

**THE JEWS
IN AMERICAN ALASKA
(1867-1880)**

By RUDOLF GLANZ

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THE JEWS IN AMERICAN ALASKA (1867-1880)

The end of the Russian Empire in the New World and its transformation into Alaska, an American territory, happened at a time when merchant pioneering of American Jews had reached at the Pacific Slope such a concentration, that it acted the decisive role in this process of transformation. The concentration was not only one of numbers (San Francisco's density in Jewish population as compared with the general one reached at that time the same degree as in New York) but also specific in the economic function taken over. In this circumstance, it was the fur trade in particular which made Alaska into a commercial dependency of the trade emporium of San Francisco. The preparation of the acquisition and opening of Alaska within the framework of Pacific history is one of the classic examples of Jewish merchant-pioneering as an adventure in the new territory of the period. Alaska's Jews, notwithstanding the excellent intentions of their first pioneers, never attained at any time at that period, the historic Jewish community organization of a Kehilla. The good intentions to create a congregation remained ever at their initial stage. But the advance of the Jewish pioneers into a territory where so far they were unknown, led to the development of facts which we have to consider typical for Jewish history. There arose real and artificially created tensions between the population of Alaska and the Jewish merchant pioneers. These tensions were exploited by interested circles still imbued with European prejudice. Thus, Russian America, with its "Drang nach Osten" and American "Westward-Movement" towards the Pacific, before the interior of the country was occupied, had their grand encounter.

It was fate, that the spiritual worlds of East and West, Autocracy and Democratic way of life, had to collide. It must be said, however, that, at the time when Alaska was taken over, Russia and America had friendly relations with each other and "Seward's Folly" was in

full agreement considered as an act of friendship of both powers. The population of Russian America, estimated about 40,000, was of course exposed to the prejudice nurtured against the Jews in Czarist Russia, and an agitation in anybody's service had a potential chance to use this prejudice for his aims.

The various commercial combinations surrounding Alaskan trade, the eventual development of a monopoly for the most lucrative part thereof, which left a number of traders, Jews among them, outside the "Trust", and the attempts of counter-organizations of the "Independents" left outside, brought about the awakening of anti-Jewish prejudice against the "Jewish trust". This prejudice was incited by journalists paid by special interests, including also Jewish businessmen. Thus, the principle of free commercial competition, which, in the industrial America of the Atlantic Coast became a burning question, but decades later, proved a great source of attraction in the new Alaskan territory. Free competition, in its general mood of "Anti-Trustism" was a step forward also for the rest of the Pacific region. The times had not yet dawned when "every third ray of the Californian sun belonged to a Railroad."

IMPORTANCE OF THE FUR INDUSTRY OF THE JEWS IN ALASKA

The full development of the fur trade in San Francisco was a domain of the Jews, who were dominant also in other branches of economy, like clothing, dry goods and tobacco. Full trade development was reached only in the second decade of the existence of American California, when gold-mining was on the decline and when the real gold mines proved to be the solid business enterprises which were built with an eye to the future. To give a final evaluation of California Jewry, let us consider the opinion of a contemporary Gentile writer, which reads: "The Jews who came to the Coast in the days of its primeval wealth and promise were more prudent and far sighted than the average pioneer Gentile. They realized that the overabundance could not always continue, that the great possibilities of the Coast would invite immigration; and that the milk and honey that flowed through the land would be absorbed in the heat of competition,—and following the dictates of an inborn economy, they were frugal and laid up stores for the future while their collaborators of vari-

ous denominations luxuriated in the sunshine of the day."¹ This prosperity planned also for the future found its particular expression in the concentration of Californian fur industry in Jewish hands. "The fur industry of the Coast has been among the interests which have successfully invited the investment of Jewish money. . . . The new State of the Far West was still in swaddling clothes when Hermann Liebes, a practical furrier, came from England, and immediately on his arrival commenced purchasing skins from trappers and the furs brought down the coast by captains of sailing vessels. He had for a partner E. J. Behlow, and although there were at the time other small traders, the firm built up an establishment which still maintains supremacy in the city.² We find a picture of the concentration of the Jews in fur trade in the city directories of San Francisco. The expression "practical furrier" is but a paraphrase for the fact that Jews from Eastern Europe who learned their furrier's trade in the old country, often in Russia, went first to England before finally emigrating to America. They were from the beginning well at home in their trade. These were the people, who could truly utilize these never dreamed of new chances on the Pacific Coast, under fine conditions in a free democratic America which had taken Russia's fur empire on the new continent. At first Russian America looked to them as the Eldorado of fur trade, but Muscovite merchants reserved that trade for the greatest part for their own benefit. The Jewish traders gathered experience on the situation in Russian America and, from time to time, did business between the trade center of San Francisco and the Russian American fur trading places. Eminent Jewish merchants from San Francisco made visits to Alaska. At that time, the Russian American Fur Company had a monopoly upon the products of fur animal hunting all over Russian American territory, a monopoly based on the company's charter. But the company's rights were bound to expire if not renewed by the Russian Government. The Jewish fur traders of San Francisco judged, as experts, that there was a sure possibility of getting much more gains from the whole Russian fur territory in America. They hoped, that a privilege could be got from the Russian Government, the more so as inside information revealed great discontent in Russian official circles about the results

¹ Overland Monthly, New Series, v. 25, 1895, p. 410-420, K. S. Nesfield, *The Jew from a Gentile Standpoint*, p. 411.

² Overland Monthly, N. S. v. 25, Nesfield, p. 413.

obtained by the Russian company. They assumed safely that the Russian Government had decided not to renew the company's monopoly. It was of course unknown at the time that the Russian Government planned to sell their American Empire to the United States.

All steps the Jewish merchants were taking regarding Alaska and the new commercial enterprises created for the purpose in San Francisco were based only on the hopes they had to become the legal successors of the Russian American Fur Company, as such duly authorized by the Russian Government.

COMMERCIAL ORGANIZATION OF ALASKA BEFORE THE TERRITORY'S ACQUISITION AND ITS IMPORTANCE FOR THE FINAL LAND SALE

The situation at that time immediately before the expiration of the Russian company's privilege—is described by the man to whose help the Jewish merchant-pioneers of San Francisco applied to get in the diplomatic way the right of succession from the Russian Government. The man was the newly elected Senator Cornelius Cole, of California, a school-day friend of Seward, the U.S. Secretary of State. Cole in the time that followed never tried to aggrandize his historic role, particularly did he "not claim to have been the originator of the proposition for the transfer, his opinion being that the first suggestion of sale came from St. Petersburg through Baron Stoeckl."² This step of the Russian Ambassador came as a surprise for Cole, who was thinking of the interest of his Jewish clients. Cole describes as follows, 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

² *Overland Monthly*, v. 68, 1916, p. 255-261, Cornelius Cole, a *California Pioneer*, by Rockwell D. Hunt, p. 259.

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 St. George, and of 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 among whom was the Collector of the Port 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."⁴ Every merchandizing company willing to take over the privilege, had to cope with a twofold demand upon its capital. In the first place, payment to the Russian Government for the privilege and moreover for the assets of the Russian American Fur Company in Alaska, which consisted in the equipment of the trading posts and in various facilities placed at the disposal of the population of Russian America, the maintenance of which the Russian company had assumed. Running annual payments to the Russian Governments had to be made. A company originally called "Hutchinson, Kohl and Co." intended to provide the necessary capital.

Its assets were Jewish, just like those of the finally established "Alaska Company" into which the Hutchinson Company was transformed later after the acquisition of the Alaskan territory. "The moneyed strength and enterprise was Hebrew" say Gentile contemporaries with certitude.⁵

The persons initially occupied with these preparations do not figure in the first way the firm was named, but they are partly known to be Jews. We must assume, that Louis Sloss, Louis Gerstle and others preferred, when carrying on negotiations with the Russian Government, not to mention the Jewish partners in the name of the firm. Cole soon met with a surprise in his activities. He felt sure that through his diplomatic intervention in St. Petersburg he could be sure of getting the coveted privilege for his San Francisco group. But in

⁴ Memoirs of Cornelius Cole . . . New York, 1908, p. 281-282.

⁵ Overland Monthly, N. S., v. 25, 1895, Nesfield, p. 413.

reality the Russian Government had held on to the secret plan of selling the whole territory to America and now made it public. Cole was able to transmit to Seward the valuable information on Russian America given him by his Jewish clients, and the senator later declared that this information made it much easier for the Secretary of State to come to his decision to buy the territory.⁶

The situation had, however, changed considerably for the San Francisco group. They were faced with competition by all other interested American groups, and had to calculate with a real race to Alaska, as soon as the U.S. flag was raised over the territory. Naturally the taking over of the assets of the Russian American Fur Company to be liquidated in American Alaska was only a part of the problem to be overcome. The most important task was to negotiate with the U.S. Government the succession into the rights reserved for the ultimate concessionaire. We are referring to the exclusive seal hunting privilege in the Pribylow Islands, the most valuable asset of the monopoly of the Russian company. It was to be expected that this right would be conferred by way of public offers. The San Francisco group—Cole's clients—made all preparations for the new situation. At the same time, other special interest groups entered the field for the exploitation of the various economic possibilities of the Alaska territory. These groups, at least as far as fur hunting and fur trade were concerned, stood in sharp economic contrast to the San Francisco "First Alaska Capitalists" created under the aegis of Jewish merchants.

THE CIRCLES INTERESTED IN ALASKA

The acquisition of such a vast new territory was bound to awaken a desire to get a clear picture of the market to be opened there. Many merchants felt, that they should not miss a chance and among them were many who had their own ideas on what to buy and what to sell there. The newspapermen saw a chance too in the requirements to be expected by the new interest groups and a special journal of commerce, the "Alaska Herald" appeared in March 1868, only six months after the new territory was taken over. This journal was published in San Francisco by a refugee from Czarist Russia, Agapius Honcharenko,

⁶ Cole, p. 281 ff.

edited half in Russian and half in English. 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 the Russian Jews, appeared in the paper. The veiled purpose was to give the paper a Russian-American atmosphere, complimentary at the same time to the 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.

The paper's success in gathering in its columns all the advertisements of the interested business circles was so great, that these columns give a good survey about them. Not all advertisers were Californian firms. Washington territory, which already took over the role of California in supplying victuals to Russian America at the time (1841), when the Russians had sold Fort Ross to Sutter figured largely in the columns.⁷ Also other newspapers, particularly those appearing in Alaska territory carried various advertisements and offers of merchandise of Jewish traders from Washington territory. Jewish businessmen from British Columbia also put in their advertisements. The main part of the advertisements in the "Alaska Herald" came from Jewish firms in San Francisco, fur merchants in the first place, but traders in all kinds of other goods were well represented. Editorial notes lured prospective San Francisco customers, one of these notes read: "Notice—To advertisers. . . . to secure the lucrative trade of fifty thousand of our Russian speaking population, whose supplies should be drawn from this metropolis . . ."⁸, thus showing the true task this commercial gazette had set for itself. In the very first number of the new trade journal we find represented the Senior Firm of San Francisco fur trade: "H. Liebes & Co., manufacturers of Ladies Fur and Buggy Robes, 129 Montgomery Street, . . . San Francisco."⁹ Later, the nature of the firm's business is more precisely described in another ad:

⁷ Alaska Herald, vol. 3, 1870, No. 60, p. 3.

⁸ Alaska Herald, v. 1, 1868/69, No. 13, p. 4.

⁹ Alaska Herald, v. 1, 1868/69, No. 1, p. 6.

"Pacific Fur Emporium. Highest cash price paid for all kinds of Raw Furs and Skins. H. Liebes & Co., manufacturers of Furs, 129 Montgomery Street, San Francisco. All kinds of ladies furs on hand. Furs shipped by every steamer."¹⁰ The firm was counting on buying raw furs from Alaska, directly from Alaskan pelt hunters, who had not yet started business relations with other houses in San Francisco. Such "independent" hunters were considered to be relatively numerous and competition for trade connections with them started. This is shown by an advertisement put in by another firm in the same copy of the paper, written in the Russian language, reading in translation: "A. Wassermann & Co., 425 Sacramento Street, San Francisco. Liberal cash advances made upon all consignments to our house in London."¹¹ Still another fur trading house, "Furs . . . J. C. Mayer . . ." advertises on another page.¹²

The businessmen also think of already existing or future requirements of the new American population of Alaska which could be taken care of from San Francisco. "Jacob Schreiber & Co. . . Manufacturers . . . Bedding . . . Furniture S.F."¹³, will see to it, that everybody in the new territory can easily lay his head to rest. The first firm to think of stationer needs is: "Philipp Freund. A. Falk. Freund & Co. Dealers in blank books, paper. S.F."¹⁴ An antiquarian book store wants to warm up the spiritual side of men in the North: "Choynski's Antiquarian Book Store . . . 146 Second Street, San Francisco."¹⁵ Such advertisements repeat themselves in later copies, and then other branches of business turn up, e.g.: "Lazard Freres, Dry Goods Importers"¹⁶, and for smokers: "Weil & Co., Importers of Cigars and Tobacco"¹⁷, thus showing two new lines in which a large number of Jewish merchants in San Francisco were concentrated. The "Alaska Herald" serves its advertisers also with editorial recommendations: "Messrs. H. Liebes & Co., respectable fur dealers in this city, are young merchants and endeavour to deal with honesty and good faith. Give

¹⁰ Alaska Herald, v. 1, 1868/69, No. 10, p. 1.

¹¹ Alaska Herald, v. 1, 1868/69, No. 10, p. 1.

¹² Alaska Herald, v. 1, 1868/69, No. 10, p. 4.

¹³ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 1, p. 7.

¹⁴ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 1, p. 7.

¹⁵ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 1, p. 7.

¹⁶ Alaska Herald, v. 2, 1869/70, No. 29.

¹⁷ Alaska Herald, v. 2, 1869/70, No. 29.

them a call on your arrival."¹⁸ The paper also serves up pep stories in the interest of its customers, showing psychological insight for good publicity: "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 received from Alaska three Black Foxes which are exhibited in front of their store."¹⁹ With the development of a local Alaskan press the circles of advertisers outside the territory grow largely. The "Alaska Times" of Sitka shows already ads of Jewish firms in San Francisco²⁰, the firm Baerwald calling itself in the "Alaska Herald" by the name of "Alaska Fur Store. Henry Myers, Tobias Baerwald . . ."²¹ appears in the "Alaska Times" under the style: "T. Baerwald, Sitka Fur Store . . . San Francisco."²² There we also find advertisements from Victoria B. C.²³—the paper stresses its non-political character —: "As we will be the only journal published in Alaska, politics will find no place in our columns."²⁴ For this reason there is no doubt that the paper enjoyed the reputation of a genuine Alaskan commercial gazette, in which the interests of local businessmen joined hands with those of outside advertisers, and new customers therefore were constantly added. In later copies we find a whole row of ads from Washington Territory, e.g.: "Rothschild & Co., Port Townsend, W.T., Importers and Wholesale Dealers in Dry Goods, Clothing, Wines and Liquors, Groceries, etc . . ." and: "Waterman & Katz, Port Townsend, W.T. Wholesale and Retail Dealers in Groceries, Liquors, Dry Goods, Clothing, Boots and Shoes . . ."²⁵ also: "Kentucky Store: Port Townsend. Rothschild & Co., Dry Goods, Clothing."²⁶ A few months later appears an advertisement from another spot in the same territory: "Lichtner & Rosenthal, Clothing, Dry Goods . . . Olympia, W.T. . . ."²⁷ All these advertisers were sure that their announcements would be directly spread among the inhabitants of the new territory,

¹⁸ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 12, p. 2.

¹⁹ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 14, p. 1.

²⁰ The Alaska Times, 23.IV.1869, p. 2.

²¹ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 11, p. 4.

²² The Alaska Times, 30.IV.1869, p. 2.

²³ The Alaska Times, 30.IV.1869, p. 3.

²⁴ The Alaska Times, 23.IV.1869, p. 3.

²⁵ The Alaska Times, 27.XI.1869, p. 2.

²⁶ The Alaska Times, 4.XII.1869, p. 2.

²⁷ The Alaska Times, 10.III.1870, p. 3.

without having recourse to the doubtful success of Alaskan news, items deriving from a paper published in San Francisco. It is not all certain how many copies of the "Alaska Herald" ever reached Alaska. Anyway, its publisher complains about lack of punctuality and even fraud in the delivery of the papers he was sending there. It is hard to say, whether his assertion, that his paper was persecuted by conservative Alaskan elements because of its libertarian, enlightening tendency, may be believed. It also seems hard to decide which part of the so-called "original correspondence material" in his gazette was fiction or fact, and to reduce to plain truth all the legends the publisher produces about his connections in former Russian-America. Nevertheless a certain genuine atmosphere seems to emerge from his Alaska correspondence, which was taken seriously by the important newspapers of San Francisco, so that—as far as it expresses feelings towards Jewish firms in Alaska—we may take for granted that these really were the feelings of a part of the Russian population there. The "Alaska Herald" occasionally also brings news about the activities of interested groups, advertisers or non-advertisers. In Copy No. 2 we find this general description: "Among the many enterprising houses engaged in trade with our new territory of Alaska are those of the Hudson's Bay Co., Messrs. Kinhead & Southern, Wassermann & Co., Martin, and Sloss. The development of Alaska may be said to have fairly begun and under good auspices."²⁸ Names of merchants, who later kept up their important position in Alaskan trade continue to appear. But also single events are presented, like: "We are informed that Messrs. Wassermann & Co. have purchased the clipper ship "Winged Arrow" for the Sitka Trade, and that other vessels will soon be ready to follow her."²⁹ In the beginning such items appeared without partisan coloring and only at a later time did the paper take up its stand on questions of Alaskan commerce, thus giving important clues on the whole development of the situation. Items in the paper directed to its Russian readers are held in general terms. In the gazette's Russian pages, Honcharenko publishes a translation of the constitution of the United States and declares, that his principal purpose is to get his Russian readers acquainted with America's democratic

²⁸ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 2.

²⁹ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 2.

institutions. He explains that purpose as follows: "When the natives find out that fish and furs are worth more than they have been accustomed to receive for them, the dictation of the autocrats of trade will cease, and before long they may write 'Ichabod' over the doors of their factories, for suspicion, once roused will not be put to sleep again. The resources of Alaska will then first begin to be developed by the active energies of free men."³⁰ The sincerity of such propaganda among the Russian natives explaining under the title "The Russian Policy in America" the enormous contrast between the two regimes, makes us consider in quite another light the news items concerning European Jews appearing in the paper. As an example we may cite a telegram from Adolphe Cremieux from Paris published in the paper, where full details about the violations and limitations of the rights of Rumanian Jews were given. This is an instance of earnest work to enlighten the Russian population about the situation of the Jews in Europe, and the publisher makes it quite clear that he wants such work valued as a public service.³¹

THE RUSH TO ALASKA

Where large new profits were expected, the merchants naturally kept secret—in the first year of the occupation of the territory—all their preparations for commercial transactions with the Arctic region. Everybody tried to be first in exploiting the business chances selected and was afraid of being matched by competitors. Arrival and departure of ships from and to the North were kept quiet, and hunting expeditions of the fur merchants were camouflaged as fishing excursions. The "Alaska Herald" pointed out this state of things.³² These facts also appeared in the San Francisco general press and it was stressed, that already in the winter of 1867 shipments of furs from Alaska were silently landed in San Francisco. It was said in the papers that it could not be otherwise: "The secretiveness of the fur traders is rather significant for the success."³³

³⁰ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 10, t. VI. 1868, p. 2.

³¹ Alaska Herald, v. 1, 9.V. 1868, p. 2.

³² Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 10, p. 3.

³³ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 11, p. 3, quoted from "Alta California" and "Bulletin."

The situation excluded an open stampede, like in the later Alaska gold rush. The northward movement in the first year of the occupation of Alaska represents however, one of the biggest transformations that ever occurred in these regions. Though everybody tried to keep his secrets, nobody who was interested in the business could be prevented from participating. Contemporary observers remark, that Jewish merchants took a large part in the Alaska rush. We are citing one item the author of which seems to think that their venture was not so profitable: "As before stated, Sitka itself yielded but a limited quantity of furs; hence the mistake made last year (1867) by numerous Jews and other traders, who thought they could buy to advantage here. By latest accounts, you could almost as cheaply obtain furs in San Francisco, not one of the places in the world most celebrated for moderate charges, and in consequence the steamers were well filled by distinguished Israelitish traders on their return trips to California."³⁴ This market analysis of a writer and not a business expert does, however, not seem to be too correct. The facts are, that all these merchants now knew the new business area by their own observations and had built up their connections there. These San Francisco fur traders never thought of staying in the region themselves and entrusted their transactions to agents and trading posts. But some new fur firms were established there after due reconnoitering. Thus, David Shirpser left Victoria, B.C. on May 29, 1867, for Sitka.³⁵ He became one of the respected merchants of Sitka figuring in the city directory of Victoria as president of Congregation Emanu-El.³⁶ His firm played quite a role in the events we shall later describe. In the same year, the foundation was laid for a group of resident Jewish merchants in Alaska, which took over, as usual, the task of providing for the requirements of the native population in general stores, and at the same time purchased the local products in view of commercial exploitation. Prejudiced travellers do not regard them in a very friendly manner: "Had Eugene Sue ever visited these shores, he would not have described the stunted birch-trees sighing in the wind, while the Wandering Jew and his partner in misfortune conversed with each other across Bering Strait

³⁴ Frederic Whymper, *Travel and Adventure in the Territory of Alaska* . . . New York, 1869, p. 104.

³⁵ David Rome, *The first two years* . . . Montreal, 1942.

³⁶ *Victoria Directory*, 1863, p. 137.

. . . Wandering Jews are not unknown here, by the way, but they appear to have degenerated from the ancient stock and have a sharp eye for business, buying from the greasy Tuski their stores of whale-bone, oil and walrus tusks, and making them happy with tobacco, powder and ball, guns, knives, kettles, and the vilest of alcoholic concoctions."³⁷

Another description reads like a tale from an early Californian mining camp, where all the shanty stores are called "Jewish shops." "Eight months in Sitka . . . Adding to the general incongruity of arrangement, there was commenced, when the fact of the cession became public a sandwiching in *ad libitum* of rough board shanties for Jewish traffic, numerous flaring saloons, and other structures for congruous purposes."³⁸

Like in California these Jewish Alaska-Pioneers rose from modest beginnings to the establishment of firmly founded business houses and created new branches of industry in the Territory.

THE RESIDENT JEWISH MERCHANTS IN ALASKA

The lowly beginnings of the Jewish traders, who settled in Alaska, do not show them in a favorable light, as compared with the achievements of Jewish businessmen in other parts of the United States. An eye-witness, an agent of one of the biggest Jewish fur firms in the world, who came to Alaska on a business trip, gives a characteristic description. He regards the Jewish merchants in Sitka as part of a class of traders participating in all the vices of that class: "The second class, of a much lower standing comprised the traders, keepers of billard 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 duties, and were liable to prosecution at any moment had the administration of the law not been so lax."³⁹ The eye-witness in question observes the non-Jewish merchants at Protestant church service and describes them as "the few non-Jewish traders."⁴⁰

³⁷ Wilhelm H. Dall, *Alaska and Its Resources*, Boston, 1870, p. 511.

³⁸ *The Overland Monthly*, San Francisco, vol. 2, 1869, p. 179.

³⁹ *A Journey to Alaska in the Year 1868: Being a Diary of the Late Emil Teichman*, 1925, p. 189.

⁴⁰ *A Journey*: . . . Emil Teichman . . . p. 201.

He sees even underworld characters among the Jews, such as a criminal gambler, "named Rapaport, a German Polish Jew by origin . . . recognized scapegoat of the whole settlement"⁴¹ and a money lender and procurer of women."⁴² But apart from the dark picture he paints in some respects, one observer by chance discovers true Jewish values among the new group of Jewish traders in the territory, and thus provides help in getting a genuine idea of the situation: "On that same 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 trade. Up to then I had never heard a sound there in the evenings, but on that night my 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 services and reading their prayers under the leadership of the oldest man present who took the place of the 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 emotional exercises. I myself should scarcely have expected it in Sitka among a community which was engaged in such disreputable occupations."⁴³ This is a manifestation of common endeavor within the Jewish group in the American Arctic region, a group of people who understand the striving of their inner selves much better than the outside world ever could see or understand. 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 into the empty spaces of the yet unpopulated areas of the American continent. Some communities were lucky, some had less chances, this depended on the success of Jewish merchant-pioneering in new regions, but again and again we see the efforts to achieve historical unity in building up Jewish communal life.

Reports by travelers, newspaper items and their own commercial advertisements principally in the Alaska press supply a good number of news material on the activities of the Jewish merchants of Alaska, and their permanent stores of goods. However, neither the reports of

⁴¹ *A Journey*: . . . Emil Teichman . . . p. 234.

⁴² *A Journey*: . . . Emil Teichman . . . p. 189.

⁴³ *A Journey*: . . . Emil Teichman . . . p. 199.

the American Russian Fur Company, nor the travel books of the period, when the company had the privilege on fur hunting from the Russian Government, show any items about even one single resident trader, whose origin could be with certainty described as Jewish. But there is one travel book describing a settlement on Afognac Island in American Alaska, a settlement of 50-60 houses, where the author seems to have found such a man: "At the time of my visit in June 1869, there were but two Europeans upon the island; one a Polish Jew employed at Sitka 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, most of whom I had seen at Kodiak, each of whom uttered a formula bidding me welcome to the island and offering rest and refreshment."⁴⁴ In the first copy of the oldest Alaska newspaper "The Sitka Times" of September 19, 1868, we find already a number of news items referring to local Jewish merchants. One item concerns the establishment of the Jewish trader, mentioned by us before, who moved from Victoria to Alaska: "D. Shirpser. Groceries and Provisions, canned fruit and shelfgoods of all kinds."⁴⁵ This was not a complete general store, but the full organization with all supplies, of such a store in the American style, was not far off. For this purpose, the firm had to establish a series of trading posts around a central store. The new location became the most important center in the Aleutian Islands and the firm's advertisement of April 23, 1869, reads: "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."⁴⁶ The business carried on at the time in Sitka was disbanded soon after: "Dissolution of Co-partnership. The co-partnership heretofore existing between the undersigned under the firm name of David 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."⁴⁷

⁴⁴ E. L. Huggins, *Kodiak and Afognac Life, 1868-1870* (Western Folklore, v. VI, 1947, p. 119-142) p. 136.

⁴⁵ The Sitka Times, vol. 1, No. 1, 19.IX.1868, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Alaska Times, 23.IV.1869, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Alaska Times, 16.VII.1869, p. 2.

Another business was installed at Sitka, with a view to the future plans of the firm for the fur trade: "D. Shirpser, Auctioneer & Commission Merchant, Sitka, A.T."⁴⁸ Both business establishments issue together an advertisement, before disbanding the company in Sitka: "Shirpser & Co., Kodiak and Sitka, Alaska Territory. Every description of merchandise, provisions, groceries, dry goods, crockery, boots and shoes, etc. . . ."⁴⁹ In 1874 the firm attained already a high measure of prosperity, as shown by the following news item: "David Shirpser & Co., having its central depot at Kodiak. This firm has fourteen trading stations in Alaska, owns a number of vessels, and employs a large number of men."⁵⁰ At the end of 1873, the firm suffered a great personal loss: "Mr. H. Shirpser, junior member of the house of Shirpser & Co., died in San Francisco. . . . Deceased was a pioneer Alaskan merchant, had long been engaged in an extensive business centering at Kodiak at which place he has also been Postmaster for some years."⁵¹ Herman Shirpser was the brother of David Shirpser and associated with the latter already in Victoria, B.C. since 1861.⁵² The first copy of an Alaskan newspaper shows also news about other "Firsters" with information on the movement of goods and the furnishing of stores: "The '*Nor Wester*' also cleared on the same date, under the command of Brendell with goods from the well known firm of Storer and Company, intending to trade with the Indians at Chil Cat."⁵³ Here is the description of a store in an advertisement: "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."⁵⁴ An item about one of the special stores for tobacco established all over America with its characteristic store of merchandise reads: "J. M. Manasse 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,"⁵⁵ and the first meat-market: "Isac Bergman, the butcher in Sitka was never known to keep an empty

⁴⁸ *Alaska Times*, 6.VIII.1869, p. 3.

⁴⁹ *Alaska Herald*, v. 1, No. 21, p. 8.

⁵⁰ *Alaska Herald*, 13.VII.1874, p. 1.

⁵¹ *Alaska Herald*, 13.XII.1873, p. 1.

⁵² David Rome, *The First Two Years . . . Montreal*, 1942, p. 118.

⁵³ *The Sitka Times*, vol. 1, No. 1, p. 3.

⁵⁴ *The Sitka Times*, vol. 1, No. 1, p. 1.

⁵⁵ *The Sitka Times*, vol. 1, No. 1, p. 4.

market. He has always when he can find it, lots of fresh meat on hand . . . No. 38 Market St., Sitka. . . ."⁵⁶ Now an advertisement for the sale of liquor: "L. Caplan Saloon. Has the following brands: butter whiskeys, French Martel, Old Tom and all lucious 'Cocktails'."⁵⁷ Caplan sold his saloon soon afterwards. On October 31, we find a notice on its sale and on a list of debts pertaining to the store, in the same paper.⁵⁸ Next we find an interesting item on the efforts to brew Lager-beer for Alaska Territory, efforts which led to a permanent industry. The basic idea here, as all over America, was to replace the "straight drink" by a less intoxicating medium, an idea which the brewers considered meritorious. It was a tendency to minimize the generally known dangerous influence of alcohol upon the native population and thus to do away with corruption and exploitation: "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 lagerbeer establishments to buck against."⁵⁹ The foregoing is taken from the first copy of the paper. Subsequent copies repeat the same advertisements. On October 24, 1868 we see a personal notice. Isaac Bergman, a butcher, had been chosen Alderman of Sitka in the first election in the territory and was invited to make his first speech at a City Council meeting.⁶⁰

The direct successor of the modestly titled "Sitka Times," the newspaper "Alaska Times" supplies a much more complete picture of the life of the Jewish merchants, their business activities and their achievements. The firms mentioned beforehand are shown in developing their business and a number of new Jewish firms in the territory appear. The newspaper also shows in the advertisements of Jewish trading houses of San Francisco, that the interest of the business world of the rest of the U.S. in the newspaper had been awakened. The traders of San Francisco used the medium of the paper in order to reach the Alaskan market.⁶¹ In the same paper we find the first advertisement of a Jewish firm, which for several years was fought against as a symbol of

⁵⁶ The Sitka Times, vol. 1, No. 1, p. 1.

⁵⁷ The Sitka Times, vol. 1, No. 1, p. 4.

⁵⁸ The Sitka Times, vol. 1, 31.X.1868.

⁵⁹ The Sitka Times, vol. 1, No. 1, p. 4.

⁶⁰ The Sitka Times, vol. 1, No. 6, 24.X.1868, p. 4.

⁶¹ The Alaska Times, 23.IV.1869, p. 2.

monopolistic capitalism, at a time when the firm had not yet obtained the "monopoly" or exclusive rights to seal-fishing at St. Paul and St. George Islands, a monopoly extended by the U. S. Government. "Hutchinson, Kohl & Co.' keep always on hand at their Store, Kodiak, a large assortment of Dry Goods, Groceries, Hardware, Clothing, Boots and Shoes, Glass and Crockery Ware, also Dealers in all kinds of *Furs*. Sam'l Sussman, General Manager, Kodiak, A.T."⁶² The goods mentioned were—as stressed by the enemies of the firm repeatedly—destinated principally for bartering skins from the natives. In this way, the merchandise served in strengthening the *natural* monopoly, which the firm had obtained by purchasing the trading posts and installations of the Russian-American Company. The newspaper demonstrates again the progress of the resident Jewish traders in all lines: "*Samuel Storer*, offers for sale at 29 Lincoln Street, a general assortment of Crockery, Glass Ware, Hard Ware, Tin Ware, Dry Goods, Clothing, Hats and Caps, Boots and Shoes, Groceries, Stationery, Wall Paper, Perfumery, Fancy Goods, Medicines, Ship Chandlery, Paints, Glass, etc. Wines, Liquors, Cigars, and Tobacco, Wholesale and Retail, Sitka, A. T."⁶³

This shows the complete assortment of goods of a general store of the period, but special stores were able to maintain their business. Here is the advertisement of a special store: "*J. M. Manasse*, Sitka. A.T. always keeps on hand the best brands of Cigars and Tobacco. . . ." The former liquor saloon has kept its name, but the new owner presents himself: "Caplan & Co.'s Saloon. 30 Lincoln St., A.T., Arthur Bart. . . ."⁶⁴ The beer brewery has become a permanent establishment with its firm name, it has come to stay: " '*Sitka Brewery*.' Choice Lager and Bottled Beer always on hand. *A. Cohen*, Manager."⁶⁵ In the subsequent copies of the paper the commercial news of Alaska became more and more specialized and are combined with editorial items on particular firms, characteristic for the press of the epoch. A retrospective view of history shows how all these means are co-ordinated with the development of each firm and the activities of the businessmen are reflected in the news of the day. Naturally, the profits of the traders

⁶² The Alaska Times, 23.IV.1869, p. 3.

⁶³ The Alaska Times, 23.IV.1869, p. 3.

⁶⁴ The Alaska Times, 23.IV.1869, p. 4.

⁶⁵ The Alaska Times, 23.IV.1869, p. 3.

⁶⁶ The Alaska Times, 23.IV.1869, p. 4.

allowed them to pay well for news to their advantage voiced in the paper. "*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."⁶⁷ Such trading expeditions into the Arctic regions were important, both, for friends and for competitors in the business world of the North. However, news on importation of goods were of no lesser importance. "New Goods. The Steamer Active brought up a large supply of all kinds of assorted goods, for Samuel Storer, Kinkead and Louthan, J. M. Manassa, Theodore Haltern. These gentlemen have an excellent assortment of all sorts of 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 without its reward. The merchants deserve the patronage as well as the praise of our citizens generally."⁶⁸ Never to forget the advertiser was good editorial policy in the Arctic as all over America, and such reports were good advertising copy like everywhere else. We see now real fixed new names for the firms, such as: "City Meat Market, . . . Isaac Bergman."⁶⁹ Now this butcher, who formerly made an offer of meat, whenever he could find some, proudly proclaims that his purchases of merchandise have been put upon a solid basis: "City Market. . . . Arrangements have been perfected for the receipt by every steamer from British Columbia, Washington Territory, Oregon, and California, of the finest stall fed cattle and the choicest kinds of vegetables which these countries produce . . . Isaac Bergmann."⁷⁰ Then we get very precise information on the brewery business, given—one item after another—by the paper: "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, the indefatigable and hard working manager. He deserves success and is receiving it. Go on brew-

⁶⁷ The Alaska Times, 30.IV.1869, p. 3.

⁶⁸ The Alaska Times, 13.VIII.1869, p. 3.

⁶⁹ The Alaska Times, 30.IV.1869, p. 1.

⁷⁰ The Alaska Times, 11.XII.1869, p. 3.

ing your best, Mr. Cohen, you're sure to prosper. Go ahead."⁷¹ While thus we can visualize the expansion of the brewery trade in the Arctic regions, we get also an imposing picture of the growth of output of beer in the Far North: "*The Sitka Brewery*' The Sitka Brewery is becoming worthy of much interest. There can be no better beer made at San Francisco elsewhere than at this establishment. A brew of 500 gallons was made in one day this week by Mr. Cohen. The demand is very large and the enterprising manager is determined to have a good supply always on hand. Mr. Cohen is a thorough business-man and is always ready to fill orders."⁷² Fantastic as it may seem, the alcoholic industry in the Far North dares to compete with that of San Francisco. More details are given on the brewing activities of the Jewish businessmen in Alaska: "Sitka Brewery.—Mr. M. Rudolph, who owns one brewery here already, bought out Benjamin Levy's interest in the above brewery on the first of this month."⁷³ A few months later, a new brewery is established. "New Brewery. Mr. A. Cohn, has got all his machinery so as to enable him to start another brewery, which he proposes to have running in a few days. . . ."⁷⁴ The new brewery of A. Cohn soon starts business shortly after this announcement.⁷⁵ Old and new names of Jewish merchants appear in this founders' period in the new territory and the transfer of business establishments is a very usual procedure. We find a new item: "Sam Goldstein's Store. Opp. the Greek Church on Lincoln Street, Sitka, A. T. Sam has a fine lot of Dry Goods, Groceries, Crockery Ware, Fancy Goods, etc. suitable for the Indian trade, always on hand."⁷⁶ The principal business which the American Jews brought to its peak develops, the special clothing store. Taking into consideration, that the real weight of ready-made clothing output only made itself felt after the American civil war, we must appreciate the high ability with which independent clothing business was carried on in Alaska only a few years later. At that time, however, it was operated in conjunction with dry goods, e.g.: "Central Store. Dry Goods . . . Clothing . . .

⁷¹ The Alaska Times, 21.V.1869, p. 3.

⁷² The Alaska Times, 22.VII.1869, p. 3.

⁷³ The Alaska Times, 12.II.1870, p. 3.

⁷⁴ The Alaska Times, 4.VI.1870, p. 2.

⁷⁵ The Alaska Times, 2.VII.1870.

⁷⁶ The Alaska Times, 30.IV.1869, p. 1.

Theodor Haltern."⁷⁷ Even tobacco sales were carried on simultaneously: "New Variety Store, Lincoln Street . . . *J. Frohman* . . . Dry Goods . . . Clothing . . . Cigars and Tobacco. . . "⁷⁸

Here is an item giving information that the personal association between L. Caplan, Anton Bart and Alex Kourutoff has been disbanded. The date is August 27, 1869. "L. Caplan, will pay all debts and collect all bills that may be owing or due to said firm"⁷⁹ and, at the beginning of 1870, we find already "Caplan's Billiard Salon. . . "⁸⁰ Quick decisions were taken at that epoch. New people arrived at the territory, and the persons with experience in the region, swiftly charged from one investment or establishment to another. Benjamin Levy, known as part owner of the Sitka Brewery, tries his skill on a larger task: "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."⁸¹ The good wishes seem to have been well placed, because the next item on Mr. Levy reads: "At Kadiac we learn that Ben Levi is doing a heavy business."⁸² Combined with commercial news, we see social and personal items, which supply information on the life and times of the Jewish traders in Alaska. Many such merchants started there in the fur trade, but learned soon that the natives had acquired some of their trading skills: "The fur trade. . . The natives have learned many 'Yankee tricks' and resort to all of them to effect a trade, patching coloring, sewing parts of skins together, and we know of one instance, where a native sold some mink to a trader, and in half an hour, stole them and sold again to the same trader at an advanced price. . . "⁸³ We find items on robberies: "The store of Messrs. Hutchinson & Co. in Kadiac was robbed. Also the store belonging to Mr. Shirpser."⁸⁴ In a list of persons pertaining to a

⁷⁷ The Alaska Times, 8.I.1870, p. 1.

⁷⁸ The Alaska Times, 11.VI.1870, p. 2.

⁷⁹ The Alaska Times, 27.VIII.1869, p. 3.

⁸⁰ The Alaska Times, 8.I.1870, p. 1.

⁸¹ The Alaska Times, 12.II.1870, p. 3.

⁸² Alaska Herald, v. 2, 1869/70, No. 39, p. 2.

⁸³ The Alaska Times, 7, V corr. 14.V.1869, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Alaska Herald, v. 2, 1869/70, No. 39, p. 6.

complimentary address we find quite a number of Jewish traders. The item reads: "Complimentary address to Ex-Collector Ketchum, Sitka, Alaska Territory, May 10th, 1869," and the list indicates also: "Samuel Storer, Wm. Phillipson, Isaac Bergman, Henry Freide, Albert Hahn, D. Shirpser & Co., A. Levy, J. M. Manasse, Caplan & Co., S. Shirpser, Henry Heizman, Sam Goldstein."⁸⁵ We find two personal news items on Samuel Storer. In November 1869, he functioned as "Acting Mayor" of Sitka.⁸⁶ On September 19, 1870, it is reported that he is disbanding his business in Sitka: "Closing out business . . . Samuel Storer . . . pioneer merchants of this city . . . Wherever he goes, he has our best wishes."⁸⁷ Occasionally an item on marriages with natives is published: "William Philipson has married a 'Native Lass' of Sitka."⁸⁸ Such marriages are reported as "curiosities" in other items: "A white trader has married a half-breed at Sitka. Shylock's disciple got one hundred and fifty three pounds of flesh on the occasion."⁸⁹ This commentary shows that feelings were very mixed on the subject of the mingling of races in the new American Territory.

JEWISH LIFE IN ALASKA IN THE FIRST YEARS OF THE AMERICAN OCCUPATION

News on awakening Jewish life in the Far North appear all over the American-Jewish press, and it is shown how the first pioneers soon after settling were looking for means to carry on their religious activities in accordance with their Jewish feelings. It seems quite natural, that the first contact with the Jewish community was established with San Francisco. As early as 1869 we read in a San Francisco Jewish paper an item reporting the result of an interview with a resident of Alaska: "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 Marzoths sent them from this city, and kept a Zeider. They are well off, and intend shortly to organize a

⁸⁵ The Alaska Times, 7.V. corr., 14.V.1869, p. 2.

⁸⁶ The Alaska Times, 13.XI.1869, p. 3.

⁸⁷ The Alaska Times, 19.IX.1870, p. 2.

⁸⁸ The Alaska Times, 7.V. corr. 14.V.1869, p. 3.

⁸⁹ Alaska Herald, v. 3, 1870/71, No. 75, p. 4.

congregation."⁹⁰ But the transformation of private associations for religious purposes into a legally established Jewish community organization was still a long way off. This transformation into a legal organization could not advance much, because its proponents were hampered by the fact, that the extent of Jewish immigration into Alaska did not correspond at all to the expectations of the first pioneers. This was the time of hope; the Jews of Alaska kept up their contacts with Jewish community life elsewhere and were greatly interested in all Jewish affairs in the rest of America. We find a proof of this state of mind in the "San Francisco Hebrew," which published a letter from a subscriber in Sitka who protests in very sharp words against the Conference of Rabbis at Philadelphia of November 4, 1869: "Let them know that there are Jews close to the North Pole, where Franklin 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."⁹¹ This pathetic way of speaking corresponded to the feelings of these pioneers in Alaska, to their longing for deeper Jewish values, still enhanced by the distance from the centers of Jewish life in America. This pioneer-feeling is also reflected in the Jewish Press on the Atlantic coast, where Jewry was proud of its Arctic pioneers and its connections with them. Together with the slow awakening of general interest for Alaska in America, came the special concern of American Jews for their settlers there, the details of whose existence they had yet to learn fully. The Jewish press of the Atlantic had subscribers in the Far North and its readers get news about them: "There are Jews prospering in Alaska Territory. Last week we received a remittance from our first iStka 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 their co-religionists and the *Messenger* will therefore be a welcome visitor."⁹² The fate of an Alaskan pioneer is described in his obituary, mentioning also his role in the legendary raising of the American flag over Alaska: "*Benjamin Levi*, one of the pioneers who went to Alaska in 1867 to take possession of that terri-

⁹⁰ The Hebrew, San Francisco, 30.IV.1869, p. 1.

⁹¹ The Hebrew, San Francisco, 7.I.1870, p. 4.

⁹² Jewish Messenger, v. 28, 1870, No. 20, p. 4.

tory in the name of the United States, died in San Francisco on the 9th. ult. Mr. Levi, on the 9th of October, 1867, when the territory was formally transferred to the United States, hauled down the Russian flag, and in its stead raised the Stars and Stripes. After that Mr. Levi went to Fort Wrangle with his family, engaged in business, and remained there until recently, when he went to San Francisco in search of medical health."⁹³ However, information items given to American Jews by the Jewish Press about Alaska remained pretty scarce also in the second decade of the occupation. The exaggerated optimism, with which certain Alaska promoters and the American press supplied with material by them, spoke about the capacity of absorption of the new territory was cruelly reflected also in the Jewish Press of the epoch. It must not be forgotten, that this happened at a time when the biggest immigration problem—that of the Jews from Eastern Europe—gave American Jewry a lot to think about. An item in the "American Israelite" (1882) during the high tide of Eastern-Jewish immigration shows a good deal of wrong information: "San Francisco. . . . It was a great mistake that the entire Russian refugees were not bundled off to Alaska. They could live in Russian atmosphere—subsist on fish, which is in great abundance, and cultivate either the potatoe or corn, or both. American Russia would be the place for them. They could worship among the Russians, as they were never permitted to do in their own country."⁹⁴ This at a time when even the keenest flight of fantasy of the promoters could imagine nothing but schemes for mining and industry, and when American immigration was purely based upon the needs of manpower created by the industrialization of the country. Moreover a large number of Russian Jews had then come to California, which at this period had already been a largely agricultural state, and were unable to effect their occupational transition to agriculture.

"JEWISH MONOPOLIES" IN ALASKA

An atmosphere of monopoly still reigned in Alaska from the Russian time, when the territory's most valuable economic asset, seal-fishing—was a privilege of the American Russian Fur Company,

⁹³ American Israelite, vol. 29, 1882, p. 295.

⁹⁴ American Israelite, vol. 29, 1882, p. 111.

which practically dominated all economic activities in Russian-America. The company also provided the Russian colonies with victuals, and besides supplying furs to fur dealers, some of them Jews, sold ice to the San Francisco Ice Company, a Jewish-owned business. All America considered the privilege of the Company as a natural product of Russian absolutism and whenever—at later times—it was suspected that the authorities would regulate the exploitation of the natural wealth of the newly acquired Alaska territory, the Russian population there as well as the American traders were disagreeably reminded of the former Czarist system. The monopoly on seal-fishing of the Russian company was, however, only one side of the exploitation process. The practical sales side of the seal-furs business was handled exclusively by another firm, which had acquired long-term contractual rights. The latter firm, dealing thus—in a privileged way—with the sale of processed Russian seal, was owned by Jews. J. M. Oppenheim & Co., London's biggest fur-house, with branches in America, got this key position by being sole proprietors of a coloring process for seal-furs, which the firm kept strictly secret. Thus, we see two privileges, one—legal—on seal hunting, and the other—technical—on coloring seal-furs, producing the final commercial values.

In 1871, the technical secret of the London firm was ended by the invention of a Californian: "The Fur Seal. . . . A new process for coloring the fur. Letters patent were received yesterday by Messrs. E. Neustadter and Louis Falkenau, for the invention of the latter for coloring the fur of the seal. . . . It remained for a Californian to make the discovery. . . . By the new process the hide can be split and the fur colored for less than one dollar per skin, a saving of over six dollars. The process has been patented and will undoubtedly be a source of wealth to the proprietors. There is every probability that there will soon be an establishment in this city devoted to the coloring of seal-skins by the new process."⁸⁵ At that time, a lease had already decided the fate of seal-fishing in American Alaska in its principal domain, the Pribilof Islands, St. Paul and St. George. In the first two years of the Alaska occupation a new situation arose, however, under circumstances which seemed clearly to indicate that the end of the efforts of

⁸⁵ Morning Call, San Francisco, July 18, 1871 (quoted in Agapius Honcharenko's *Alaska Scrapbook* in the Bancroft Library, Berkeley, Calif.).

the commercial competitors in the fur-trade would be again a new monopoly. The tension around this development was produced principally by the fact, that the interested parties, while expecting a monopoly, created by their own acts the conditions for it. This situation reminds one of the great industrial and railroad monopolies all over America—like the rebates and freight privileges—which later were the object of so many complaints. Already in the beginning of the secret race to Alaska of commerce, it was shown, that shipping space, though there was enough of it, was rented—for reasons of competition—only with great difficulties, or at a price representing a multiple of ordinary business rates, whenever trips to Alaska were involved. This state of things did not last very long, but its character of unethical competition was strongly resented by those who considered having lost their chances. Two Jewish firms in California already hated by trade circles as pretenders to new monopolies, were accused of monopolizing all shipping to Alaska even before full commercial progress, and of withholding shipping space from the other business houses. The two firms were Hutchinson, Kohl & Co., fur dealers, later styled The Alaska Commercial Company, and the San Francisco Ice Company.⁹⁶ The Ice Company had already in former years made a large scale arrangement with the Russian Government, allegedly paying \$500,000 for the concession of monopolistic rights. "The Ice Company five years ago paid a bonus to the Russian Government of 500,000 dollars for certain restricted rights."⁹⁷ The company carried on its business from Kadiac Island and its commercial rule was fought against the time of the American occupation as a *Jewish Domain*, when the battle against monopoly began. It was said that the company exploited the native population of Alaska by shabby wages, supplies of bad food, and exactions of all kinds: "A Benevolent Society.—On the 18th December last, the *Chronicle* requested us to be more explicit in regard to the charges which we made against the 'Benevolent' Ice Company, and if any rascality really existed to make a full exposure. A letter we received recently from the island of Kadiac contains the following information on this point:—'The Benevolent Ice Company, which consists entirely of Jews, have built

⁹⁶ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 12, p. 5.

⁹⁷ Alaska Herald, v. 1, 1868/69, No. 17, p. 2.

a Church to humbug the natives. They employ in the winter season about two hundred Aleuts, and pay them forty cents per day, many times the Aleuts have rebelled and demanded one dollar per day. The superintendent, a Fin, by the name of Henry Bloskvich, agreed to pay them this amount, but never did so. The poor natives were cheated all the time by this Company. If the natives want goods or clothing the Benevolent Company charges them three times the value of the goods, which is taken from their wages. . . ."⁹⁸ In this case the publisher could base his writings on original correspondence received from persons living on the island and this proves that the propaganda carried on there was an anti-Jewish one along the lines peculiar to revolutionary and anti-Semitic action in Russia. These and other economic circumstances led to efforts to create another competitive firm of ice dealers, announced as follows: "New Ice Company . . . In Lesnoy, an Island near Kadiac."⁹⁹ We can see that the advertisement and the article against the old Ice Company published at the same time were part of an organized plan of the competition, founded on assistance by the press bought by the new firm. This is another instance of the complicated propaganda scheme carried on against the Jewish firm, which was the owner of the greatest monopoly in Alaska, seal-fishing, thus dominating the whole fur trade. As soon as it was clear, that the sale of Alaska would force the Russian company to sell its assets in Arctic America, the combination of Jewish merchants in San Francisco which foresaw that development because the Russian company could no longer uphold its privilege, was taken under heavy fire by its competitors. These circles incited public opinion of the native Russian population against the Jewish group. When finally the Jewish merchants succeeded in effecting the purchase at favorable conditions—\$60,000 cash and \$95,000 debentures—a big publicity stunt was made of it.¹⁰⁰ For the Russian company itself the transaction represented however, an important capital gain, for they had neglected to exploit the gigantic potential values which were at their disposal when in power. Even the counter-propagandists of the Jewish "trust" had to concede as much: "The American Consul at Moscow writes to

⁹⁸ *Alaska Herald*, v. 1, No. 26, 1.II.1869, p. 5.

⁹⁹ *Alaska Herald*, v. 1, No. 26, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ *Alaska Herald*, v. 1, 1868/69, No. 17, p. 2.

the State Department that the stock of the Russian American Co. which before cession of Alaska sold at 80 in the Moscow market (par value 150) is now selling at 330."¹⁰¹ As soon as the Jewish group had bought the assets of the Russian company, the antagonists of the Jews used for their ever growing propaganda systematically all the social tensions in American Alaska, on a broad anti-Jewish background. They hoped thereby to prevent at least the worst that could happen from their point of view, meaning the turning over to the Jews of the expected lease on seal-fishing. But their ideas seemed muddled, for they implied the interpretation of the exploitation of seal-fishing on both islands as a sort of "free for all" adventure. Nature had developed on these two small islands in the American Arctic a curious "protective measure," for it was certain that reckless exploitation of the seal stock created by nature would annihilate it. If hunting was to be done by people, who were not experts at it, the seal herds could be frightened so much that the animals could easily be shocked into fleeing to the Russian side of the Bering Sea. Therefore the American Government was forced from the very beginning to declare these islands as a natural reservation for seal herds, and could allow their exploitation only under severe regulations as to the number, age, and sex of the animals to be hunted. Such an exploitation was only possible by giving a lease on seal fishing exclusively to a firm accepting such severe conditions. The group of competitors were not at all animated by a common idea, and incapable of setting up a workable counter-group. This is demonstrated by the name of their loosely organized and fragmentary co-operative group to combat the lease, as "The Alaska Traders Protective Association."¹⁰² If they had been a real going outfit they should have called themselves at least a "Developing Company."

Naturally, the group of competitors had—under these circumstances—mostly to rely upon stressing the character of their fight as that against a Jewish firm, and again and again they tag the proprietors of the firm as Jews, mention their Jewish names and try to explain their "typically Jewish commercial activities" to the broad masses of the public. The modest beginnings of the Jewish firm and

¹⁰¹ *Alaska Herald*, v. 1, 1868/69, No. 10, p. 2.

¹⁰² *Alaska Herald*, 15.V.1869, p. 2.

its transformation and development in all its phases are made the theme of hostile descriptions. Public interest in the firm was awakened when they took over the assets of the Russian Company and the newspapers published relative items and details: "... a San Francisco firm, composed of six respectable merchants (Messrs. Hutchinson, Kohl & Co.) having purchased the assets and rights of the American Russian Commercial Company" has kept the manager of the Russian company, Prince Maxutoff, in its services.¹⁰³ In the polemics, when mentioning the firm, it is always referred to "6 respectable merchants." But the firm's enemies circulated a sketch on the history of the firm under the title "Who are Hutchinson and Co.?" Therein, it is said that on August 21, 1867, a group of commercial adventurers came from the East, to San Francisco including Gen. Rousseau, Messrs. Hutchinson, Hirsch, Dinkelspiel, Howser, Dodge and Col. Fast. Messrs. Rousseau, Hirsch and Dodge sailed for Sitka on September 20. The first co-partnership was formed by Hutchinson and Hirsch, later Sloss and Gerstle joined as "partners who were to furnish the sinews of trade," namely, the capital. Later Hirsch, Dinkelspiel and Howser left and a new organization emerged: "Taking in as partners Mr. Wassermann and Mr. Boscovich supposed to be experts in the business. Hence originated the present firm of Hutchinson, Kohl & Co." Kohl, in a later stage of the process of foundation, brought in a ship, for which he was granted a part in the firm.¹⁰⁴ Business history records published in the Pacific region up to this time only referred to bankruptcies or other outstanding events, but the interest in Alaska itself translated itself into a special interest in the doings of the gentlemen in question. "Hutchinson, Kohl & Co."—in expectation of obtaining the lease on seal-fishing in St. Paul and St. George Islands—was transformed on September 16, 1868 into the "Alaska Commercial Company" in order to make the necessary preparations. The by-laws of the said company by way of polemical action, were printed in 1871 when the lease had already been given.¹⁰⁵ These by-laws show that the President and the General Secretary of the company were merely representative figures, the President being expressly in charge of negotiations with the Amer-

¹⁰³ San Francisco Bulletin, 9.VI.1868, quoted in Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 11, p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 17, 15.IX.1868, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ Alaska Herald, v. 4, No. 80, p. 2

ican Government. The real management of the concern remained in the hands of the five trustees. These were Louis Sloss, Louis Gerstle, A. Wasserman, William Kohl and Leopold Boscovitz and their Jewish names were used by their antagonists for their attacks.—Polemic "reflections" on the rise of Mr. Wasserman relate that he was originally an importer of cats to combat the rat-plague at San Francisco.¹⁰⁶ In another item it is referred thereto in a way to make people rather look down upon him. "A few years ago A. Wassermann speculated in the feline race, which was rather a lucrative business for he made quite a fortune."¹⁰⁷ Wasserman is reproached with not knowing his place in the world. "... at the present time he is importer of Russian tea. He stated that he could not drink the tea purchased from American stores, because they had no good tea in America. The Russo-American Company had plenty of good tea from Russia at the time of the cession of territory to the United States. We suppose that some of this tea has been imported from that place."¹⁰⁸ This refers more to efforts to deprive the Russian population of the American Arctic of a stimulant they could not miss, than to get-rich-quick methods. This accusation against one of the partners of the firm personally, is only an overture to the collective accusations against the firm as a whole, that they take out everything valuable from Alaska, plunder the natives, and export to San Francisco for sale a lot of precious material from the former Russian company which the native population sorely needed. Another report gives a demagogic picture of the way to power of the former importer of cats: "Now he has sent the barque *Menschikoff* on an expedition beyond the Behring straits to discover the winter abode of the fur seals also to establish hunting winter quarters in the Arctic regions. He should be proclaimed Emperor of the Icy Regions."¹⁰⁹ These insinuations were calculated to agitate the native population, which was liable to easily absorb anti-Semitic poison based on their "education" under the old Russian regime. The native population, but recently liberated from Czarism, was reminded all the time by the agitators, openly or secretly, that the Jew in America can be just the same kind of absolute ruler that the Czar used to be. In their fighting

¹⁰⁶ Alaska Herald, v. 2, 15.IV.1869, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Alaska Herald, vol. II, 1.V.1869, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ Alaska Herald, vol. II, 15.IV.1869, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Alaska Herald, vol. II, IV.1869, p. 1.

propaganda against the Jewish firm, the enemies of the Jews compared the old tyranny with the new one, and striking up an attitude of "holy conviction" they stated that the native population would prefer the return of the Czar, the Little Father, to the domination of the Jews. They even talk of prayers for the Czar's return: "Curses turned to Prayer—The Russians of Alaska heretofore cursed the tyranny of the Russian Fur Company. They now pray for the return of the power and oppression of that Company as a relief from the iron heel of American monopolies, which have succeeded it."¹¹⁰ Such general propaganda stunts are succeeded by description of the reign of terror which the Jewish firm had brought on the native population all over the occupied region, by taking over the assets of the former Russian company: "Latest from Sitka . . . It is the general impression here that Hutchinson & Co. have purchased this entire country, villages, stations, ports and all; while this august firm exults over the delusion and declares that it will realize on the first voyage sufficient to reimburse them for the purchase from the material they carry off."¹¹¹ The shameful deeds of the firm are described. One page in a newspaper describes under the title "Transfer of Kadiac to Hutchinson and Co." the contents of a letter from Kadiac about the exploitation of the population by the Jewish firm, and its sufferings caused by the new situation.¹¹² In the following copy of the paper appears an appeal of the population of Kadiac to public opinion, mentioning that the firm had raised by 100% the price of flour on the island.¹¹³ Another report states that Mr. Boscovitz, as manager of the firm in Alaska, had cheated a Russian captain, employed by him as a translator, of his fee.¹¹⁴ The accusations also say that the main criminal activity of the firm consists in hampering free trade in the American territory in co-operation with government agents bribed by the firm, and that other merchants suffer heavily by the chicanery they experience when dealing with the said government agents: "Hutchinson, Kohl & Co. imagine that all Russian America is their empire. A few weeks ago Mr. Faulkner the agent of this firm in Alaska, also Deputy Collector

¹¹⁰ Alaska Herald, vol. 1, No. 15, p. 1.

¹¹¹ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 15, p. 2.

¹¹² Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 15, 15.VIII.1868, p. 5.

¹¹³ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 16, p. 5.

¹¹⁴ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 15, p. 2.

at Sitka, seized the schooner *Alaska* and *Lewis Perry* not for the violation of law, but to prevent these traders, from doing business in their Empire."¹¹⁵ Another newspaper item states: "It is very strange that the Americans do not understand the policy of Hutchinson, Kohl & Co., who for one year by bribery everywhere have been laughing at them."¹¹⁶ The enemies of the firm state that the insolence of their executives went as far as making open threats against other merchants, who tried to compete with the firm's trade: "Mr. Boscovich at the time of the seizure of the *Ann Eliza* at Sitka, said that he would do harm all vessels intending to trade with the Aleutian islands. He also says that the United States officers will aid him in this persecution. O rascal Boscovich, and United States officers in Alaska."¹¹⁷ Another partner of the firm is accused of personally participating in these unjustifiable activities: "A. Wassermann receives his guests like Abraham received the three angels, but unfortunately for A. Wassermann, his angels are United States officers with some influence."¹¹⁸ Two accusations are made against the firm, which must be considered particularly serious in view of the general situation. If these accusations would have been based on facts, they would have implied a great danger to life and property of the whole population of the occupied territory. They consist in the alleged sale by the firm of firearms and of exorbitant quantities of whiskey to the native population. Most dangerous incidents in Alaska arose, when persons who drank too much alcohol, started on shooting sprees. The accusers said that the Jewish dealers sold shooting-irons to the natives without a permit from the authorities.¹¹⁹ Another sin they were accused of was one against the first commandment of collective security, by a planned drive to transform the population into drunkards. "Mr. Boscovich causes all the trouble in Alaska. He has flooded the country with whiskey and his rascality prevents all other traders from doing business in Alaska."¹²⁰ The propagandists gave lectures to the population of the new territory on how the local government officers in Alaska were but the long arm of a corruption,

¹¹⁵ *Alaska Herald*, vol. 2, I.V.1869, p. 1.

¹¹⁶ *Alaska Herald*, v. 2, 15.V.1869, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ *Alaska Herald*, v. 2, 1.IV.1869, p. 2.

¹¹⁸ *Alaska Herald*, vol. 2, 15.IV.1869, p. 2.

¹¹⁹ *Alaska Herald*, v. 2, No. 32, p. 2.

¹²⁰ *Alaska Herald*, v. 2, 15.V.1869, p. 1.

which started in the Central Government at Washington. This corruption, they said, was made possible by the representative system, enabling politics and business to exact a common pressure upon the government bureaus. For these tricks you had to know the art of lobbying, they stated, and the Jewish firm was allegedly a past master in that art: "Special Brevities.—One half of the firm Hutchinson & Co. are Republicans and the other Democrats. The business was beforehand arranged thus: If the Democrats carry the country, A. Wassermann would go to Washington and promote the interests of the firm and of its monopoly; if the Republicans win, as is now the case, their interests will be defended by Louis Sloss. It is a very good thing for a firm to have partners belonging to both parties. It is certainly shrewd business."¹²¹

When it became more and more clear that the lease for seal-fishing on both islands was getting to be a reality soon, the propagandists sharpened their journalistic weapons and painted a dark picture of the combination of big business and politics. The final accusation was a very open one: "Official Corruption in the United States. . . . On the 13th of April, barely one year ago Governor Haight, gave official information to Secretary Seward 'that certain parties living in New London Ct., had obtained exclusive hunting and fishing privileges in Alaska.' In another passage of the official note the Governor said that 'a San Francisco firm, composed of six respectable merchants (Hutchinson, Kohl & Co.) having purchased the assets and rights of the Russo American Company and succeeded to its relations to the Russian government ought, he considered, to be entitled to preference if any exclusive privileges were to be granted, but otherwise, they (the respectable six aforesaid) did not seek them.' This was the inception of the monopoly scheme which has now assumed such large proportions. Shortly after this, a member of the firm referred to, Mr. Louis Schloss, was elected one of the President electors on the Grant and Colfax ticket, and it is fair to presume that his influence is not adverse to monopoly. How can we question this when we know that this firm is a parcel of adventurous speculators who, by extortion and intimidation are amassing for themselves the most colossal fortunes at the expense of the happiness of the blood we had almost said, of the

¹²¹ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 22, p. 2.

unhappy natives of Alaska? It is reported, and from creditable sources, that Major General Halleck is interested in the upholding of this monopoly. General Jeff C. Davis, commanding the Department of Alaska, is an active tool in the hands of the scheming firm of 'Six Respectable Merchants'."¹²²

But only when the spiritual requirements of the native population of Alaska are referred to, the opponents of the Jewish firms put real zest into their tirades. They accuse the Jewish manager of the Russian company's successors of being a usurper of spiritual activities, who took over the Russian church together with its ministers, made them drunk and induced them to threaten with hell's punishment all those who would not sell to the Jewish firm. The said manager, they declare, sells even church bells, from the possessions of the former Russian company, at the lowest prices. This is how the propagandists describe the use by the Jewish firm of the Russian priests in their pay: "Humbugging the Natives.—In Kadiac it was customary in the old regime for the priest to collect the members of an expedition about to start on the hunt for beavers, and bless them with prayers, and the sprinkling of holy water, and such incantations to secure success to the voyage. The Superintendent of Hutchinson & Co., the successors of the Russian Company, who, by the way, is one of the children of Israel, has succeeded to the sacred office and now in the most approved style calls in a priest to assist him and for the moderate sum of \$20—in gold coin, this functionary goes through the mimicry of images, blessings etc. to the infinite satisfaction of the deluded people, who believe it is a prelude to the success of their expedition. Of course, this ceremony is followed by feasting, the material for which is provided by the Company, who doubtless do not fail to make the proper charge for the articles consumed."¹²³ Here are some comments on the use of the installation from Russian churches simply turned over to the new owners by the liquidators of the former Russian company: "An Alaskan Pilate.—Prince Maxutoff, among the rest of his speculations, sold a quantity of pictures of Jesus Christ and of the saints, to a company of Jewish traders. He deserves the name, if not of

¹²² *Alaska Herald*, v. 2, 15.IV.1869, p. 5.

¹²³ *Alaska Herald*, v. 1, No. 15, 15.VIII.1868, p. 5.

Pontius Pilate, at least of an *Alaskan Pilate*.¹²⁴ The demagogues who called a Russian prince an "Alaskan Pilate" did not hesitate to call an American politician a "Judas" who sold the native Russian-Orthodox population of Alaska to the Jews. They gave this title to Senator Cole, post factum, at a time when the Jewish firm had already obtained the lease from the American government. They hoped, however, that their polemic arguments would induce public opinion to exert pressure for a cancellation of the lease: "A Judas slaughtered.—Senator Cornelius Cole, the *Judas of Alaska*, and author of the *infamous peonage bill* by which the Aleuts of St. Paul and St. George Islands, Alaska, are *held in slavery for twenty years* by the Alaska Commercial Company, was politically slaughtered in the Republican Caucus of the California legislature on the 13th inst. . . ."¹²⁵

The accused firm defended itself by statements in the Californian press declaring that the firm had never transgressed the rules of permitted competition and added public statements by witnesses testifying to its good treatment of the native population. The "Alaska Herald" published a collective survey of the firm's statements.¹²⁶ However, the old adage "Semper Aliquid Haerere" could be applied to this case too, for it was very hard to fight in this way accusations against a firm, readily believed just because Jews were involved.

THE FUR TRADE IN ALASKA AND THE GRANT OF THE LEASE

A clear picture of the activities of the fur firms in 1867, when the sale of the territory to the U. S. was on the way and the Russian company itself was looking forward to its liquidation is very difficult to give, because the parties concerned had good reason to hide their doings. The principal party acting in such a way was the Russian company, which had an interest not to let the light of publicity shine on its dealings, for they had contractual engagements to supply the seal-furs to J. M. Oppenheim & Co., London, at a stipulated price, while they preferred to sell them "black marker" style to new buyers. Oppenheim & Co. tried everything they could to prove the loss they

¹²⁴ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 15, 15.VIII.1868, p. 5.

¹²⁵ Alaska Herald, v. 4, 15.XII.1871, p. 3.

¹²⁶ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 27, p. 5.

¹²⁷ Emil Teichmann, p. 5.

suffered by this breach of contract, and for this purpose went so far as sending their New York representative to Alaska in 1867 to take the necessary steps.¹²⁷ In the meantime great damage had been done, without a possibility of uncovering the Russian company's unfair dealings. One transaction could be uncovered, however, among the sales to American merchants by the company while Alaska was still Russian. It was a sale of 16,000 seal-furs to Mr. Boscovitz at 40 cents a piece. Boscovitz shipped the furs to Victoria, B. C. and re-sold the furs at 82 to 83 cents a piece.¹²⁸ We find further plausible suppositions on the "veiled liquidation" of the fur stocks of the Russian company in the interested press: "Sea Seals.—The *Winged Arrow* lately from Alaska, brought to this city \$60,000 worth of skins of the Sea Seals. Considering that the catch of Sea seals begins only in April, we are at a loss to understand how in the limited space of three months this immense quantity could be secured. The mystery is, however, fully explained by a letter, which we received, in which it states, that Prince Maxutoff sold the furs, which have been collected in previous years and which were paid for by the Russian Stockholders and were really their property."¹²⁹ J. M. Oppenheim & Co. considered this an act of embezzlement against them, as the prospective owners of the returns of the company's seal trade. These and similar mysteries in Alaskan fur trade, appearing also in other instances, contributed to make the period between the American purchase of the territory and the final decision of the U. S. Government on the fate of seal fishing on both islands of the Pribylow group a very exciting one. Propaganda activities went on at full blast. Commercial competition in the general fur trade of Alaska, not just in seal-fur sales, was extremely sharp. Native fur hunters, acting as independents, always disposed of a stock of skins, principally from smaller furbearing animals and also of a certain quantity of seal furs, the product of hunting outside the two islands. Every firm naturally tried to establish, in its initial business dealings with the natives, the basic stock for a permanent business. But nobody could really compete with Hutchinson & Kohl, who had the advantage of having taken over from the Russian company a set

¹²⁸ Bancroft, Hubert H., *History of the Pacific States of North America*, San Francisco, 1886, p. 636.

¹²⁹ *Alaska Herald*, v. 1, No. 15, 15.VIII.1868, p. 2.

of trading posts completely installed with living quarters and magazines. All the other merchants were depressed by the preponderant position of Hutchinson & Co., and felt that their chances for the future were threatened. It was clear to them that the Hutchinson people not only held the trading monopoly but that their power was very hard to compete with. Here is an item from the "Alaska Herald": "Letter from Kadiac. . . . The Russian American Fur Company (Hutchinson & Co.) are trying their best to keep us, as well as others away. . . . They are particularly opposed to me as I am buying furs. . . . H. Shirpser."¹³⁰ This news item refers to one particular Jewish competitor, but many other Jewish fur-firms of San Francisco were in the same situation. Thus, we can easily see why the "Alaska Traders Protective Association" was organized to combat the granting of the lease to Hutchinson & Co. We are citing a number of names of signers of a Memorandum dated January 28, 1869, to the U. S. Congress protesting against the granting of the lease: "H. Cohen, A. S. Rosenbaum, R. H. Waterman, B. H. Freeman, J. Shirpser, F. H. Rosenbaum, H. Liebes & Co., S. Martin, Wellman, Peck and Co."¹³¹ Referring to the said document, the "Alaska Herald" adds: "Many citizens refused to affix their names to this memorial to Congress on account of their friendship with Hutchinson & Co."¹³² This hostile attitude of such a great number of commercial competitors was still more intensified by the fact, that Hutchinson & Co. had been able to acquire enormous stocks of furs at a very cheap rate, 30% below the general value given to the furs at the time when they bought them. When the full extent of these purchases of furs became clear to the competition, the furs were worth still more. One of the competitors offered publicly to pay 30% more, instead of 30% less, of the general value of every kind of fur he could obtain.¹³³

All these combined hostilities could, however, not change the fact that there was no really organized common group of competitors. Nobody could really oppose the newly organized Alaska Commercial Company with its capital of \$2,000,000 or act as an, even relatively,

¹³⁰ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 16, p. 5.

¹³¹ Alaska Herald, v. 2, I.VI.1869, p. 2 and: A. History of the Wrongs of Alaska . . . San Francisco, 1875, p. 15, 16.

¹³² Alaska Herald, v. 2, I.VI.1869, p. 2.

¹³³ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 12, p. 2.

equal candidate for the lease with the American Government. The publicity material of the "Alaska Traders Protective Association" was purely literary and negative: "We are unwilling that the whole trade of this vast region should be monopolized by one firm, whose only claim to public consideration is the large fortune it has made in that Territory. . . ."¹³⁴ Sometimes their propaganda items consisted in pure tirades of the press in the pay of the Traders Association against the "monopoly firm": "At present, it is hard for the monopolists to fight against us and the party we labor for, which is opposed to all exclusive privileges, and favors equal rights to all traders."¹³⁵ The American Government was faced with the serious consideration whether any other firm or a combination of business houses could offer the same financial security as the Alaska Commercial Company in connection with granting of a lease. That company, it must not be forgotten, was already in possession of the 50 trading posts of the former Russian company and of all its installations on the seal islands. Anybody who was not in possession of these installations would risk to see the seal-fishing deteriorate or even have to face the flight of the herds to the Russian side of the Bering Sea. There was no doubt how the fight for the lease between the later styled "Anti-Monopoly Association of the Pacific Coast" and the Alaska Commercial Co. would end. The fight did not last too long, but while it was on, everything possible was done to create an atmosphere of hostility against the wealth of the "monopolists": "Louis Sloss sailed for Washington with a million of dollars to justify his monopoly. O almighty dollar."¹³⁶ When later, it was stated in the Memorandum we mentioned before, that the "monopolists" had acquired all their wealth only in Alaska, nobody believed that statement, for it was generally known that particularly Louis Sloss had built up his fortune in California, where he came as early as 1849.¹³⁷ The publisher of the "Alaska Herald" writes repeatedly, that the "monopolists" tried to bribe him, but that he would not betray, for any price, the native population of Alaska.¹³⁸ Especially Louis

¹³⁴ Alaska Herald, v. 2, 1.VI.1869, p. 2.

¹³⁵ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 23, p. 2.

¹³⁶ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 20, 11.XI.1868, p. 5.

¹³⁷ Biographical Sketch of Louis Sloss, Ex-President of the Society of California Pioneers, in the "California Historical Society," San Francisco.

¹³⁸ Alaska Herald, v. 1, No. 16, p. 1, No. 17, 15.IX.1868, p. 2.

Sloss is described as the money potentate of the "monopolists" and all his steps are carefully watched like those of a real ruler: "A Great Man's Exile.—Louis Sloss (says the Washington correspondent of the *Times*) leaves here disgusted with the shortsighted views of Congressmen generally, and says he can keep his money so long as the Government can keep those Alaska Islands. He leaves New York on the 18th of May next, with his family in the steamer *Westphalia*, on a visit to his old home, Stuttgart, in the kingdom of Wuerttemberg, where he will remain until Congress meets in December."¹³⁸ "Louis Sloss is a very rich man—worth \$600,000. Relying on his vast amount of cash he ought surely to have accomplished everything he desired. Ere he has discovered his mistake."¹³⁹ Among the recriminations raised against the "monopolists" before the granting of the lease, we find the accusation that Hutchinson, Kohl & Co. (later the Alaskan Commercial Co.) made difficulties in shipping for their competitors through government clerks bribed by them, and that the firm later placed the government employees formerly in their pay, in lucrative positions with the firm itself. The foes of the "monopolists" hoped also to make a great impression by alleging, that the privileged firm had acquired the exclusive power to privately supply the Army: "Nearly every sutler attached to the United States military posts in Alaska is an agent or employee of said firm. The six citizens permitted by law to remain upon the Island of St. Paul and St. George's, United States military reservation, are all connected with this firm."¹⁴⁰ The commercial honesty of Messrs. Hutchinson, Kohl & Boscovitz was under attack by David Shirpser who brought up an incident in the spring of 1868, and charged the said three businessmen with embezzling a shipment of expensive furs, which Shirpser had entrusted to them for transportation from Sitka to Victoria. This incident was, however—as usual in commercial life—settled by an arrangement. The propaganda thereupon accused the firm of having obtained the arrangement surreptitiously by raking advantage of the ignorance of the business partner Shirpser.¹⁴¹ When later the lease was granted, in public treatment of the offers, accusations appeared again of irregularities and

¹³⁸ *Alaska Herald*, v. 2, No. 33, p. 2.

¹⁴⁰ From "Memorial to President Grant, June 15, 1868" in "A History of the Wrongs of Alaska" . . . San Francisco, 1875.

¹⁴¹ A History of the Wrongs in Alaska . . . p. 9-10.

obtaining of unfair advantages by bribery of government officials. Louis Goldstone, the representative of the opposing group who made his offer on their behalf, asserted that his offer was the highest. Although Goldstone withdrew his statement on December 15,¹⁴² the propagandists continued to repeat his allegations as long as they could hope that their fight for the cancellation of the lease in Congress had any chance of success.¹⁴³ They considered that the high worth of the seal-fishing lease, estimated at more than half of the whole Alaskan fur values, justified the trouble of keeping up the struggle.¹⁴⁴ We can visualize the confusion in the camp of the foes of the firm, when we read, almost all in one go, completely contradictory assertions regarding the seal-catch of the Alaska Commercial Co. Thus, the "Alaska Herald" writes on December 1, 1870: "The steamer *Constantine* lately arrived from St. Paul and St. George islands with a small cargo of fur seals, of selected quality. . . . The same Company now so careful of killing only male fur seals has, during the last three years slaughtered everything regardless of age and sex. Thus, the company was merely a speculator and determined to make all it could, out of the fur seal fisheries. Now, with a lease for twenty years, they are careful enough to protect their own property. . . ."¹⁴⁵ One year later, in a spurt of renewed propaganda against the lease, it is asserted that the firm was pursuing quite a contrary policy. The same newspaper under the heading "The Alaska Swindle" states that the firm had 150,000 seals killed during the previous year, but paid to the American Treasury only a part of the amount due.¹⁴⁶ The fight still went on for quite a long time under the slogan "swindle in the payment of license fees." The propagandists collected material among the native population of Alaska. Thus, we find an "inspired" petition of the population of both islands against the slavery imposed upon them, and a complaint of a group of 9 independent fur hunters calling themselves the "Russian Free Traders" declaring that the resident agent of Hutchinson, Kohl & Co., Mr. Fred Smith, had sent "five men, Jews and Canadian Frenchmen" to a certain Jacob Komaroff in order to rob the latter of

¹⁴² Bancroft, p. 647.

¹⁴³ A History of the Wrongs in Alaska, p. 23.

¹⁴⁴ A History of the Wrongs in Alaska, p. 12.

¹⁴⁵ Alaska Herald, v. 3, No. 70, 1.XII.1870, p. 1.

¹⁴⁶ Alaska Herald, v. 4, No. 96, 1.I.1872, p. 2.

furs deposited with him, belonging to the "Free Traders."¹⁴⁷ At that time, the assets of Hutchinson & Co. had been also formally transferred to the Alaska Commercial Company, but in the Far North the old firm name was still used in referring to the "monopolists." Only a year after having obtained the American seal-lease, the firm succeeded in buying a privilege from the Russian Government to the rights for 20 years on the seal-catch in the Behring, Copper and Robber Islands. They paid 5000 Rubles annually and 2 Rubles for every pelt.¹⁴⁸ The editorial policy of the "Alaska Herald" gradually proceeded to include announcements of other fur hunting grounds than those of the two islands and also boosting of the commercial advantages of the trade with Siberia. But the usefulness of the first publisher for the foes of the "monopolists" had come to an end and he sold his paper. The new owner of the "Alaska Herald"—at a price—made his peace with the Alaska Commercial Co. Thus, we read already under date of December 27, 1873: "The Alaska Commercial Company.—. . . We cordially wish the Company ample returns in the future for their vast outlays, and take the occasion, at the close of the year, to return our warmest thanks to the Secretary, *Mr. E. Neumann*, as well as his assistants in the office, for many courtesies shown us in our efforts to procure Alaskan facts and figures for publication."¹⁴⁹ The foes of the firm concentrated their continued attacks on these "ample returns" and asserted that the Alaska Co. had in this one year made a profit from its deals in the territory amounting to \$1,300,000.¹⁵⁰ They added that from this sum \$1,000,000 derived from the seal trade on the two islands. After 1875, all former publications hostile to the firm, were collected in a special polemical pamphlet called "The History of the Wrongs in Alaska" published with the intention to induce the U. S. Congress to make use of its right to cancel the lease. But nothing came of it, and the secret game of commercial participations and combinations continued. The whole "anti-monopolists" movement collapsed. Some time later all reproaches made against the firm by its

¹⁴⁷ Honcharenko Scrapbook, v. 2, p. 2, Translated from Russian. St. Michael Redoubt, Kwichpak River, Alaska, 30. July 1872.

¹⁴⁸ *Alaska Herald*, v. 4, No. 79, 20.IV.1871, p. 2. Biographical Sketch of Louis Sloss . . . in *California Hist. Soc.*, p. 81.

¹⁴⁹ *Alaska Herald*, 27.XII.1873, p. 5.

¹⁵⁰ *History of the Wrongs in Alaska* . . . p. 33.

opponents during the struggle, were publicly retracted. It was discovered, that a special "ghost writer" had composed the hostile articles for the "Alaska Herald."¹⁵¹ In a final word on this period an article written in 1895, comprising a retrospective view on the Alaska Commercial Company, stated: "The firm amassed wealth and the members became the veritable Astors of the Pacific Coast."¹⁵²

THE JEWISH MERCHANTS IN ALASKA UNTIL THE END OF THE SEVENTIES

All questions concerning the principal objects of the economic development of Alaska, seal-fishing and fur-trade, had now been decided and the general interest in the Far Northern territory began to slacken. The big immigration to Alaska, which many had hoped to witness, failed to realize. The interested circles on the Pacific Slope, who had hoped to see a human stream of about thirty million people in the expected immigration movement, were bitterly disappointed. Thus, the expectations of the Jewish community for a strong immigration wave to the Pacific Coast, later to be directed towards Alaska, were destroyed. However, until the time when the "old immigration" was over (1880) we still find new Jewish names in Alaska. In the second decade of American occupation (1870-1880) changes occurred in the location of Jewish merchants in Alaska. The importance of Sitka—the only harbor in Alaska at the time when the territory was acquired—declined and Jewish traders settled also in other places. Louis Sloss estimated the white population of Sitka in the year 1879 at only 15 men.¹⁵³ In the meantime, we find Jewish names in fur-trade in many widely scattered points: "From Unalaska,—C. Sheinefeldt remains in charge of C. J. Jansen's trading post. . . ."¹⁵⁴ Other names are found in the report on the first mining adventure in the new territory (1876): "Cassiar and Alaska Items.—. . . Of the Cassiar miners from Victoria the following have proceeded from Sitka to Wrangel in order to prepare for the icy journey up the Sitkine within a few weeks: Bill Levy, Tom Archdale, and the Rath Brothers. Mr. Levy says that

¹⁵¹ Bancroft, p. 649 ff.

¹⁵² *Overland Monthly*, v. 25, 1895, Nesbitt, *The Jew* . . . p. 413.

¹⁵³ *The Alaska Appeal*, San Francisco, No. 1, 6.III.1879, p. 1, *Alaska Statistics*.

¹⁵⁴ *Alaska Herald*, 12.XII.1874, p. 1.

although he will advise no one to go to the district where naught but inconvenience, hardship and hard labor are constant companions of the ambitious candidates for dusty favors, yet *he* has unbounded faith in the richness of the district, and he intends to mine there so long as he can make it pay. During the past season he made six dollars a day."¹⁵⁵ The conditions of life at Sitka in 1879 are reported as very bad, and the division of the population into classes, as described ten years earlier, is still confirmed by a visitor: "... Commander Beardslee, of the *Jamestown*, at Sitka in his report says: ... The whites of Sitka may be divided into three classes, namely, a very few respectable people worth saving; a large number of Russians and half-breeds; ... and a few unprincipled white men, mostly discharged soldiers or deserters who make what little money they can by any scheme, however nefarious. Belonging to all these classes are certain naturalized American merchants, mostly Jews, who sell liquor to the Indians and sailors, and at the same time that they thus incite danger and incapacitate their protectors, they call all the loudest for protection."¹⁵⁶ The inhabitants of the territory did not see their Jewish fellow-citizens in such an unfriendly light as the said visitor. A missionary speaks respectfully about "Mr. Cohen, a Jew who keeps a store here."¹⁵⁷ In Sitka, he was referred to as "Mr. Cohen, the brewer . . ." and the Jews are recognized in their role as pioneers. A local historian, speaking about the census of 1880, says: "(There) are many names well known in Alaska by the 'Old Times,' as: . . . A. Cohen, Miss P. Cohen, Miss H. Cohen, D. Ackerman, . . . L. Caplin, . . ."¹⁵⁸ The settledness of the Jewish merchants in Alaska at the end of this period can be seen from their commercial advertisements. In copies of the "Alaska Appeal" of April 6, 1879, we find the following ads: "Sam'l Goldstein. Dealers in Groceries, dry goods and hardware, Sitka, Alaska." and "Henry Thein, Groceries and general merchandise, Sitka, Alaska." Also "Provisions, Dry Goods and Hardware, Cheap for Cash. Lazar Caplan, Sitka, Alaska." In the same paper, we can read already advertisements from Wrangell: "Bernheim & Marx, dealers in General

¹⁵⁵ Alaska Herald, 20.II.1876, p. 4.

¹⁵⁶ The Alaska Appeal, v. 1, No. 10, 15.VIII.1879, p. 4.

¹⁵⁷ Rev. Sheldon Jackson, D.D. Alaska, and missions on the North Pacific Coast, New York (1880) p. 205.

¹⁵⁸ C. L. Andrews, The Story of Sitka (Seattle, 1922) p. 85.

merchandise, Wrangell, Alaska.—J. Frohman, Provisions and General Merchandise, Sold Cheap for Cash, Wrangell, Alaska.¹⁵⁹

In a later copy of the "Alaska Appeal" other ads can be found: "A. Cohn, Dealer in General Merchandise, Sitka, Alaska."¹⁶⁰ and "Benjamin Levy, Dealers in General Merchandise and Mining Goods, Wrangell, Alaska."¹⁶¹

The following advertisements in the same copy of the paper show also psychologically that the Jewish dealers in the new territory had developed a feeling of belongingness to their new home in Alaska territory. In the way of all American businessmen, even in the smallest places of the continent at that time, the announcements give a repertory of the whole body of merchants, and Jewish firms are named: "Alaska Business Directory. *Sitka*.—General Dealers: Th. Haltern, S. Goldstein, A. Cohen, H. Thein,—Restaurants. Mr. A. Cohen.—Billard Saloons: S. Goldstein *Wrangell* General Dealers: Bernheim & Marx, L. Caplan, Benj. Levy."¹⁶²

The settlement of merchants, under the circumstances they had to cope with—in that Alaska which to this day is not yet fully developed—may seem modest compared with other points. But let us not underestimate their achievements. The merchant-pioneering of the American Jews of the period was a great beginning, a sign of prosperous times to come, all over America including also the new Far Northern possessions of the United States.

¹⁵⁹ The Alaska Appeal, v. 1, No. 3, 6.IV.1879, p. 7.

¹⁶⁰ The Alaska Appeal, v. 1, No. 9, 30.VII.1879, p. 6.

¹⁶¹ The Alaska Appeal, v. 1, No. 9, 30.VII.1879, p. 7.

¹⁶² The Alaska Appeal, v. 1, No. 9, 30.VII.1879.

