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Marvin Falk

Steven Lay, reporter

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Steven Lay said the holes of Alaskan history can be filled by a unique acquisition by the archives of Rasmuson Library. Microfilm copies of more than 11,000 pages of Russian manuscript have been acquired. More than 99 percent of the film is new to scholars. It has never been previously released by the Soviets. According to Dr. Marvin Falk, UAF Curator of Rare Books, the materials known as the Shur Collection will be invaluable. Falk said there are a number of Russian-American materials just now becoming available. This closes a number of gaps and fits in well. From this point on any researcher working with Russian American materials will have a lot of material that hasn't been available before to work with. Steven Lay said the collection was gathered in the Soviet Union by Dr. Leonid Shur. Falk said Dr. Shur worked as a specialist on Alaska and Russian-Latin American relations in the Soviet Union for a number of years. His last position was with the Bureau of Ethnology. Shur immigrated to Israel and then to France. Lay said when Shur left the Soviet Union he was allowed to take his personal papers and the microfilms with him. The accumulated collection represented years of work of archives throughout the Soviet Union. Many of the archives are unavailable to westerners because they are in cities which are off limits to non-Soviets. The collection has many unique materials. Falk said it has a lot of material dealing with the ethnology of Alaska, with the administration of the Russian-American Company, and observations of early explorations to Alaska. These things have not been used up until now except by a few Soviet scholars. Lay said much of the material is from original expeditions of explorations into Alaskan regions. They recorded and accrued some of the first impressions by westerners. Falk said they have some reproductions of paintings done by traveling artists with Russian expeditions. There are manuscript notes taken on expeditions within Alaska. They have a number of things written by Khlebnikov who was the managing director of the Russian-American Company. These materials express a trained observer's viewpoint of the brand new land.

Rasmuson Library has completed preliminary cataloging of the content of the microfilm. They are planning an ongoing translation program to make the information readily accessible to researchers. The translations will include explanatory footnotes to provide insights into the meaning of the words. It has taken almost a year to prepare the materials so they can be used. Falk said the material originally came in the form of about 300 pieces of microfilm, most of them curled rather tightly and wrapped in tissue paper. This is the way they came out of the Soviet Union as part of the baggage of Dr. Shur. A lot of the film was pretty brittle, but the images were good. Over a period of time they put them in order and spliced them together. They were then duplicated by Mario Grassi of the Geophysical Institute who did a superb job in protecting the original. Now they have three copies of the original microfilm. One to use as a master in case any other duplicates need to be made. One to be used as a working copy. Another copy will go back to Dr. Shur for his use.