

The Naming of Seward in Alaska.

It is not often that complete documentary evidence is preserved showing the manner and reason of naming a city. For that reason it is thought best to here record the letters and orders resulting in this honor to the memory of the great War Secretary of State.

The following letter was dated at the office of the Chief Engineer of the Alaska Central Railway Company in Seattle, June 23, 1902:

Prof. Edmond S. Meany,
University, Wash.

Dear Sir:

I have been giving some thought to the question of a name for the town at the southern terminus of the Alaska Central Railway. This town will be a nice commanding site on Resurrection Bay, which Bay is the only open port the year round on what is known as the South Coast of the main part of Alaska, and is about in the middle of said South Coast, being between Prince William Sound and Cook's Inlet.

One of our engineers has suggested the name "Almouth," meaning mouth of Alaska. While not satisfied with the name, I am not myself able to think of a better one, and wish that you would make some suggestion to me in the matter.

Very truly yours

C. M. ANDERSON,
Chief Engineer.

The reply of Professor Meany was dated at the University of Washington, Seattle, 1 July, 1902, and was as follows:

Mr. C. M. Anderson,

Chief Engineer of Alaska Central Ry. Co.
Seattle, Wash.

Dear Sir:

Your favor of 23 June is at hand.

I thank you for the opportunity of suggesting a name for the southern terminus of the new railroad. The name above all others most appropriate for a prominent city in Alaska is Seward.

The Alaska Purchase Treaty was concluded 30 March, 1867; ratifications exchanged at Washington 20 June, 1867; proclaimed 20 June, 1867. The treaty was signed by William H. Seward for the United States and Edouard de Stoeckl for Russia.

The purchased empire was little appreciated. It was ridiculed by Harper's Weekly and others as "Seward's Paradise," etc. Practically all the negotiations were conducted by Seward.

More than any other one man is he responsible for American ownership of Alaska.

By all means let us honor the great War Secretary of State.

I have examined the official list of U. S. postoffices dated 1 January, 1902, and find no Seward in the list.

Mr. C. L. Wayland, U. S. Inspector of Postoffices, will soon leave for Alaska. He establishes and often names new post-offices. You should see him and arrange for the name you decide upon.

I am somewhat familiar with the history of Alaska, and if Seward is found impossible for any reason I could suggest other names that would commemorate significant facts. To me this method of naming cities is much to be preferred to the plan of sticking pieces of names together as "Almouth" or "Bucoda."

Yours faithfully

EDMOND S. MEANY.

On July 2, 1902, Chief Engineer Anderson wrote to Mr. G. W. Dickinson, President and General Manager of the Alaska Central Railway Company, as follows:

Dear Sir: Inclosed please find correspondence relative to name of southern terminus.

I wish to refer the same to Mr. Wayland with your endorsement.

On this letter was written in pencil the following:

Anderson.

Good idea to have concurrence of P. O. people. Ask Wayland.

G. W. D.

On July 2, 1902, Mr. Anderson wrote:

Mr. C. L. Wayland,
Postal Inspector.

Dear Sir: Please act on Mr. Meany's suggestion if you can do so. And greatly oblige

Very truly yours

C. M. ANDERSON,
Chief Engineer.

To this letter Mr. Wayland replied as follows, on July 4:

In compliance with your attached request I would suggest the name of "Vituska," pronounced Ve-tus-ka, and being made up (1) of the first (and chief) name of Vitus Bering, the Dane, who for Russia in 1728 to 1741 discovered Alaska, the Bering

Sea and Strait and thus completed the discovery of North and South America begun by Columbus 250 years before, and (2) of the final syllable of Alaska. This is a positively distinct and striking and solid name and sounds exactly like it belonged to Alaska—as it does. I can't share Prof. Meany's aversion to names made of pieces. It has been the loving task of all lexicographers to show how nearly all words were built of pieces and to show the meaning of the word through the meanings of its pieces.

The last letter of this series is as follows:

Seattle, Wash., July 8, 1902.

Mr. G. W. Dickinson,
General Manager.

Dear Sir: Enclosed please find correspondence, in relation to the naming of our southern terminal. If thought best to accept Mr. Wayland's suggestion to name the terminal "Vituska," I would suggest that the name of the Bay be made "Almouth." While not personally very pleasantly impressed with the name "Vituska" in respect to Mr. Wayland's suggestion, shall use said name unless I receive contrary suggestion from you.

Very truly yours

C. M. ANDERSON,
Chief Engineer.

This letter bears these pencilled letters "O. K.—G. W. D."

Professor Meany happened to be a passenger on the Steamship Bertha in July of 1902 and had, as fellow passengers, a party of engineers bound for Resurrection Bay for the Alaska Central Railway. From that party he obtained a copy of the above correspondence. The only missing item is the order, if any was given, by which "Vituska" was set aside and the originally suggested name of "Seward" was decided upon for the city thus founded in Alaska in 1902.