

THE RETARDED DEVELOPMENT OF ALASKA

BY

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Despite the glowing accounts of Alaska's rich resources, they remain undeveloped, and the geographer naturally looks for the underlying causes.

Undoubtedly, Alaska is rich in natural resources. During the forty years preceding 1925, \$500,000,000 worth of fish were caught in Alaskan waters, and up until the end of 1929, \$616,000,000 worth of minerals had been mined in Alaska.

Furs constitute a third important source of wealth, wild game alone furnishing about \$2,000,000 annually. Fur farming also seems to hold out unusual possibilities. The reindeer herds are increasing at the rate of 39 per cent a year and it is estimated that when the full capacity of the northern herd is reached, there will be available each year for market approximately 200,000,000 pounds. The fur seals of the Pribilof Islands are also steadily increasing in numbers.

In 1932, the timber stand was estimated to be 85,000,000 board feet and lumber cut from the National Forests on a sustained yield basis amounts to about 40,000,000 to 50,000,000 board feet per year.

Because of these resources, the outlook for the Territory has been considered brighter than that for more fully developed European countries lying in approximately the same latitude. But are these indications that Alaska is actually progressing?

In the vast area, 586,000 miles in extent, there are but 59,278 people (51 per cent of whom are Indian and Eskimo, and more than 3/5 of whom are found in the southern part of the country). In 1930, there were the same number of native whites as in 1910 and only half as many foreign born inhabitants. Native stocks alone showed an increase. Hence one questions whether conditions in Alaska are suitable for a permanent people.

Alaska as a whole has 64,000,000 acres available for agriculture and grazing, and Alaskan soils and climate permit crops of potatoes, hardy vegetables etc. It therefore seems that a closed economy might be possible though there is little hope for developing a market economy. However, if Alaska cannot attract immigrants and no dependence can be placed in the slow increase of native stocks, the development of the country will have to be exploitive.

Yet before accepting as inevitable such a distasteful prospect as mere exploitation, it is worthwhile to consider why Alaska has failed to come up to expectations. Is it because of the inaccessibility of resources, poor governmental management, the wrong type of publicity, or the character of the inhabitants?

Since each of these considerations, and perhaps others, may have some bearing on Alaska's present situation, what is a fair and impartial attitude to take? Alaska's position in the far north off of all established trade routes, its great distance from the more densely populated sections of the United States, and the great mountain range preventing easy access from the south combine to form what is probably Alaska's greatest hindrance, isolation. Nevertheless, there is no apparent reason why slow, but long continued growth should not culminate in the ultimate development of the Territory in the future when it may be much needed as an essential aid in supplying world demand.