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Alaska, the last frontier Voice of America, Broadcasted on September 17, 1967

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The Voice of America, Studio 1. The beginning is a preview of things to come. Rhett Turner. Turner discusses the environment of Alaska. These things include: boots, bears, Indians, gold, Eskimos. Alaska is the land where Eskimos have lived for thousands of years. The land lured thousands of prospectors during the gold rush. The beginning was 10,000 years ago when a tiny sliver of land stretched across the land, joining North America and Asia. At some time, people with Mongolian descent walked to Alaska and are the Arctic Eskimos and American Indian are descendants.

Tom Brower, from Point Barrow, talks about how the Natives worked together, hunted together, and fished together. They did this so there would be a food supply of one. The coastal people hunted the Bowhead whale mainly in the spring and fall. During the summer they would also hunt the walrus, seal, and caribou.

Another beginning came in 1741 when Danish sailor, Vitus Bering, exploring for Czar Peter the Great from Russia discovered the country. The Natives called it Alyeska, or "the great land". Bering didn't survive, but the sailors brought back 1,000 pelts from trade. When the sea otter pelts were delivered to a Russian-Chinese trading post in Asia, it wasn't long before Russian fur traders were swarming along the southern coast of Alaska.

In 1776, as the American colonies declared their independence, Captain James Cook of England explored Alaskan coastlines and rivers looking for the fabled Northwest Passage. By 1787, Russia had established the first permanent settlement at Kodiak, on an island south of the Alaska mainland. The Eskimos of the coast of the north continued hunting in the Arctic Ocean, catching whales. Native Aleut fished and trapped along the Aleutian Island chain that stretches out toward Asia. Inland, the Athabaskan Indian tribes lived and hunted in the arctic mountains and along the Yukon River. The richest of Indian civilizations, the Tlingits lived in the southeast coastal regions of Alaska and western Canada.

On an island jutting out into the Pacific lays Sitka, the historic capital of the Russian-American colony. This is where Alexander Baranov, the famous governor of the Russian-American Company, established his capital in 1799.

A woman, Romaine Hardcastle, begins talking. She says Baranov anticipated the need to move south from Kodiak in 1795, sent an expedition to reconnoiter the area around southeast Alaska and Sitka in particular. They liked the location of Castle Hill best because it is a prominent area and looked out over

the sea. It was a very outstanding location as far as controlling the surrounding island. The hill was already occupied by the Kiksadi clan of Tlingit Indians. The Russians needed the cooperation because the Russians needed the Indians as trappers. The Russians selected a second-best location 6 miles north of Sitka. In 1799 the Russians led by Alexander Baranov came into the area, arrived at old Sitka, had parlay agreements with the Kiksadi land of Tlingit people and they were given permission to establish a fort at Old Sitka in 1799.

By 1800, the Russian-American company had expanded their trading all the way down to California. Sitka was a mild, comfortable, and ideal spot for a capital. The Russians had used native Aleuts as hunters when they came to the Islands. The Tlingit Indians however, were not as accommodating. The fort was attacked in 1802 by the Kiksadi clan of Tlingit people. The survivors were picked up by a British ship and returned to Kodiak Island. Baranov was not present at the colony at the time. In 1804, the Russians again returned to Sitka and the Indians realized the Russians would be back so within the 2 year period they fortified a fish camp at Indian River. The natives had firearms and brought guns and ammunition from traders. The fort was well placed, beyond a tidal flat, which kept Russian ships in deep water out of cannon range. Romaine Hardcastle, standing at the site of fort, explains the battle. The Indians had sent a canoe out to the surrounding islands to collect their caches of ammunition and bring them to the Indian River Fort. One of the Russians took a potshot at this large canoe crossing the channel not realizing what was in it. The canoe contained the ammunition that the Indians had been collecting over two years. One of the Indians in the canoe fired back. A flint from the rifle fell into the powder keg and blew up the canoe.

Fighting erupted between the Russians and Indians. The Tlingit held out for 7 days on the meager supplies of ammunition. At low tide, they would go out and pick up the Russian cannonballs that had fallen short. When the Russians would move in, then Indians would fire their cannonballs back. After 6 days the Russians found out there was a shortage of ammunition and that the Indians were trying to replenish this. The show down was requested by the Indians and the Russians said they would attack the fort. When the Indians realized it wasn't possible to re-up on ammunition, they evacuated rather than submitting or giving the Russians control. The Russians attacked the fort in the morning and found it was empty.

Baranov and the Russian-American Company established their permanent capital at Sitka. They extended their trading on the entire southern coast of Alaska, Canada, and United States. For 50 years the fur trading flourished. A combination of circumstances eventually led to America purchasing Alaska.

Throughout the early 1800s the fever of gold hadn't picked up yet in Alaska. Just a few miles east of Sitka in Juneau, Bob DeArmond tells the story about how the United States first became interested in the territory. The first interested was in the early 1800s by fur traders from the Eastern Lower 48. There was an American name Lincoln who went to Sitka to build ships for the Russians. A little later than that the first Americans who came to Alaska were part of the Western Union Telegraph expedition in 1865 and 1866. Robert Kennicott was sent to explore with the idea of extending a telegraph line from the U.S. to Europe via Siberia. This was the first exploration into the interior of Alaska and first to decide that the Yukon (Athabaskan Indian Word) and at the mouth they called it Kwikpak. Most maps showed

the Yukon flowing northward into the Arctic Ocean parallel with the Mackenzie River while the Kvichak River was supposed to be a different river. Baranov couldn't do anything about the incursion of American and European traders in Southeast Alaska.

Shortly after 1805, a military post and agricultural colony was established hundreds of miles to the south in the rich soil of California [Fort Ross on the Russian River in California], a more favorable environment for growing food crops. By 1844, the fur bearing animals were almost exterminated and questions were being raised about the future of Alaska. Imperial Russia's fleet was outclassed by the British and the weaknesses were prevalent in the Crimean War of 1856. This among other reasons prompted Russia to approach the U.S. about selling Alaska. The Russian minister to Washington, Baron Eduard de Stoeckl, was instructed by the Grand Duke Constantine to see if the U.S. was interested in buying. It wasn't until 1866 until the atmosphere was right for the real estate transaction.

Historian Bob DeArmond says the U.S. purchased Alaska because William H. Seward, Secretary of State, was interested in extending America. There were some negotiations between U.S. and Russia during the Civil War. The Russians sent a fleet to San Francisco Bay and New York Harbor. There were people interested in fur and maybe coal during the Civil War period. DeArmond believes several different interests promoted the purchase of Alaska by the U.S.

De Stoeckl received careful instruction from St. Petersburg about the exact terms of deal between the U.S. and Russia. He was told to insist that the property rights and freedom of religion of Russians in Alaska be respected. After the purchase was completed, they were to be given the option to stay or go back to Russia. The sale was to provide that during the transition period, the U.S. should assume the responsibilities of feeding, clothing, and housing those who decided to stay. Also, so that the Americans retain a commitment to the Hudson Bay Company lease in southeastern Alaska. One more stipulation is that Minister Eduard de Stoeckl was to accept no less than 5 million dollars for the territory.

De Stoeckl first asked secretary of state Seward 7 million dollars. When he realized Seward had his heart set on Alaska, he held out for 7 million plus 200,000. The whole idea was called "Seward's Folly." With the assistance of De Stoeckl and the support of Senator Charles Sumner from Massachusetts, and Congressman Thaddeus Stevens from Pennsylvania, Seward completed the deal and is now called the greatest deal in real estate history. The purchase treaty was signed on March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1867 and on the afternoon of October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1867 at the site of Castle Hill, a formal ceremony celebrated Alaska from Russia to the United States.

Rhett Turner discusses the Juneau Ice cap, the long blue Lynn Canal up to Dyea and Skagway, Rhett says there below Chilkoot pass and the White Pass, the route followed by the gold stampede, very little was done in Alaska until 1874 when Canadian prospectors found gold in BC. In 1880, a man named Joe Juneau and Richard Harris discovered gold near the site of the town of Juneau. Bob DeArmond is asked what brought prospectors. He says there was a lot of gold and a lot of wealth, but it didn't bring a lot of people. From Yukon Territory they found gold on the Fortymile River in 1886 and that brought about 500 more prospectors north. In 1894, they found gold in Circle City and that brought more. In 1896, gold was found on the Klondike River in Canada on the Yukon Territory and that set it off.

During the period of the Civil War there was an economic depression. The idea of digging and getting rich was tempting for people. A newspaper reporter, Beriah Brown, in Seattle got the idea for a lead by saying a ton of gold had arrived from Alaska. The gold rush was on after that. The ship actually brought in two tons of gold.

In 1898 through Alaska's Dyea and the Chilkoot Pass, through Skagway and the White Pass, over through the headways of the Yukon River, and on 500 miles to Dawson. 40,000 streamed in. Frank Young was there when he was 6 with his father at Chilkoot Pass in 1898. Young says that his family went to the Klondike diggings by the way of Dyea and Chilkoot Pass. Young was 6 or 7 years old when they made that trip. They went down through Yukon to Dawson in the spring of 1898. They stayed in Dawson a couple of years when they heard of the gold strike in Tanana Valley in Fairbanks and they arrived there in May 1905. Since those years Young has been in the Interior of Alaska. Young did some good and some bad.

Gold was discovered all across Alaska; Dawson, Fairbanks, Nome. Lots of the people liked the country and stayed in Alaska. Young went over in the Vault Creek when he was young and it looked like a good prospect. Another man told him where to go sink a hole, Young went there and he landed on good pay. He made a few thousand dollars and most he invested into machinery. In the long run, he ended up not too rich.

Most prospectors were like Frank Young who didn't find any gold. They stayed because they found people like them who were willing to live in a challenging environment.

Alaska was made a territory in 1912, the first territorial legislature began in 1913, the battle of statehood began in 1916, and it wasn't until 1959 that Alaska became the 49<sup>th</sup> state of the union. By 1940, when the price of mining went up and the price of gold went down, mining almost went down. This is when the era of the bush pilot began, to be discussed in part two.