Jewish community.

Anchorage

Congregation Beth Shalom, in Anchorage, was organized in 1958 with twenty people. It built a beautiful synagogue in 1988 and now has a membership of 165 families. It is a full service congregation led by Rabbi Harry L. Rosenfeld who arrived in 1984. Congregation Beth Shalom holds Shabbat services on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings. It has a sizable religious school of 101 pupils, a youth group of fifteen, and runs a summer day camp.

Beth Shalom is actively engaged in tzedakah. The congregation helps provide undergarments for impoverished Anchorage residents, is raising funds to adopt Romanian orphans, and is deeply involved with Operation Exodus -- to date raising close to one million dollars. Moreover, the Jewish

community has resettled six Soviet Jewish families in Anchorage. The Anchorage Jewish community has an active Hadassah Chapter of forty, and works closely with A.I.P.A.C. (American Israel Political Action Committee) and the Alaska Council of Soviet Jewry.

Fairbanks

The Jewish Community in Fairbanks was largely military until the suspension of the draft in the early 1970s. As the military population decreased, visits from the Jewish Chaplain grew more infrequent and then stopped. At the same time, civilians, Jews among them, came to the Tanana Valley during the oil boom of the 1970s. Lacking a chaplain, members of the Jewish community led services and operated a religious school. Services were, and still are, held at the Main Post Chapel on Fort Wainwright. Members of the community provide lay leadership. The Religious School began in the early 1960s, under the tutelage of Chaplain Seymour Gittin. The Religious School has been operating for almost thirty years, thanks to the dedication of community members.

In 1980, members of the community organized as the Jewish Congregation of Fairbanks (J.C.F.). Friday night Shabbat services were held on a monthly basis until 1985, now they are held weekly. Congregants gather to celebrate festivals and life cycle events. There is an active Hadassah chapter, organized in 1986, which sponsors the Community Passover Seder. Seder participants number nearly one hundred twenty-five.

In 1989, J.C.F. brought up to Fairbanks its first resident rabbi. Matthew J. Eisenberg, a fourth year rabbinical student from the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, served J.C.F. during the summers of 1989 and 1990. At least twenty-five members of the Jewish

community warmly welcomed the Eisenbergs at the airport. Eisenberg officiated at Shabbat services, planned family and adult education programs, tutored bar and bat mitzvah students, and directed Camp KiTov -- Fairbanks' first Day Camp.

During the summer of 1989, there was a triple b'nai mitzvah (Sam, Jake, and Rachel Griswold) and another bar mitzvah (Jordan Koko). Camp Kitov operated for one week and attracted 25 elementary school aged campers. At week's end, campers and families participated in a Shabbat Camp Out at Glass Park. Teen aged youth and adults helped plan programs and provided a quality camping experience.

The summer of 1990 saw Camp KiTov grow to 37 campers. Campers engaged in a large variety of activities, which included singing and dancing for local residents of a nursing home. J.C.F./Camp KiTov entered its first ever float in the Fairbanks Golden Days Parade. The Camp Out was extended from one night to an entire weekend and was held at Denali National Park, two hundred miles south of Fairbanks. On Saturday evenings, during both summers, J.C.F. members went to the Eisenbergs' for Havdalah.¹

The Jewish Congregation of Fairbanks membership list numbered ninety one as of July, 1990. J.C.F. is in the process of bringing up another student rabbi for the summer of 1991. The Congregation fills an important need for Jews of the Interior, that of gathering with other Jews. The Jewish Congregation of Fairbanks is a firm link in the Alaskan Jewish chain of tradition which began as Chevra Bikur Cholim in September of 1908.

¹ Havdalah (distinction) marks the end of the Shabbat, just as Kiddish begins the Shabbat. Havdalah is a short ceremony of song which consists of four benedictions: over wine, spices, light, and the distinction between sacred and ordinary time.

APPENDIX A

Additional information on LOUIS SLOSS and LOUIS GERSTLE. Alaska Commercial Company correspondence of interest.

LOUIS SLOSS

Mr. Sloss was born in Bavaria, on July 13, 1823.¹ The youngest of a family of five children, he had two brothers and three sisters, and was orphaned early in his life. His father died when he was four, and his mother passed away when he was but ten years old.² In spite of the restrictive laws against the Jews in Bavaria, the Sloss family found a good grammar school for their children to attend.³ The boys also received religious education. After the death of his parents, Louis had to leave school and strike out on his own. He became a clerk in a country store, until early in manhood, when he decided to migrate to the United States.

Mr. Sloss came to this country in 1845, and settled in Mackville, Kentucky,⁴ where he opened a country store. In 1849, when reports of gold strikes in California filtered back to Kentucky, he crossed the plains on

¹ Michael M. Zarchin, *Glimpses of Jewish Life in San Francisco* (Oakland: Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum, 1964), p. 56.

² Martin A. Meyer, *Western Jewry: An Account of the Achievements of the Jews and Judaism in California* (San Francisco: California Press, 1916), p. 147.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁴ There is a discrepancy here between the sources. Zarchin, p. 56, says Sloss settled in Mackville, Kentucky; whereas Meyer, p. 148, says Sloss settled in Maxwell, Kentucky. I contacted the Kenton County, Kentucky library. They provided me the following locations: Mackville is southeast of Louisville; and Maxwell is near the Big Sandy River, in the eastern part of the state. I conclude, although this is not certain, that Sloss settled in Mackville. My reasoning -- it is near Louisville, and it was in Louisville where, some say, Sloss met Gerstle, his future brother-in-law and business partner. Weil, p. 4, called the town Mocksville -- this is probably a typographical error.

horseback. He took up residence in Sacramento, then the principal center of new mining activity. Sometime before 1851,⁵ Mr. Sloss, along with Simon Greenwald, established the mercantile house of Louis Sloss and Company.⁶ In 1851, Lewis Gerstle joined the partners of the firm.

Mr. Sloss was a committed Jew. The sources report, "Mr. Sloss, always an ardent Israelite, gifted with an insight into the forces that should move his religion and race to high places of honor and usefulness, became the Parnass of the new Jewish congregation in Sacramento."⁷ However, due to the demands business made upon him, he soon resigned the position.

Messieurs Sloss, Greenwald, and Gerstle were engaged in the wholesale grocery business until 1861, when the flood of that year forced them to move.⁸ They decided to relocate in San Francisco. Upon their arrival in San Francisco, they sought another business avenue. In 1862, Messieurs Sloss, Greenwald, and Gerstle opened a stock brokerage office.⁹ To all accounts, the business was a great success. So much so, that in 1866, Sloss obtained a seat on the San Francisco Stock Exchange.¹⁰ He became a powerful broker in the city, particularly through his dealings with Nevada's silver mining entrepreneurs. During this time, there was frenzied mining speculation and widespread business dishonesty. Sloss, apparently was

⁵ There is no precise date for this. All I know is, according to Meyer, p. 148, Gerstle joined the firm in 1851, after its establishment. However, according to Zarchin, p. 56, the firm was established in 1852. Zarchin does not mention when Gerstle joined it.

⁶ Martin A. Meyer, *Western Jewry: An Account of the Achievements of the Jews and Judaism in California* (San Francisco: California Press, 1916), p. 148.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁸ Michael M. Zarchin, *Glimpses of Jewish Life in San Francisco* (Oakland: Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum, 1964), p. 56. According to Meyer, p. 148, however, the business moved to San Francisco in 1860.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

above such corruption, for the *San Francisco Chronicle* wrote of him as "the most honest man that handled mining shares."¹¹

On January 31, 1868, the Alaska Commercial Company was formed and Louis Sloss was elected its president.¹² Also in 1868, he was an elector on the national Republican ticket, which elected President Grant.¹³ In 1870, Mr. Sloss traveled to Washington, and helped successfully negotiate a twenty-year seal-fishing lease from the government for the Pribilof Islands.¹⁴ After the discovery of gold, the Company expanded into the area of trading, and into supplies through so called "chain stores." Mr. Sloss also made heavy investments in the Alaska Packers Association, which owned large salmon canneries.¹⁵ He had interests in several mercantile enterprises, as well as, extensive landholding in Southern California.¹⁶ In 1884, he helped found, and served as the first president of, the Society of Pioneers.¹⁷ Mr. Sloss never ran for political office, but he did hold a semi-public office as the treasurer of the University of California from 1885-1902.¹⁸

Mr. Sloss was very charitable. He took great joy in aiding worthy people to get a foothold in business.¹⁹ He was a member of Congregation Emanu-El, twenty-eighth president of the Society of California Pioneers,

¹¹ Ibid., p. 56.

¹² *The Alaska Commercial Company*, p. 7. From the Alaska file in The American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

¹³ Martin A. Meyer, *Western Jewry: An Account of the Achievements of the Jews and Judaism in California* (San Francisco: California Press, 1916), p. 148.

¹⁴ Michael M. Zarchin, *Glimpses of Jewish Life in San Francisco* (Oakland: Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum, 1964), p. 57.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 57. Once again there is a discrepancy between the sources. Meyer, p. 148, maintains, Sloss was a founder, and first president of, the Society of *California* Pioneers.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 57.

treasurer of the California State Central Committee, and trustee of the Free Public Library.²⁰

Mr. Sloss was married in Philadelphia, in July, 1855, to Miss Sarah Greenebaum.²¹ They had five children: Mrs. E. R. Lilienthal, Leon, Louis, Joseph, and Judge M. C. Sloss.²² After his passing on June 4, 1902, the *San Francisco Examiner* wrote the following:

"A noble, kind, and gentle soul was called from earth when Louis Sloss passed away. He envied the possessions of no man; he saw the wealth of the waste places on the earth and went forth to take some of it. He was a pioneer in California, Nevada, Siberia, and Alaska, and better than William Penn, he traded with the Indians without cheating them. We sincerely trust that his life will influence the lives of all the young men in California. If Louis Sloss had been in great haste to make money, and to get it had done mean things in his early life, his declining years would not have been blest with the happiness and serenity that are God's greatest and best gifts to man."²³

LEWIS GERSTLE

Lewis Gerstle was born December 17, 1824.²⁴ Like Louis Sloss, Mr. Gerstle was born in Bavaria. At the age of twenty-one years, he came to the United States and settled in Louisville, Kentucky.²⁵ An interesting fact about

²⁰ Ibid., p. 57.

²¹ Martin A. Meyer, *Western Jewry: An Account of the Achievements of the Jews and Judaism in California* (San Francisco: California Press, 1916), p. 149.

²² Ibid., p. 149.

²³ Michael M. Zarchin, *Glimpses of Jewish Life in San Francisco* (Oakland: Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum, 1964), p. 57.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 57.

²⁵ Martin A. Meyer, *Western Jewry: An Account of the Achievements of the Jews and Judaism in California* (San Francisco: California Press, 1916), p. 93. There is a discrepancy in the sources. Zarchin, p. 57, writes, Gerstle immigrated in 1847 -- that means Gerstle would have been twenty-two or twenty-three years old, not twenty-one.

Mr. Gerstle -- he worked his way across the Atlantic Ocean as a deck boy.²⁶ When he arrived in Louisville, he became a peddler, in the employ of his brother.²⁷

In 1849, he made his way to New Orleans, and the next year he journeyed to California by way of Panama.²⁸ While en route, he contracted what was then commonly known as Panama Fever. His money was scarce and he was compelled to work as a cabin boy to pay for his passage to San Francisco.²⁹ He opened a fruit stand,³⁰ but soon began working the gold mines as a day laborer near Georgetown, El Dorado County.³¹ In Sacramento, he met Louis Sloss, and in 1851, joined the partners of the mercantile house, Louis Sloss and Company.

Mr. Gerstle, along with Mr. Sloss and Mr. Simon Greenwald, engaged in the wholesale grocery business. They were open until the flood of 1861, which forced them to close down and move to San Francisco. In 1862, Messieurs Sloss, Greenwald, and Gerstle opened a stock brokerage office.³² To all accounts, the business was a great success. On January 31, 1868, the Alaska Commercial Company was formed, Lewis Gerstle was elected its vice-president.³³

²⁶ Michael M. Zarchin, *Glimpses of Jewish Life in San Francisco* (Oakland: Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum, 1964), p. 57.

²⁷ Martin A. Meyer, *Western Jewry: An Account of the Achievements of the Jews and Judaism in California* (San Francisco: California Press, 1916), p. 93.

²⁸ Michael M. Zarchin, *Glimpses of Jewish Life in San Francisco* (Oakland: Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum, 1964), p. 57.

²⁹ Martin A. Meyer, *Western Jewry: An Account of the Achievements of the Jews and Judaism in California* (San Francisco: California Press, 1916), p. 93.

³⁰ It is unclear from the sources, where he opened this stand. Whether in San Francisco or near Georgetown, El Dorado County.

³¹ Michael M. Zarchin, *Glimpses of Jewish Life in San Francisco* (Oakland: Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum, 1964), p. 57.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

³³ *The Alaska Commercial Company*, p. 7. From the Alaska file in The American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Mr. Gerstle's business interests reached beyond the Alaska Commercial Company. He was one of the original promoters of the Union Iron Works in San Francisco, the San Joaquin Valley Railroad, the Pioneer Woolen Mills, and several other manufacturing properties.³⁴ In the late 1880's, Mr. Gerstle together with New York Senator Warner Miller, established a company to build the Nicaragua Canal.³⁵ He was a director in the Nevada National Bank, the Union Trust Company, and the California-Hawaiian Sugar Company.³⁶ After the death of his close friend and associate, Mr. Louis Sloss, Mr. Gerstle followed him as treasurer of the University of California for a few months -- from August 12 to November 19, 1902.³⁷ He owned large blocks of real estate in the business section of San Francisco.

Mr. Gerstle was a generous man. He was a benefactor of the Orphans' and Old Peoples' Home,³⁸ and served a short term as director of the Hebrew Asylum and Home Society.³⁹ He was one of the earliest members of Temple Emanu-El.

Lewis Gerstle was married in 1858 to Miss Hannah Greenbaum of Philadelphia.⁴⁰ (Hannah was the sister of Mrs. Louis Sloss.) They had seven children: Sophia Lilienthal, Clara, Bertha, Mark L., William, Alice, and Belle.⁴¹

³⁴ Michael M. Zarchin, *Glimpses of Jewish Life in San Francisco* (Oakland: Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum, 1964), p. 58.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 58.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 58.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 58.

³⁸ Martin A. Meyer, *Western Jewry: An Account of the Achievements of the Jews and Judaism in California* (San Francisco: California Press, 1916), p. 94.

³⁹ Michael M. Zarchin, *Glimpses of Jewish Life in San Francisco* (Oakland: Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum, 1964), p. 58.

⁴⁰ Martin A. Meyer, *Western Jewry: An Account of the Achievements of the Jews and Judaism in California* (San Francisco: California Press, 1916), p. 94.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 94.

He passed away on November 19, 1902 at his suburban home in San Raphael. He was survived by his wife and seven children.

Interestingly enough, although Messieurs Gerstle and Sloss were heavily invested in Alaska, they never traveled up north. This according to a 1967 interview with Alice Gerstle Levison, his daughter and niece of Louis Sloss. Asked whether her father and uncle ever went to Alaska, Mrs. Levison said: "They never did. My brother Will went to Alaska; Louis Sloss [Jr.] went; and Leon Sloss went to Alaska for a visit. My mother and father never did. . . . You didn't do things like that. It was a hard trip, and at that time it was a long trip. There were no accommodations there."⁴²

Correspondence of Interest

There were three bodies of source material concerning the Alaska Commercial Company which were of particular interest to this writer. The first was a letter from Mr. Samuel Willets, a stock holder, dated November 16, 1880, inquiring about the company's treatment of the native population on the Pribilof Islands.

"John E. Miller, President,
Dear Friend:

The great success of the Alaska Commercial Company has prompted more or less thought respecting the enterprise; and in connection therewith I have found myself thinking of the Aleuts (or, whatever the inhabitants of St. George and St. Paul Islands are called), and have wondered if all is being done for them that ought to be done, considering the rich harvest of the Company. . . .

Are we doing *all* that we *can do* for those poor laborers who are filling our coffers with gold? Do we sell our goods to them at fair,

⁴² Ruth Teiser, *Alice Gerstle Levison: Family Reminiscences* (Berkeley: University of California, 1967), p. 69. From the Alaska/Biographies file in The American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

reasonable prices? . . . Can we improve their houses and better their schools? . . .

Thy assured friend,
SAML. WILLETTS."⁴³

Mr. Miller wrote a reassuring and detailed reply to Mr. Willets, dated December 1, 1880.

"Dear Sir:

. . . it affords me much pleasure in assuring you that everything has been done on the part of the Company to accomplish the object in view, and in order that you and the rest of our Eastern Stockholders may fully understand what has been done in the matter, I . . . furnish you herewith a brief outline of the voluntary work performed . . . to better their condition.

At the Islands of St. Paul and St. George, large and commodious schoolhouses have been erected, . . . with most competent teachers, the children are making satisfactory progress.

Under management of the old Russian American Company, the natives lived in underground huts, utterly unfit for human habitation — . . . we have erected on the two Islands, within the past five years, 85 cottages . . . free of rent . . . we have resident physicians . . ., with an abundant supply of medicine. . . . The supplies we send forward, are of the best and most substantial character, . . . and sold there @ 15% advance above San Francisco cost, which simply covers expenses of transportation. Each family is furnished free of charge, . . . good coal to last through winter. . . . Liquors . . . are strictly prohibited, and the utmost efforts are made on our part to promote good feeling . . . between the Company's employees and the natives....

At Ounalaska, where we have no exclusive rights for trading and consequently are subjected to the strongest competition of several other business houses, the same liberal principle has been manifested on our part, We send a yearly liberal supply of good and useful books to the different stations in Alaska, both in English and Russian.... The Company will not permit the slightest interference with their mode of worship; on the contrary, every assistance is rendered . . . building of churches To the natives free passes are given for travel on any of the Company's vessels to and from Alaska or to any point in the Territory visited by us Instructions to our agents are

⁴³ Ibid., p. 19.

most emphatic as to the necessity of fair dealings and strict compliance . . . our contract with the Government

I am, Yours sincerely,
John F. Miller⁴⁴

Mr. Miller's letter alleviated the concerns of Mr. Willets.

The second letter was sent by Mr. Lewis Gerstle to the Company's agents at St. Michael (located at the mouth of the Yukon River), and provides an example of a corporation "with a soul." It was published, July 4, 1927, in the *San Francisco Examiner*. The letter was from the government files in Washington in the 1889 volume entitled *Investigation of the Fur Seal and Other Fisheries of Alaska*⁴⁵ The occasion was the inrush of gold miners at "Forty Mile" -- as a point of reference, this was ten years before the gold strike in the Klondike.

"San Francisco, May 7, 1886.

Dear Sir: We have been informed that a large number of miners have already started to the Yukon and Stewart River Mines, and it is probable that many others will be attracted to that section of the Territory in consequence of the supposed existence of rich diggings in the district. Considering that the company's station at St. Michaels is the nearest source of supply, an extra amount of groceries and provisions has been sent to you to meet the possible demands likely to be made upon you during the coming winter.

It must not be understood, however, that the shipment referred to is made for the purpose of realizing profits beyond the regular schedule of prices heretofore established. . . .

In this connection we deem it particularly necessary to say to you, that traders in the employ of the company, or such others as draw their supplies from the stores of the company, . . . must not be permitted to charge excessive profits, otherwise all business relations with such parties must cease, as the company cannot permit itself to

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 19-21.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 58.

be made an instrument of oppression toward anyone that they may come in contact with.

Yours truly,
Lewis Gerstle, President"⁴⁶

Asked if the agents of the Alaska Commercial Company were as honest as they were expected to be, Alice Gerstle Levison replied: "I remember some of the agents who used to come visit. . . . My uncle (i.e., Louis Sloss), was so easygoing, left a lot of the work to his sons. He had great faith in his sons; they were always right. . . .they were always very friendly with these agents. They overlooked a great many things they should not have overlooked; I don't think those agents were as honest as they might have been, but they were all good fellows."⁴⁷

The third item is a contract, dated August 9, 1870, between the Alaska Commercial Company and the Government of the United States, discussing the management of the seal population. Considering how man has exploited animals and mammals, especially whales, some to the point of extinction, this contract appears particularly farsighted. But let there be no illusions. In its environmental policies the Alaska Commercial Company sought to protect its seal-fishing resources. Their efforts to be environmentally responsible were motivated by profits. Having said this, however, it was commendable of the Company to set out guidelines for the management of their resources, even if those means were to ensure profits.

"In accordance with the provisions of 'An act to prevent the extermination of fur-bearing animals in Alaska,' approved July 1, 1870,

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 58-59.

⁴⁷ Ruth Teiser, *Alice Gerstle Levison: Family Reminiscences* (Berkeley: University of California, 1967), pp. 69-70. From the Alaska/Biographies file in The American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

First. The number of fur seals which may be killed for their skins during the year 1870, upon the island of St. Paul, is hereby limited and restricted to 37,500.

Second The number of fur seals which may be killed for their skins during the year 1870, upon the island of St. George, is hereby limited and restricted to 12,500.

And the rent of \$55,000 reserved to the Government in the lease under said act to the 'Alaska Commercial Company,' bearing the date August 3, 1870....

William A. Richardson
Acting Secretary of the Treasury

...Witnesseth, that the parties hereto do hereby mutually agree ... not to kill upon the island of St. Paul more than 90,000 fur seals, and upon the island of St. George not more than 10,000 fur seals per annum; not to kill any fur seals upon the islands aforesaid in any other months except the months of June, July, August (From the 1st to the 15th of said month), September, and October of each year; not to kill such seals at any time by the use of firearms or other means tending to drive the seals from said islands; not to kill any female seals or any seals less than 1 year old,⁴⁸

Mr. Lewis Gerstle, representing the Company, agreed to and signed the above contract with the Government. The contract provided benefits to both parties. In November 1930, *Fortune Magazine* reported that "eighty per cent of all the fur seals in the world frolic on the Pribilof Islands. But, "what mattered to the U. S. Treasury was that in the forty years following purchase of Alaska for \$7,200,000, the leasing privilege of killing seals on these islands returned nearly \$9,473,996."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *The Alaska Commercial Company*, p. 11. From the Alaska file in The American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

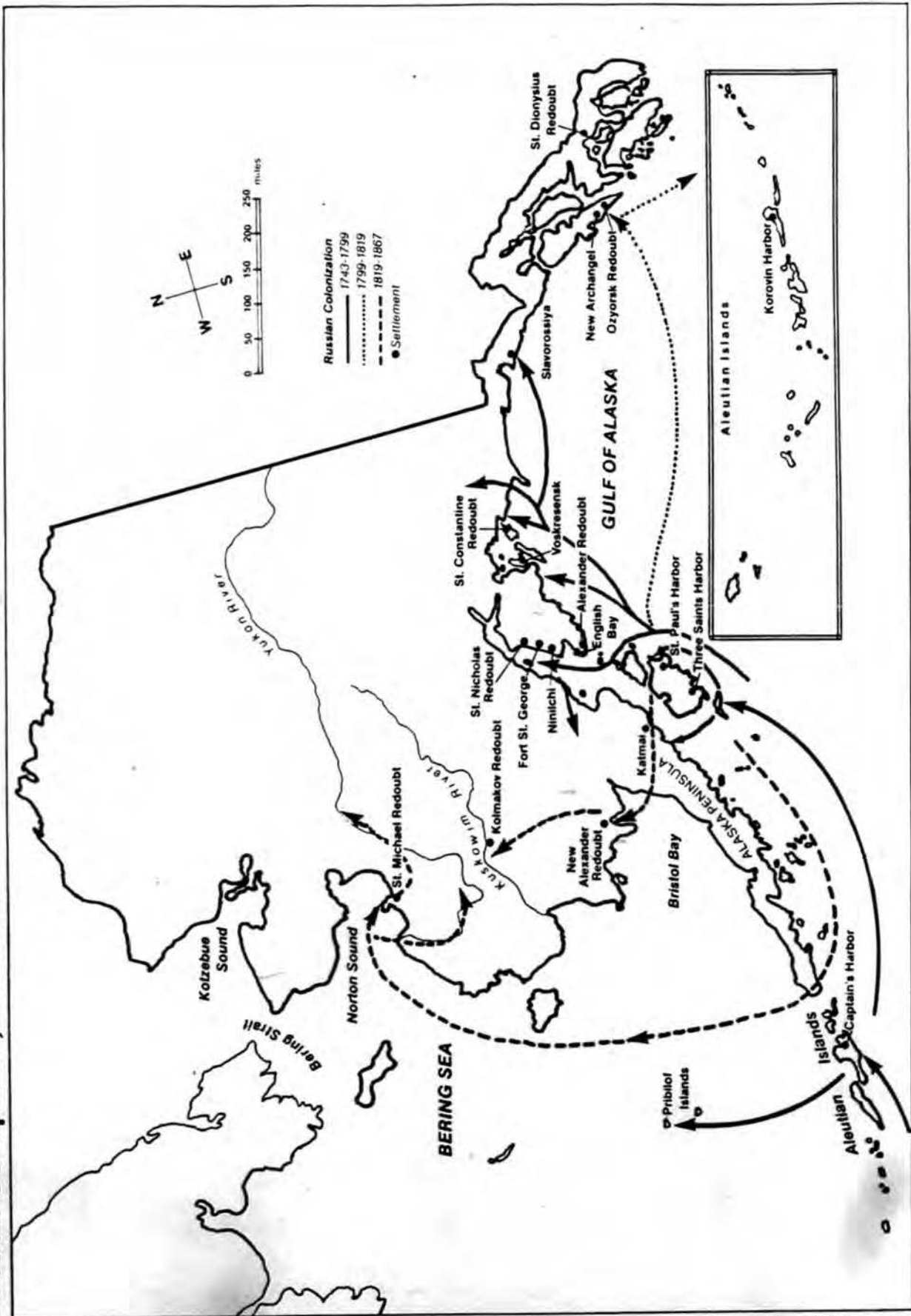
APPENDIX B

MAPS: Russian Occupation, 1743-1867

The Gold Rush, 1880-1902

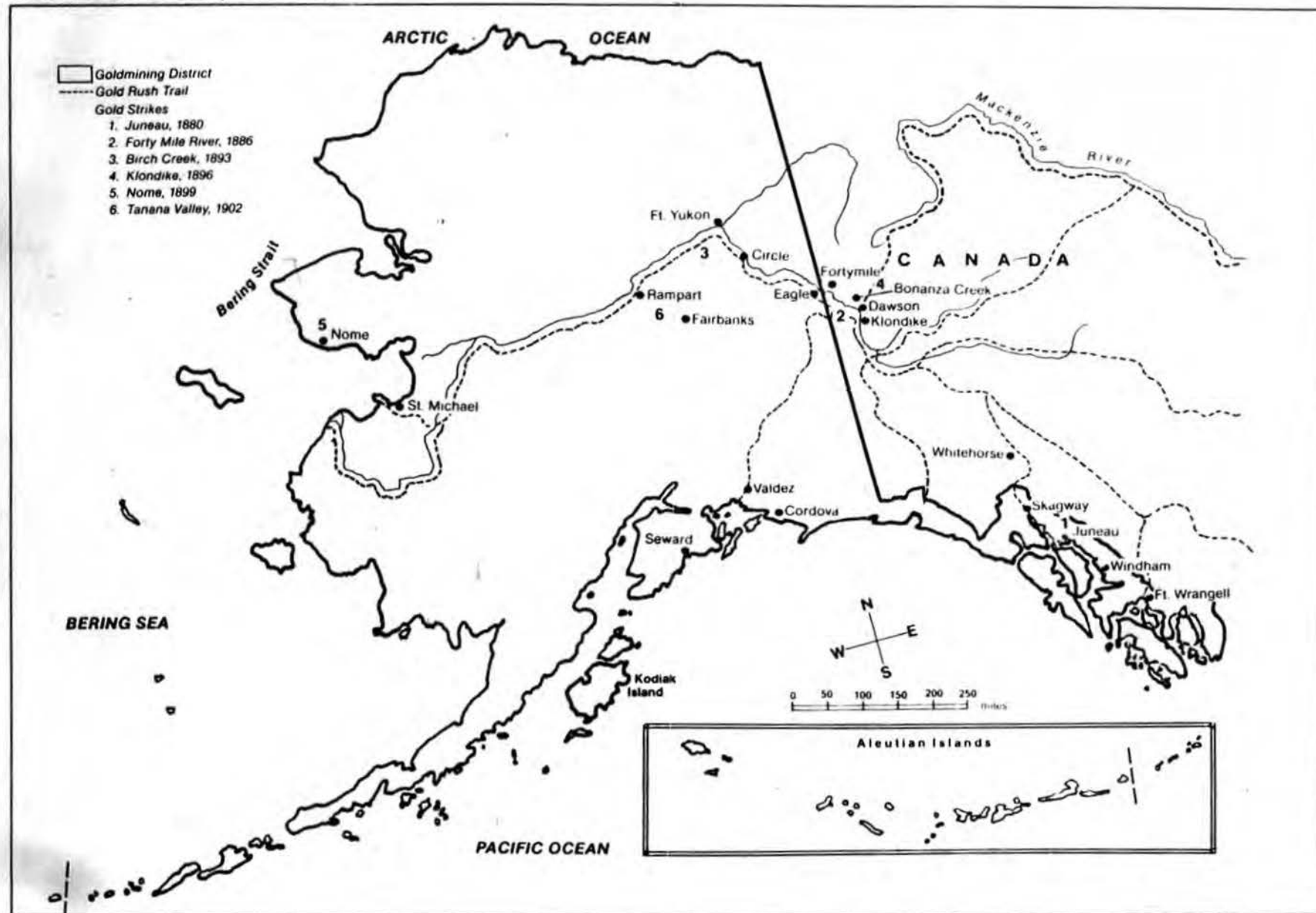
Landforms

Russian Occupation, 1743-1867



The Gold Rush, 1880-1902

1.17



Alaska

Landforms



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