Paving Alaska's Trails

The Work of the Alaska Road Commission

UNIVERSITY PRESS OF AMERICA

by Claus-M. Naske

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The United States Senate appointed a Subcommittee on Territories to journey to Alaska in 1903 to thoroughly investigate the district and ascertain what, if any, legislation was required. Senator W. P. Dillingham, Vermont, chaired the group. Other subcommittee members were Senators Henry E. Burnham of New Hampshire, Knute Nelson of Minnesota, and Thomas M. Patterson of Colorado. Here the party is crossing the Arctic Circle. National Archives of the United States.

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4720 Boston Way
Lanham, MD 20706

3 Henrietta Street
London WC2E 8LU England

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Naske, Claus-M.
Paving Alaska's trails.

(Alaska Historical Commission studies in history ; no. 152)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. United States. Alaska Road Commission—History. 2. Roads—Alaska—History. I. Title. II. Series.
HE356.A4N39 1986 353.97980086'42 86-15850
ISBN 0-8191-5576-4 (alk. paper)
ISBN 0-8191-5577-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Alaska Historical Commission Studies in History No. 152

Research for this project was supported by grants from the Alaska Historical Commission, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, and the Alaska Humanities Forum; however, the author is responsible for all statements herein, whether fact or opinion.

Design by Arctic Environmental Information and Data Center, University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

All University Press of America books are produced on acid-free paper which exceeds the minimum standards set by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

For Bruce and Jean Ariss
Writers, Artists, Friends, and In-Laws

Table of Contents

Foreword

Thousands of men were out of work during the late 1880's as an economic recession enveloped the United States. Many people moved west in hope of a better way of life. Then gold was found in the Fortymile, in the Circle district, in the Klondike, on the beaches at Nome, at Fairbanks, and in the Koyukuk. Word of these discoveries spread, and thousands of people headed north hoping to find their bonanza. The multitudes engulfed a primitive area that lacked the infrastructure they had enjoyed on the outside. Alaskan cities did not offer the conveniences many expected, mail service was limited, and roads and railroads did not exist. More than once there was fear of mass starvation, there was an ongoing dispute as to the correct location of the Alaska-Canada boundary, and there was a need to control the unruly elements which always make up a part of any rapid economic expansion.

To bring order out of chaos several companies of the United States Infantry were moved into Alaska and stationed at strategic locations near the gold camps. The President and Congress designated the United States Army as the lead organization to plan for and to provide a transportation system in Alaska. Several army reconnaissance parties were dispatched to determine the most feasible transportation corridors from the Gulf Coast or Cook Inlet to the Interior, the Tanana and Yukon rivers, and to the Seward Peninsula.

The organization established to plan, build, and maintain the road system for Alaska, as an agency of the War Department, was known as the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska. Established in 1905 as a group of three army officers, it expanded with the needs of the territory into an efficient highway department known as the Alaska Road Commission. In 1956 it became a part of the Bureau of Public Roads of the Department of Commerce, and in 1960 the organization became the State of Alaska Department of Highways.

A democracy is defined as "government by the people." Politics is defined as "the practice of managing affairs of public policy." The story which follows is not a dry statement of the facts tracing the development of a government agency. Rather, it is a dynamic history of an engineering organization responding to the needs and desires of the people of the territory and influenced by the political realities of territorial status:

> *Alaska had no votes in Congress, our small population could exert little influence in the sea of power, our problems were remote when viewed from Washington, D.C. and those with special interests in Alaska controlled powerful lobbies to influence legislation.*

The Alaska Road Commission began as a small group of army officers charged with the responsibility of locating, constructing, and maintaining roads in a hostile environment. There was no precedent. Who knew about permanently frozen subsoil and how it would react to surface disturbance? Who had experienced stream icing? Who had observed the explosive forces of a breaking glacier lake? Why was it advisable to locate a road on a south facing slope? The Alaska Road Commission learned the hard way and developed techniques to cope with these problems. The problems it worked with every day and never completely overcame were many and varied:

1. The need for roads and the constantly changing location of that need as mining camps developed—some to die and some to become permanent settlements. The lack of funds to meet these pressing needs.
2. Personality and philosophical differences which developed into implacable animosities.
3. Rivalry between various areas of the territory competing for limited funds.
4. Jealousies existing among various government agencies.
5. The organizational changes required to locate, construct, and maintain paved highways to meet military requirements.
6. The many tasks assumed by the Alaska Road Commission as the one government agency capable of performing heavy construction in the remote areas of the territory.

The details of these problems and the evolution of our present highway system make for interesting reading.

Woodrow Johansen

Acknowledgments

Many friends helped me to complete this project. Bob Thomas suggested the topic to me; Henry Springer materially supported the initial phases and launched me on the final one. The Alaska Humanities Forum helped with a modest grant to get the project started. William R. Hunt and Terrence Cole shared their insights into Alaska's past with me. Librarians at the University of Alaska gave unstinting help, especially Pauline Gunter who always found obscure congressional documents.

As on many previous occasions, Renee Jaussaud of the National Archives helped greatly in guiding me to pertinent records; I thank Franklin W. Burch of that same institution for many courtesies extended. Archivists at the Federal Records Center in Seattle, Washington, were very helpful, particularly David Piff and Philip Lothyan. Staff members at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, New York; the Harry S. Truman Library in Independence, Missouri; and the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas; unfailingly gave of their expertise. David Hickok, Director of the Arctic Environmental Information and Data Center of the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, located in Anchorage, provided a pleasant environment for the first two phases of this work. Louise Flood of the Institute of Water Resources on the University of Alaska-Fairbanks campus typed the second phase of the project quickly and accurately. The project then moved to the Geophysical Institute which is a great place to work. Administrative chores are accomplished by skilled personnel. Neta Stilkey always made sure that monies were accounted for and monthly statements were on time. Kathy Allen and Meg McCoy typed the entire manuscript cheerfully and speedily. Carla Helfferich and Kathy Fiedler Morack edited the technical report into a book. Jeanne Hume painstakingly proofread the entire manuscript; Eva R. Trautmann did the final editing and proofreading and prepared the index and Ludwig Rowinski provided the photographs. Morgan B. Sherwood and Orlando W. Miller made many valuable suggestions. The Alaska Historical Commission provided editing and prepublication grants, and its staff helped prepare a clean copy. I thank them all, including Al Belon, the Associate Director of the Geophysical Institute who let it happen. Finally, I would like to thank Larry Sweet, Chief of the Research Section of the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, for many courtesies rendered.

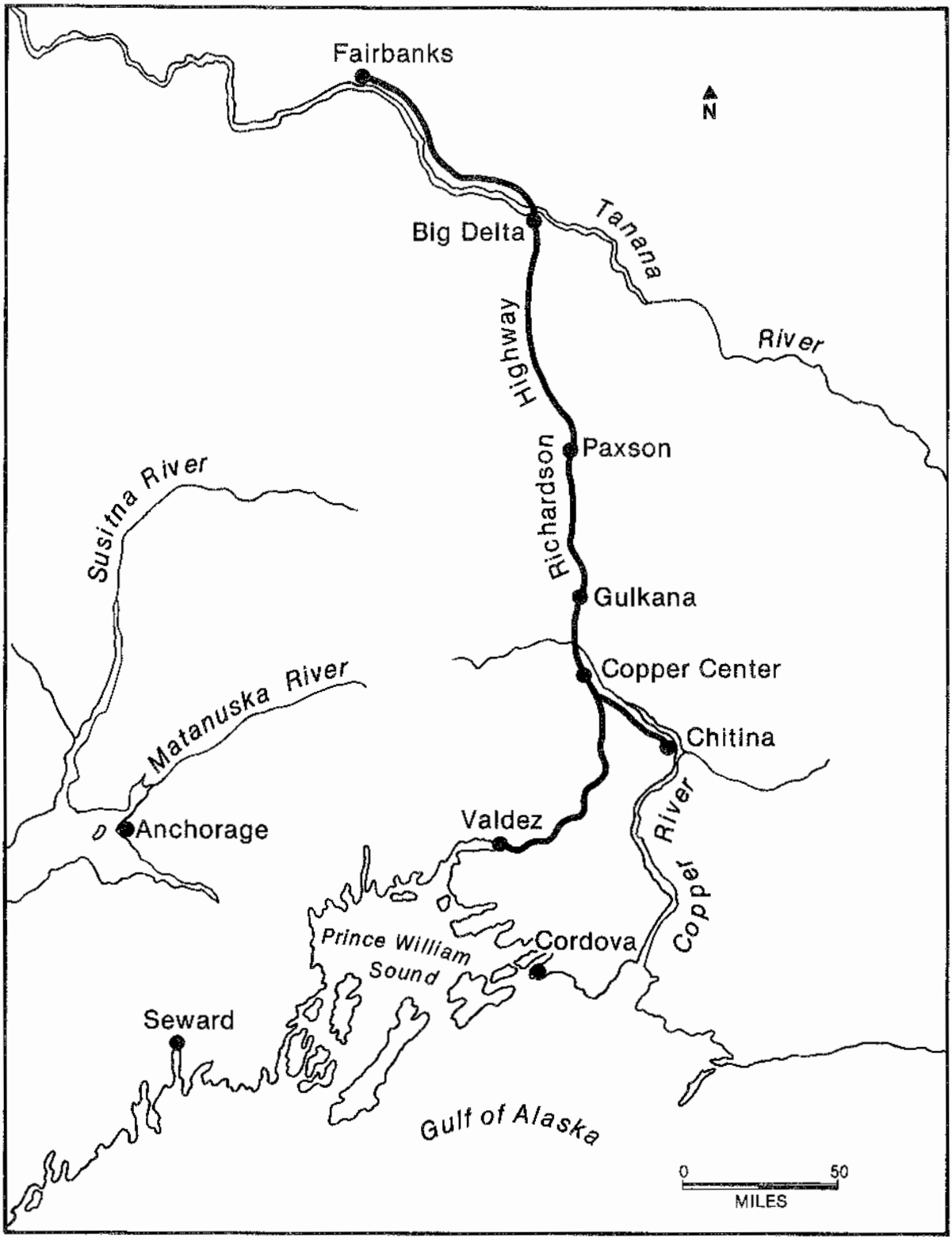
1 Introduction

When the Alaska Road Commission began its work in 1905, the territory had less than a dozen miles of officially recognized wagon roads. When it handed over its duties to the Bureau of Public Roads in 1956, Alaska had a network of 10,000 miles of roads. The commission, in an effort to provide minimum transportation facilities for everyone in the Alaska territory, built pioneer roads in every region, developed and maintained summer and winter trails, constructed small airfields, operated ferries, and built and maintained portages and narrow-gauge tramways—often under spectacularly difficult conditions.

Alaska, a region with uneven terrain that is difficult to traverse and with a deeply indented 34,000-mile-long coastline, contains small, widely separated settlements. Almost all long-distance travel around Alaska was by water and later by air. Connecting the widespread communities and camps with each other and the "outside" by roads was impractical. Such roads, if possible to build at all, would be difficult to construct and maintain—considering the terrain, the large areas of water, and the short construction season. To this day, many regions have only local roads. For example, many southeast Alaska towns have only roads to canneries and fishing coves and the airport or ferry terminal.

The early road builders often utilized the aboriginal trail systems. The gold rushes determined many of the road locations, as did the transportation requirements of the army. River transportation, however, remained the important means of travel and freighting well into the twentieth century when airplanes became Alaska's prime means of transport. But the demand for roads was there. The well-used summer and winter trail systems, the need for government and military communication and transport, and the vociferous pleas from miners for access to freight connections, all testified to the need for better land transportation. The federal government's answer was to turn to the military and its experience with western trails and assign the duty of developing road systems in Alaska to the army. And the army's answer was to set up a commission composed of engineers. Established in 1905 as an agency of the War Department and named the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, it was referred to popularly—almost from the beginning—as the Alaska Road Commission. The original board consisted of three military officers, one of whom occupied the position of president of the board, another that of chief engineer, and the third served as secretary and disbursing officer. In 1932 it was reorganized and transferred to the Department of the Interior. On August 17, 1956, Secretary of Commerce Sinclair Weeks and Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton jointly announced that, effective September 16, the Alaska Road Commission would be absorbed by the Bureau of Public Roads, a part of the United States Department of Commerce. This transfer to the Bureau of Public Roads took place because in 1956 Congress included Alaska on a modified basis in the Federal-Aid Highway Act. This legislation eliminated much of the uncertainty about future funding for Alaska's roads, but it also called for the demise of the venerable Alaska Road Commission, ending the existence of this 51-year-old agency.

The first major road built in the territory was the Richardson Highway from Valdez to Fairbanks. This route was originally a winter trail, but with the increased traffic caused by the rapid development of the placer gold deposits around Fairbanks accompanied by construction of the military telegraph line,



The Richardson Highway, Valdez to Fairbanks, and the Edgerton Highway connecting Chitina with the main road.

"The Trail," was gradually improved. First it became a wagon road, later the commission upgraded it sufficiently to accommodate the Model-T Ford, and eventually it became a modern, paved highway kept open on a year-round basis.

Construction methods changed radically between 1905 and 1956. The early labor consisted largely of building crude wagon roads, cutting brush, and flagging winter trails. During the 27 years from 1905 to 1932, the Alaska Road Commission developed an elaborate system of trails and sled roads, totaling more than 10,000 miles, with less than 500 of those miles consisting of low-standard roads capable of being used by wagons. This system was designed to serve military needs as well as those of the largely itinerant population of fishermen, trappers, and miners. The commission eventually abandoned the system of trails and sled roads and instead built airfields. Heavy construction machinery only gradually replaced horses, wagons and hand labor. The Alaska Road Commission acquired its first automotive equipment—surplus military vehicles—after World War I. Later giant earthmovers came into use that could haul 20 times as much material at greater speeds than the original equipment; where workers had earlier corduroyed mudholes to support horses and wagons, in the 1950s they laid asphalt to enable rapid, dust-free travel.

In fact, it was not until the early 1950s that Congress, largely at the urging of the military, appropriated substantial amounts of money for an accelerated road construction program. Between 1950 and 1952 the Alaska Road Commission received $20 million or more annually for these purposes. And even though appropriations from 1953 on dropped considerably after those fat three years, the precedent for more spending and the "defense" justification were set. After all, America and the Soviet Union were engaged in the so-called "Cold War," and the United States considered Alaska its forward bastion in that conflict. Also, Alaska was in a better position to participate financially because in 1955 the territorial legislature had raised the motor fuel tax from 2 to 5 cents a gallon. But even with this boost, monies from this source and other highway user taxes would amount to only slightly more than $2 million a year, inadequate to cover even maintenance.

By 1956 the Alaska Road Commission had accomplished much. It had grown from a few dozen employees to a well-organized highway department. The headquarters staff in the early 1950s consisted of more than a hundred individuals, and district engineers at Anchorage, Fairbanks, Valdez, and Nome handled field operations with more than a thousand employees during the peak of the summer construction season. The commission had pioneered Alaska's transportation network—then consisting of 998.5 miles of through roads, 1,234.6 miles of feeder roads, 1,361.3 miles of local roads, and many bridges, airstrips, tramways, and ferries which it had built and maintained over the years—and provided important employment opportunities for many Alaskans.

The Army's Involvement in Alaska before 1905

The U.S. Government became involved in the Far North with the international quest for the Northwest Passage to the Orient when the United States joined the search for the lost expedition of Sir John Franklin in 1850. Several exploratory missions followed, some government-sponsored and some private ventures of scientific exploration. When Alaska was purchased from Russia in 1867, the United States Coast Survey began the first official government exploration of the new possession.

The United States War Department became more actively involved in Alaska in the 1880s when its responsibility for mapping the Far West ended. In essence, the army's role in Alaskan scientific exploration between 1867 and 1898 can be divided into three phases.

The first occurred between 1867 and 1877, when the army governed the region with headquarters at Sitka and various posts scattered along the southern coast. During this period the army did very little exploratory work and mainly restricted itself to tours by inspecting generals and one reconnaissance along the Yukon River. The Army Signal Service dominated the second phase, beginning before the Army left Alaska and ending in the early 1880s. Army personnel made meteorological observations in the Aleutians and the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta during this time; they contributed mainly background information. The third phase resembled the pre-Civil War explorations of the trans-Mississippi western territories undertaken by the Corps of Topographical Engineers (which ceased to exist as a separate organization after 1863 and became the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers). This phase ended with Lieutenant Henry Allen's remarkable 1885 exploration of the Copper, Tanana, and Koyukuk rivers.[1]

Between 1886 and 1898 officers of the United States Navy and the Revenue Marine Service undertook expeditions to the Selawik and Kobuk River valleys; J. E. McGrath and J. H. Turner of the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey performed astronomical observations, triangulation and topographical surveys on the 141st meridian in 1889-1890; Frederick Funston was on the Yukon and in the Arctic for the Department of Agriculture in 1893; William H. Dall and George Ferdinand Becker did a mineral survey for the United States Geological Service along the coasts in 1895; and Josiah Edward Spurr, together with H. B. Goodrick and F. C. Schrader, made a geological reconnaissance in the summer of 1896 from the head of Lynn Canal, over Chilkoot Pass, to the Yukon, and then down the river to St. Michael.

The navy's hydrographic office and the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey continued to conduct hydrographic surveys in Alaska. The former incorporated on its charts the results of surveys by naval vessels in southeastern Alaska. After 1880, however, it concentrated on mapping foreign waters and restricted itself to the coasts facing and bordering Siberia. The Coast and Geodetic Survey, with principal responsibility for domestic waters, continued its work and issued charts particularly for Southeast Alaska and the Aleutians.[2]

Even though the federal government's interest in Alaska was not continuous, hardy individuals streamed to the North to try to make their fortunes. Written records reveal that as early as 1869 William Henderson and James Strichan had gone to the Chilkat country to prospect. In 1871 a soldier found gold in the Indian River on the outskirts of Sitka, and in 1880 Joseph Juneau and Richard T. Harris found the precious metal near the site on which Juneau was to be built. Prospectors roamed throughout Southeast Alaska, and before long a few made their way over the Chilkoot Pass to the headwaters of the Yukon River.[3]

In 1874 miners discovered gold in the Dease Lake region of British Columbia. As news of the discovery spread down the Stikine River, it sparked a minor gold rush. Fort Wrangell, at the mouth of the Stikine, boomed as a transfer point of cargo and men from ocean craft. In 1874 some three thousand people went through Fort Wrangell, and, with the construction of stores, bakeries, restaurants, and a saloon and dance hall, it soon became a popular wintering place for miners.[4]

In the early 1880s, numerous prospectors examined the gravel bars of the Yukon River for gold, and by 1886 some 200 miners had

1. Morgan B. Sherwood, *Exploration of Alaska, 1865-1900* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1956), pp. 86-87.

2. A set of published Coast and Geodetic Survey Charts is in R.G. 23, N.A.

3. Robert N. DeArmond, *The Founding of Juneau* (Juneau, Alaska: Gastineau Channel Centennial Association, 1967), pp. 23-37.

4. Bobby Dave Lain, *North of Fifty-Three: Army Treasury Department, and Navy Administration of Alaska, 1867-1884*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1974, pp. 44-45.

gradually worked their way down the Yukon. Two prospectors found gold on the Fortymile River, and a minor stampede followed.[5]

That same year gold was discovered at Franklin Creek, a tributary of the Fortymile River in American territory. More discoveries followed: mining activities began on Dome Creek in 1893, in the placers of Wade Creek in 1895, and in those of Chicken Creek in 1896. In the spring of 1896 the center of the footloose mining population had shifted from Fortymile in the Yukon Territory to Circle City on the banks of the Yukon River on American soil.[6] In the late fall of 1896 George Washington Carmack and his two Indian companions found gold in quantities never before seen in Canada's Yukon Territory; soon thousands rushed to the Klondike.[7]

The rush focused worldwide attention on the North and lured thousands to the Klondike and Alaska, among them many not seeking gold: sportsmen, scientists, political and civic figures, con men, and fugitives from the law. They came from all parts of the United States, Canada, and abroad. At the same time, federal bureaus—some new to the North—began work to fill in the gaps in the knowledge about the region and to disseminate available data in their respective fields. The U.S. Geological Survey had begun work on Alaska's mineral resources in 1895; in 1898, geological studies of Alaska began on a regular basis. Soon, the Bureau of Navigation published a circular on navigational conditions on the Yukon and Porcupine rivers, and the Labor Department issued information on labor opportunities and conditions in the gold fields; while the Department of Agriculture dispatched investigators to evaluate the agricultural possibilities of the North.[8]

The numbers of men who had been prospecting over the Yukon River valley since the 1870s grew as the men moved into this vast, still vaguely defined winterland, from the Bering Sea to the 141st meridian, the boundary line separating Alaska from Canada's Yukon Territory. Throughout the seventies and eighties small parties of prospectors had entered Alaska's enormous interior from both ends of the Yukon River. After a relatively brief but intensive summer labor, most Yukon miners departed for the "outside" to spend the winter. By 1894 improved river steamers and the competitive presence of the North American Transportation and Trading Company eased their living conditions so much that miners were able to spend the winter on their claims. In 1895 Governor James Sheakley estimated that 1,500 men worked placers along the Yukon River, and for that entire region there was only one government official, an inspector of customs. Prospectors regulated their affairs with the aid of the Miners' Code.[9]

As early as 1871, disputes had arisen over the Canada-Alaska boundary, but little attention had been paid to them then. Two routes to the gold fields of Alaska led through Haines Mission and Dyea at the head of Lynn Canal, ground claimed by Canada. During August and September of 1896, Captain D. D. Gaillard of the Corps of Engineers conducted a preliminary examination of the disputed area and concluded that the Canadian claims were unjustified. In order to protect its interests until the matter could be settled officially, the United States sent army troops to Dyea and Fort Wrangell in February 1897 and stationed a detachment at Skagway.[10] In 1898, both governments agreed that a joint commission should settle the matter. No agreement was reached, however, and in 1903 officials renewed negotiations. On October 20 of that year an arbitration tribunal decided in favor of

5. Claus-M. Naske, "The Historic Forty-Mile District," *The Northern Engineer*, Summer 1976, p. 42.

6. *Ibid.*

7. William R. Hunt, *North of 53°: The Wild Days of the Alaska-Yukon Mining Frontier, 1870-1914* (New York and London: MacMillan Publishing Co., and Collier MacMillan Publications, 1974), pp. 24-25.

8. The discussion about the scientific exploration of Alaska is based on Sherwood, *Exploration of Alaska*.

9. Ted C. Hinckley, *The Americanization of Alaska, 1867-1897* (Palo Alto, California: Pacific Books, Publishers, 1967), pp. 212-215.

10. U.S. Army, Alaska, *The Army's Role in the Building of Alaska*, USARAL Pam 360-5, April 1969, pp. 26-28.

the American claim except for two small islands which went to Canada.[11]

After receiving conflicting reports about disorders in Alaska in the summer of 1897, the War Department ordered Captain Patrick Henry Ray and Lieutenant Wilds P. Richardson to investigate. The two officers were to determine the extent of the troubles, whether the food supply was sufficient to sustain the population, and if troops would be required to enforce law and order.[12] The two officers arrived at St. Michael near the mouth of the Yukon River in August 1897. They observed stranded and destitute people and feared that the coming winter might bring starvation. Answering requests for a military guard, and on the advice of Ray, the army dispatched Lieutenant Colonel George M. Randall, 8th Infantry, with two officers and 25 enlisted men to St. Michael on Norton Sound in September to establish a military station, known as Fort St. Michael.

By late fall Ray had decided that it was necessary to station a permanent military force at a central point in interior Alaska. The presence of the troops, he reasoned, would not only have a salutary moral effect on the population but also aid civilians in maintaining law and order.[13] Since most settlements were located along the Yukon River, Ray recommended that the first and largest post be located on the north bank of the Yukon opposite and slightly below the mouth of the Tanana River. This was a geographically and commercially central location. (The War Department agreed, and in 1899 this became the site for Fort Gibbon.)[14] In case the department decided to establish a post on the upper Yukon River, Ray recommended a site at the mouth of Mission Creek near Eagle City, close to the Canadian border. (In 1899 the War Department chose this approximate site for the construction of Fort Egbert.)

By December 1897, the reports that had reached the States of impending starvation along the Yukon River had aroused official opinion. Congress responded by appropriating $200,000 for relief to be administered by the War Department. The War Department used the funds to purchase a herd of domestic reindeer from Scandinavia. Many of the animals died during transportation to New York and Seattle, and from there by boat to Alaska. Before the animals got anywhere near the Yukon River, the need had dissipated, and new reports from the gold field indicated that there was no famine.[15]

Finally in March 1898, based on Ray's and Richardson's recommendations, the Secretary of War directed that three military exploring expeditions investigate interior Alaska. The orders were very specific, stating that the expeditions collect:

> *All the information valuable to the development of the country regarding topographical features, available routes of travel, feasible routes for railroad construction, appropriate and available sites for military posts, mineral resources, timber, fuel, products, capability of sustaining stock of any kind, animals, etc., should be embodied in a report with necessary accompanying maps and plates, to give the department information on which to base its action, and the public as full an understanding as possible of the resources, etc., of the country.*[16]

The first of these expeditions was to drive reindeer north from southeastern Alaska and then to explore and mark the trails from the Yukon River to the Tanana River. This operation, however, was abandoned at the outbreak of war with Spain and the consequent demand for military personnel.[17] The

11. *Ibid.* p. 28.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*, p. 32

15. Sherwood, *Exploration of Alaska*, pp. 155-156.

16. USARAL Pam. 360-5, pp. 32-34.

17. Sherwood, *Exploration of Alaska*, pp. 155-156.

second expedition, under the command of Captain William Ralph Abercrombie, was to explore from Valdez to the Copper River and to the tributaries of the Tanana River. Captain Edwin Forbes Glenn assumed command of the third expedition. He was ordered first to Prince William Sound to explore routes to the Copper and Susitna rivers; from there he was to proceed to Cook Inlet and explore north from tidewater to one or more crossings of the Tanana. Both expeditions suffered severe hardships, and the results were hardly worth the time, energy, and money expended. The exception was the valuable work performed by topographical assistant Emil Mahlo and geologist F. C. Schrader with the Abercrombie party and geologist W. C. Mendenhall with Glenn. The U.S. Geological Survey had loaned the geologists to the War Department for the expeditions.[18]

The army explorers discovered suitable routes in the interior and recommended the construction of a military road. They also knew that prospectors would eventually require some kind of transportation in the future and encouraged tying various mining camps into the same connecting line. A proper system of trails, roads, river transportation, or a combination of all of these would do much to enhance the economic prospects of the North.[19]

In March 1899 the War Department ordered that an exploring expedition go to Valdez, open a military (and public) road to Copper Center, and from there go by the most direct route to Eagle City. Captain Abercrombie led the expedition that was to survey and mark the road; in late April 1899 the members of the expedition started road construction. Originating at the military reservation at Valdez, the road ran up the Lowe River valley through Keystone Canyon and Thompson Pass to the Tonsina valley, where construction ceased for the year in October. Using only hand tools, the soldiers had built a 93-mile trail suitable for pack horses.[20]

War Department orders of March 1899 also directed the organization of a Cook Inlet expedition, under the command of Captain Edwin F. Glenn, to explore the country northward via the Matanuska, Susitna, Yentna, and Kuskokwim rivers and find the most direct and practicable route from tidewater to the crossings of the Tanana River. It was a continuation of Glenn's previous exploratory work, not a road-building enterprise. His primary duty was to find a direct route to the Tanana and from it to the military posts on the Yukon. One section of Glenn's expedition, a group led by Joseph Herron, made an important contribution when it accomplished the first official exploration of the upper Kuskokwim.[21]

In retrospect, historians have concluded that the army was not the best organization for exploring the North at that time. Military personnel rarely conducted any surveys and only made the most superficial observations. Geologists employed by the United States Geological Survey and civilian topographers did much of the mapping. Army parties were far too large and bound by bureaucratic regulations to carry out primary exploration. In contrast, the Geological Survey parties were small and flexible and responded easily to field conditions. Army expeditions were also more expensive than their USGS counterparts, an important factor for a cost-conscious Congress.[22]

When the War Department created the "Department of Alaska" in 1900, garrisons were located at Fort Davis near Nome, Fort St. Michael near the mouth of the Yukon, Fort Gibbon near Tanana, Fort Rampart, Fort Egbert at Eagle, Fort Liscum near Valdez, and Fort William H. Seward at Haines. To communicate with the nation's capital from the Yukon River generally required six

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 156-162.

19. USARAL Pam. 360-5, p. 41.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

21. Sherwood, *Exploration of Alaska*, pp. 163-166.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

months for a one-way message. It was soon obvious that if the army was to perform its function properly, it would be necessary to connect the Department of Alaska headquarters at Fort St. Michael with the other army posts by military telegraph and cable lines. The entire Alaska system then needed to be tied in directly with Washington, D.C. Responding to this need, Congress appropriated $405,550 for the project on May 26, 1900.[23]

Construction of the Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System, or WAMCATS as it was called, got under way promptly. Fort Egbert became the base for building the first telegraph line, a 12-mile segment which ran along the Yukon River eastward to the Canadian boundary. There it connected with the previously constructed Canadian line which ran to Dawson City and Whitehorse. With the completion of this short segment of line in 1900, Fort Egbert could send messages to Dawson and Whitehorse. From there they were carried overland to Skagway and then sent by mail ship to Seattle.[24] When the Canadians completed the trans-Canadian line to Vancouver in June 1901, it became possible to contact the contiguous states directly from Fort Egbert.[25]

During 1900, telegraph lines were strung the 4 miles between Nome and Fort Davis, and from there 20 miles to Port Safety. The next year saw much construction activity. The first undersea cable in Alaska crossed Norton Sound, connecting Port Safety with Fort St. Michael, and soldiers under the command of Lieutenant George Gibbs completed the 448-mile telegraph line from Fort St. Michael to Fort Gibbon in 1901. Construction between Eagle and Valdez lagged, however, and Brigadier General A. W. Greely, the chief of the Signal Corps, sent 21-year-old Lieutenant William Mitchell to Fort Egbert to investigate delays in connecting the telegraph line to the South. Mitchell made his base at Fort Egbert between 1901 and 1903 while he directed the building of the Eagle-Valdez line to the Tanana River, some 153 miles distant, and the 204-mile segment of the Goodpaster line, all under rather difficult conditions.[26]

In the summer of 1902 Mitchell completed the line to Tanana Crossing, where he met Captain George Burnell who had built the line from Valdez. Messages could now be sent from Fort Liscum on Prince William Sound to Fort Egbert on the Yukon, then re-telegraphed over the Canadian line to Vancouver and Seattle. After a new submarine cable was laid from Juneau to Skagway in the summer of 1909, telegraphic messages from Southeast Alaska went through Skagway and Whitehorse and down the Canadian line.[27]

The final work consisted of joining the Fort Egbert-Fort Liscum line to the one from Fort St. Michael, which extended only to Baker on the Tanana River. In January 1903 Lieutenant Mitchell mushed from Eagle to the confluence of the Goodpaster and Tanana rivers, thus discovering an excellent route for the line. After incredibly hard work, Mitchell met Lieutenant Gibbs near the Salcha River on June 27, 1903, thus making the final connection to the trans-Alaska telegraph system. The men of the U.S. Army Signal Corps had completed the 1,506 miles of overland lines and a few hundred miles of submarine cable in just three years, one month, and one day, a truly impressive achievement against, at times, overwhelming odds. The government had spent approximately $617 per mile for the overland lines and about $52 per mile for the submarine cable.[28]

It was mainly infantry- and artillerymen who built most of the line and also performed

23. William A. Quirk, III, *Historical Aspects of the Building of the Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System, with Special Emphasis on the Eagle-Valdez and Goodpaster Telegraph Lines, 1902-1903* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, 1974), p. 1.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

some of the maintenance. The project was unique in the history of telegraphic engineering because of Alaska's immense size, remoteness, rough topography and inclement climate. All construction materials as well as food and supplies had to be moved by dogsleds or pack animals. The terrain was so rough that often only a few miles could be traveled per day. Icy streams, swamps, underbush, deep snows, and temperatures that froze the quicksilver in the thermometer bulbs weakened men and animals. In the summers frequent rainfalls, mosquitoes, and forest fires made life miserable and impeded construction. The weather and forest fires often destroyed existing lines, making replacement necessary. In addition, shortages of proper food and remoteness of medical aid were common.[29]

In 1903 Congress appropriated another $485,000 for the construction of submarine cables from Juneau to Sitka and on to Seattle, a distance of 1,377 miles, but it was not until 1904 that these lines were completed. Another congressional appropriation in April 1904 provided money for laying a submarine cable from Sitka across the Gulf of Alaska to Valdez, a distance of 600 miles. This project was also accomplished in 1904, thus completing an all-American telegraph system.[30]

Completion of the system did not end the job. Now arose the difficulties of maintenance. Stationed at log cabins spaced 40 miles apart, detachments of soldiers maintained the line. Each detachment consisted of one Signal Corps repairman and two army soldiers. Through blizzards, summer heat and mosquitoes, forest fires, and storms, these army privates kept the line operating. It was lonely and monotonous duty at low wages. They received $13 per month plus 20 percent for Alaskan duty, which made it a grand total of $15.60 per month. In addition, they received rations, a clothing allowance, and housing and medical care—when that was available. For example, a dentist would visit once a year.

Army recruits did not have to worry about drawing this duty after a few years, however; new technology began to do away with their task. In 1907 the Signal Corps began to use wireless or radio equipment, and by the end of 1915, WAMCATS had reduced its land lines to 848 miles. In 1936 Congress renamed the organization the Alaska Communications System, and by the end of June 1940, radio had entirely replaced the cables.[31]

Congressional Involvement in Alaska before 1905

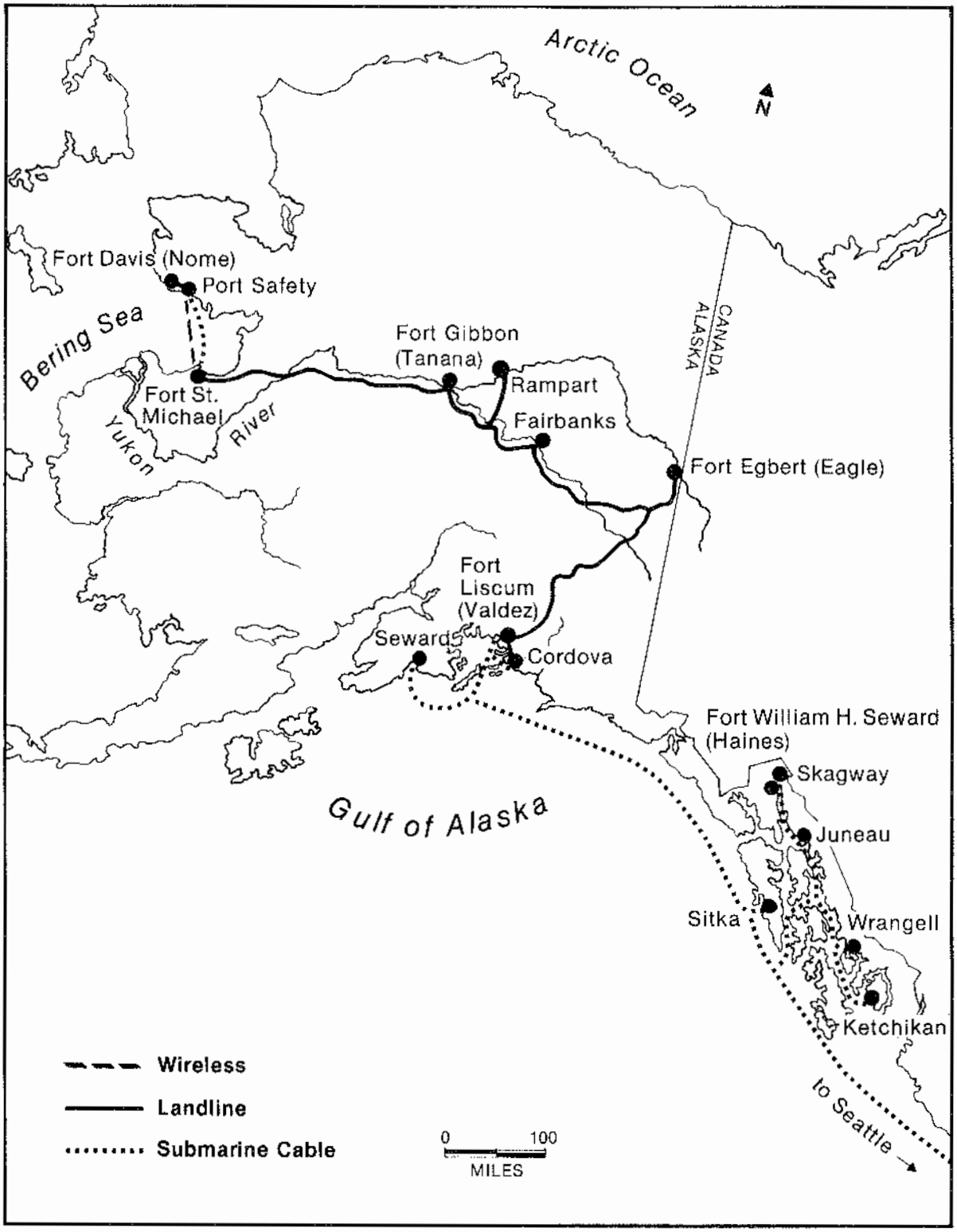
Although the military had become the federal presence in the territory, the gold discoveries had also focused congressional attention on Alaska. Between 1897 and 1899 Congress passed two major pieces of legislation that were significant for the North. The first made various provisions for the construction of railroads and extended the homestead laws to Alaska. It also provided that citizens of Canada were to be accorded the same mining rights as United States' citizens were granted in the dominion and that goods could be transported duty free between Alaskan and Canadian ports if the latter granted reciprocal rights.[32] The other piece of major legislation was a complex and lengthy "clarifying" act

29. Brig. Gen. William L. Mitchell, *The Opening of Alaska*, edited by Lyman L. Woodman (Anchorage, Alaska: Cook Inlet Historical Society, 1982), p. x.

30. Quirk, *Washington-Alaska Military Cable*, p. 7.

31. USARAL Pam 360-5, pp. 53-63.

32. Claus-M. Naske, *An Interpretative History of Alaskan Statehood* (Anchorage, Alaska: Alaska Northwest Publishing Company, 1973), p. 4.



The Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System, popularly called WAMCATS.

which provided for the punishment of crime in Alaska and also gave a code of criminal procedure. It codified the laws of Oregon and modified them somewhat for Alaska. It also included a tax system, the first levied in the district, and legalized the sale of liquor.[33]

Lawmakers introduced a great many Alaska measures between 1900 and 1901, including bills pertaining to Native welfare, reindeer herding, education, the fisheries, the judiciary, and a recurrent request for an Alaskan delegate to Congress. In 1900 Congress passed an Alaskan civil code and a code of civil procedure. With this piece of legislation, Congress began to deal directly with the problem of providing a general governmental system for Alaska. The measure divided Alaska into three parts, and courts were established at Sitka, Nome, and Eagle City on the Yukon, with authority to convene elsewhere when necessary. It also made possible the incorporation of municipalities for the first time.[34]

Inspired by all the activity at the turn of the century, the United States Senate appointed a subcommittee of its Committee on Territories to journey to Alaska in 1903 and make a "thorough investigation of existing conditions, her resources and her needs, with the purpose to ascertain and report what, if any, legislation is required for that district.[35]

Thereupon, the chairman of the Senate Committee on Territories, Senator Albert J. Beveridge, appointed a subcommittee consisting of Senators Dillingham (Vermont) who acted as chairman, Henry E. Burnham (New Hampshire), Knute Nelson (Minnesota), and Thomas M. Patterson (Colorado). The four senators met in Seattle and sailed for Alaska on June 28. They cruised through the Inside Passage to the head of Lynn Canal, stopping at various settlements along the way. They went over the White Pass to Lake Lebarge, the Lewes River, and along the upper Yukon River to Dawson City, where they visited the gold fields and examined the Yukon Territory's form of government. From Dawson the group continued downstream all the way to St. Michael, stopping at various settlements and army forts.

On the morning of July 20, 1903, Federal District Court Judge James Wickersham convened court in Rampart on the Yukon River. He had rented the only suitable space, a large warehouse, and had fitted it out with barroom chairs and rough benches. Just as the work of the court was to begin, the *Jeff C. Davis*, the army transport from Fort Gibbon, announced its arrival with a long whistle. On board were the four United States senators and their staff engaged in studying conditions in Alaska. Judge Wickersham arranged for the subcommittee to use some of the space in the temporary courthouse for holding public meetings to get suggestions from Alaskans for possible legislation to develop the territory's government and natural resources.

The four senators were attorneys, and on their second day at Rampart they expressed the wish to be admitted to the Alaska bar. Wickersham thereupon asked Charles E. Claypool, the U.S. Commissioner from Circle City, to move for their admission in open court. The judge then administered the oath admitting them to practice law in Alaska.

While in Rampart, the members of the Arctic Brotherhood entertained the senators at a smoker, and the four men became so interested in the Alaska fraternal order that they asked to be admitted to membership. The Arctic Brotherhood complied and initiated them in due and regular form. "After a 'wet' lunch, the entire membership of the Arctic Brotherhood, dressed in their long white parkas, escorted the senators to the riverbank and gave them the 'malamute howl' as they embarked on the steamer for their long trip to Nome."[36]

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

34. *Ibid.*

35. U.S. Cong., Senate, 58C., 2S., S. Rpt. 282, *Conditions in Alaska*, Hearings before Subcommittee of Committee on Territories Appointed to Investigate Conditions in Alaska (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), p. 1.

36. James Wickersham, *Old Yukon: Tales - Trails - and Trials* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Law Book Co., 1938), pp. 413-415.

At St. Michael the U.S. Revenue Marine Service cutter *McCulloch* took the senatorial party aboard, and they went on to Nome, St. Paul in the Pribilof Islands, Dutch Harbor, and Unalaska, passing through the Aleutian Islands into the North Pacific. They continued their journey along Alaska's southern coast, stopping at Karluk and Kodiak, Valdez, and Sitka. The senators visited Juneau a second time and returned to Seattle on August 26. Throughout their extensive journey, the senators held hearings and took testimony from residents. By the time they returned to Seattle, they had covered a distance of 6,600 miles, but only 111 of those miles were on land.[37]

During the course of their journey, the senators took testimony from 61 witnesses in 11 settlements and towns. The witnesses were concerned with a wide variety of subjects, ranging from agriculture to boundary questions, coal and copper deposits, the necessity for an elected delegate to Congress, fish hatcheries, freight rates, game laws, care of the insane, the need for lighthouses and better mail service, surveys and taxes, and the need for a territorial government and better transportation. Numerous individuals addressed the lack of roads and trails. William Daily of Ketchikan told the senators that he represented the Unuk Mining, Smelting, and Transportation Company of Danville, Illinois, whose mines were located 42 miles from the mouth of the Unuk River. Daily told the group that his company at the time was constructing a wagon road to its mines at an estimated expense of $50,000. Daily reminded the senators that the Canadian government built roads into territories to aid economic development, but he complained that no similar provisions were made in Alaska.[38]

At Eagle on the Yukon River, the senators called on Lieutenant William Mitchell of the U.S. Signal Corps, then in charge of building part of the Alaska telegraph system, to testify on territorial conditions and needs. Mitchell told the group that it would cost more than $2 million to construct a fair wagon road from Eagle to Tanana Crossing and from there to the head of steamboat navigation at Chena at the confluence of the Chena and Tanana rivers, a total distance of about 520 miles. He related that a 165-mile wagon road from Tanana Crossing to Copper Center would be easier to construct because the country was not as rugged as along the Tanana River or near Eagle. However, it would be as expensive as the others because materials would have to be transported across the rugged coastal mountains. A continuation of the route from Copper Center to Valdez, although only 103 miles in length, would be difficult to build because of the mountainous character of the country. Mitchell told the senators that a wagon road could leave Copper Center and follow a low ridge to the Tonsina River, a distance of about 25 miles; from there to Tiekel Station was another 24 miles, thence 23 miles to Saina, 13 miles to Dutch Flat, 8.5 miles to Keystone Station, and a final 12 miles to Valdez. A military trail already existed between Valdez and Copper Center. This trail connected with another one that led to Tanana Crossing. Although very crude, it made possible the transportation of supplies with pack animals.[39]

Abraham Spring of Fairbanks testified that Alaska needed roads and trails. Only Congress could appropriate the sums necessary to construct wagon roads connecting Alaska's principal settlements. Miners themselves could build the feeder roads. Spring suggested that miners be permitted to perform road work annually in lieu of the required assessment labor on claims and that the whole system of road building should be under the direction of commissioners who know the needs of the various districts. The lack of good trails and wagon roads made mining very expensive. Miners and trading companies had built trails and bridges by subscription, each contributing as much as he could afford. But every summer, trails and

37. S. Rpt. 282, *Conditions in Alaska*, Subcommittee of Committee on Territories.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 54-64.

bridges had to be rebuilt. Spring explained to his audience that there was "no intelligent supervision of the work, there is no engineering skill."[40]

Federal Judge James Wickersham supported the contention of many witnesses that the cost of getting provisions from the navigable streams, particularly the Yukon, was so high as to be almost prohibitive. Witnesses had repeatedly asked that the government build wagon roads from points along the rivers to the mining camps. Wickersham explained that the development of large areas of low-grade mining ground around Nome had only been made possible by competitive, cheap ocean transportation. Goods and supplies were landed almost as cheaply as they could be bought in Seattle, Portland, or San Francisco. Supplies destined for the areas along the Yukon, however, either came down the river via Skagway and Dawson or upriver from St. Michael. Miners had to wait until winter to transport their goods on dogsleds from distributing points on the Yukon and its tributaries to the mines. Supplies destined for miners working at Coldfoot in the Koyukuk district landed at Bettles, at the head of navigation or the Koyukuk River but below the mining center, at $135 per ton. From Bettles, supplies had to be forwarded to Coldfoot in the summer by a scow pulled by horses along the riverbank or, even more laboriously, by poling boats; in the winter freight moved on dogsleds. Summer or winter, this added an additional $200 a ton to freight costs, making the total $335 per ton at Coldfoot. The freight on a 50-pound sack of flour delivered to Bettles came to $3.37; transporting the same sack to Coldfoot cost an additional $5.00, for a total of $8.37. The 50-pound sack of flour eventually retailed for well over $10.00. (A table showing 1903 freight rates from St. Michael to various Yukon River points, giving an overview of the Appendices.)

Wickersham told the senators that to develop interior Alaska's mining potential, certain wagon roads were essential:

1) *from Valdez across to Eagle City by way of the Fortymile River;*
2) *a branch road from Tanana Crossing, north along the Tanana River to Fairbanks and thence across to Rampart;*
3) *a branch road from Circle City on the Yukon to Fairbanks;*
4) *a continuation of the Tanana valley road to Coldfoot on the Koyukuk; and*
5) *branch roads from these main trunk lines to the various mining centers.*

When asked what institutional framework was needed for road building, Wickersham suggested that a three-member road commission be appointed in each of Alaska's three judicial districts with the territorial governor serving as an ex-officio member of each commission. The chief executive was the right person for the job, Wickersham suggested, for he received a good salary and had very little to do. The construction should be financed from the license fees paid outside of incorporated towns.[41]

In addition to much testimony by individual witnesses favoring the construction of roads and trails, two communities also submitted formal resolutions to the senators. The citizens of Eagle regarded the lack of sound overland transportation routes to be the main drawback to the development of the country. The construction of roads and trails would encourage the mining industry; furnish routes for the Postal Department and decrease the cost of mail delivery; save the judiciary thousands of dollars annually in traveling fees and reduce per diem expenses of marshals, witnesses, and jurors; and it would save the War Department thousands of dollars in freight costs. The citizens of Nome urged Congress to make liberal appropriations for the construction of permanent roads, trails, and bridges between Nome and settlements in the interior and on the coast, and emphasized that the trails and roads needed to be provided with guideboards or

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 94-101.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 118-124.

stakes of sufficient height so they could be readily observed above the snow line.[42]

After their return from the extensive Alaska trip, the senators summarized their impressions to their colleagues. They had been awed by Alaska's vastness and surprised at the lack of transportation facilities. "Outside the few and scattered settlements called towns, which are found in different parts of Alaska proper, and most of which are but the centers of mining interests," they commented, "there is not to be found a single public wagon road over which vehicles can be drawn summer or winter."

It was true. The military trail between Valdez and Eagle, constructed by the War Department in 1899-1900, was only fit for saddle and pack animals. Summer transportation relied on the waterways and on pack horses and during the long winters on dog teams. The senators observed that Alaska's development depended "more upon the improvement of transportation facilities than upon any other one instrumentality." The federal government had done nothing to construct a transportation system. "It has neither built roads nor provided other means of transportation," the senators stated, "and the hardy and adventurous who have sought the wealth hidden in the valleys of the Yukon, the Koyukuk, and Seward Peninsula have done so amidst difficulties that can only be understood by those who have made a study of the situation." The senators contrasted federal inactivity with Canadian achievements in the Yukon Territory. Between 1898 and 1903, the Canadian government had spent $1,025,000 to construct and maintain 850 miles of wagon roads and winter trails leading to the camps from Dawson. Some 225 miles of the total could carry the heaviest of freight, such as machinery so large that moving it took 6 to 12 horses.[43]

The subcommittee recommended that the government construct a system of transportation routes and that the basis for such a system should be a well-built wagon road connecting the Pacific Ocean at Valdez with Eagle on the Yukon River, a distance of approximately four hundred miles. The road should follow the general lines of the military trail which Captain Abercrombie and his men had built in 1899-1900. The military telegraph line, recently completed, followed the same route. The subcommittee explained that Valdez was the finest far northern harbor on the Pacific Coast, open and ice-free throughout the year, a natural gateway to Alaska's interior, and a key to its economic development. Eagle, once it was connected by a road, should become the distributing point for American goods for most of the vast Yukon basin. Most important, the subcommittee believed that a system of wagon roads and trails would allow miners to use modern heavy machinery in extracting minerals, would induce immigration, and even result in a permanent population "wedded to the soil." In conclusion, the subcommittee members stated that it was "as much of a duty to build the road [between Valdez and Eagle] and secure the American interests of the district to the United States as it was to build the first Pacific railroad to connect the Pacific Coast with the territory east of the Rocky Mountains." To finance such a program of road construction, they suggested that the taxes on the salmon fisheries be increased and that, together with already available revenues, these monies would "constitute an annual fund which, if wisely used, will result in a grand advance in Alaska's development and wealth."[44]

The subcommittee had distributed its report to the full Senate on January 12, 1904, and three days later a deluge of Alaska bills descended upon both houses. Most of these measures were referred to the Committees on Territories, and those bodies held extensive hearings in an attempt to coordinate the different parts of the Alaska program. An appropriation to conduct a preliminary survey of a wagon road from Valdez to Fort Egbert at Eagle and for a military trail between the Yukon River and Coldfoot passed quickly. The Secretary of War was to make the necessary arrangements.

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93, 164.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-11.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-17.

Thereupon, the War Department appointed J. M. Clapp, an assistant engineer in the Seattle office of the Corps of Engineers, to head the survey parties. Clapp assigned 48 men to accomplish the Valdez-Fort Egbert survey. He appointed Oscar A. Piper and two assistants to survey the Yukon River-Coldfoot route. On August 14, 1904, the survey party had completed the 430-mile survey, and Clapp estimated that it would cost $3,500 per mile or approximately $1.5 million to build the wagon road from Valdez to Fort Egbert.[45]

In the meantime Piper and his men and pack animals continued downstream on the steamer *John Cudahy* and on June 21 landed opposite Fort Hamlin, an abandoned Alaska Commercial Company trading post named for Charles S. Hamlin, an assistant secretary of the Treasury between 1893 and 1897 and a commissioner at the convention between Great Britain and the United States in 1897 to determine the fur seal fishery controversy. At Fort Hamlin, 40 miles northeast of Rampart, the Yukon emerges from the flats and narrows into a single stream, flanked on either side by densely timbered ridges. After cutting trail for a couple of days, the party left the Yukon on June 24, surveyed in a northwesterly direction, and reached Coldfoot on July 12. The party concluded its field work on August 14. Piper found about 80 well-built cabins at Coldfoot, most of them deserted for the mining season. He estimated that Coldfoot had a winter population of about 60 souls, and the whole Koyukuk valley a population of approximately 300 miners. He calculated that it would cost about $6,000 to build a 136-mile trail sufficient to meet the current needs of the miners.[46]

Creation of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska

Knute Nelson, U.S. Senator for Minnesota since 1895, became active in Alaska legislation after his 1903 visit. He introduced a measure in 1904 reapportioning the money received for licenses outside of the towns. It designated such fees the "Alaska Fund" and gave 5 percent to the Secretary of the Interior for the care of the insane, 25 percent to elected school boards under the superintendency of the territorial governor for the education of white children, and the remaining 70 percent to the Secretary of War for road construction. Roads were to be built under the direction of a board of road commissioners composed of an engineer officer of the U.S. Army to be appointed by the Secretary of War and two other officers drawn from troops stationed in Alaska. The new Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska was empowered,

> *upon their own motion or upon petition, to locate, lay out, construct, and maintain wagon roads and pack trails from any point on the navigable waters.... to any town, mining or other industrial camp or settlement, between any such town, camps or settlements..., if in their judgment such roads or trails are needed and will be of permanent value for the development of the district.*

The board was not to build roads or trails to transitory settlements. Any work worth more than $5,000 was to be let for bid and awarded to the lowest bidder, but if all bids were deemed too high, the board possessed the power to perform the required work by buying the necessary materials and hiring the men. The board also was responsible for maintaining this transportation network.[47]

45. U.S. Cong., House, 58C. 3S., H. Doc. 192, *Wagon Road from Valdez to Fort Egbert, Alaska, and Military Trails Between Yukon River and Coldfoot, Alaska* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), pp. 1-3.

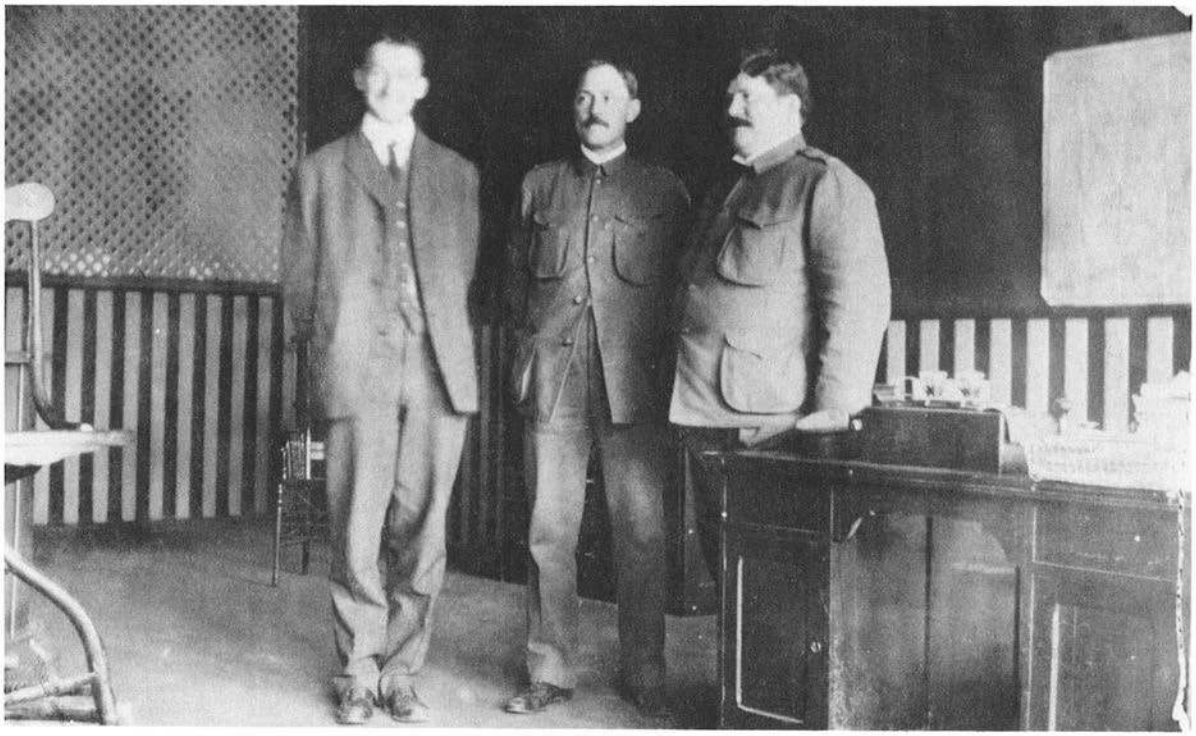
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 16-23.

47. Jeanette P. Nichols, *Alaska: A History of its Administration, Exploitation, and Industrial Development During its First Half Century Under the Rule of the United States* (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1963), pp. 231-233; *Report of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska for the Season of 1905*, November 1, 1905, photocopy, pp. 1-2.

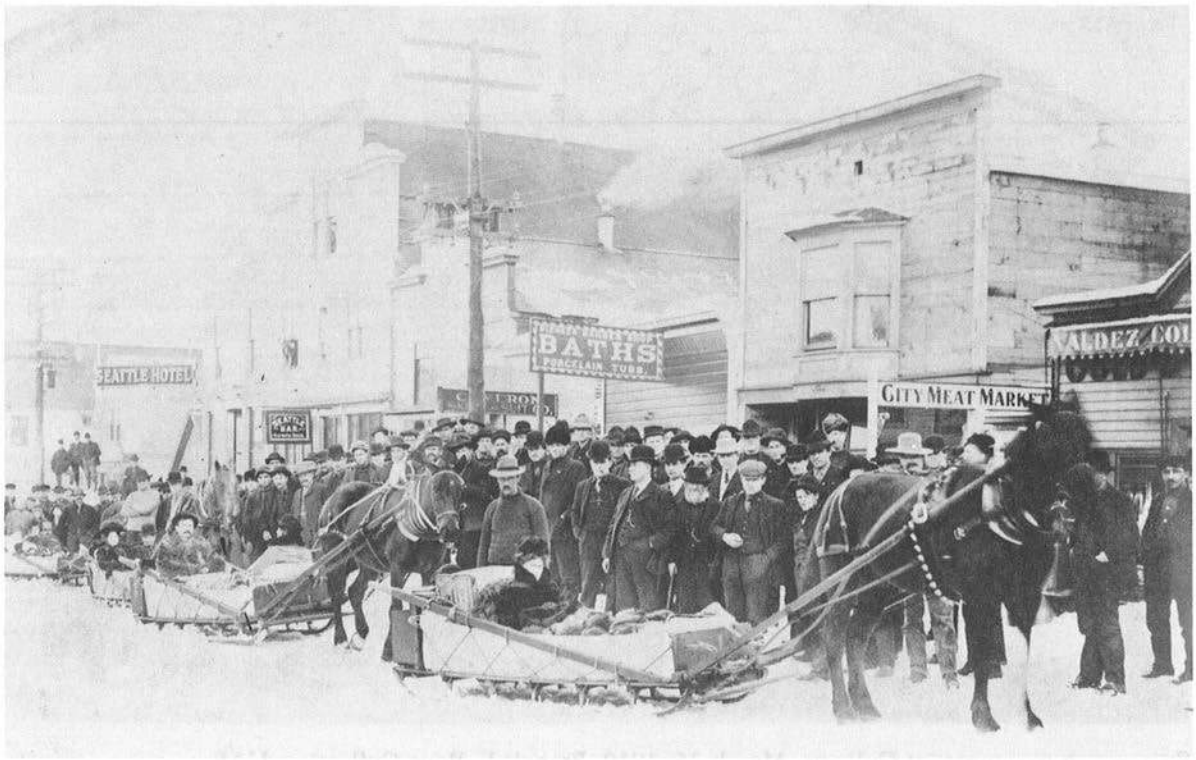
The Fairbanks Valdes Stage, Ed. S. Orr & Co., carried mail and passengers along the Valdez-Fairbanks trail; about 1910. Mary Whalen Collection, Alaska and Polar Regions Department, The Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska, Fairbanks (UAF).

Judge James Wickersham, Valdez, about 1900. Mary Whalen Collection, UAF.

Stagecoach passengers at Gulkana, March 26, 1910. Francis E. Pope Collection, UAF.



Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska: President Wilds P. Richardson (right); Lieutenant Samuel C. Orchard, Secretary and Disbursing Officer (center); Captain George B. Pillsbury, Engineer Officer (left); 1906. Francis E. Pope Collection, UAF.

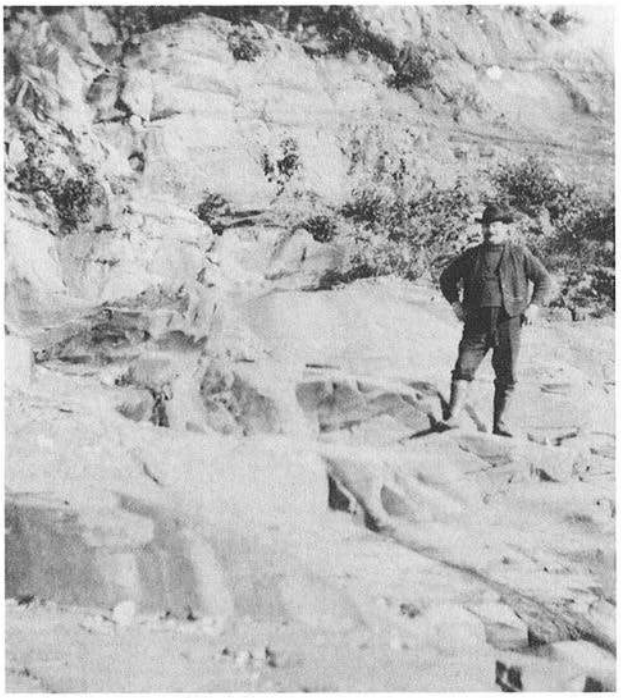


D. T. Kennedy's stages leaving Valdez for Fairbanks, February 25, 1908. John Zug Collection, UAF.

U.S. Mail dog team on the Yukon River, early 1900s. John Zug Collection, UAF.

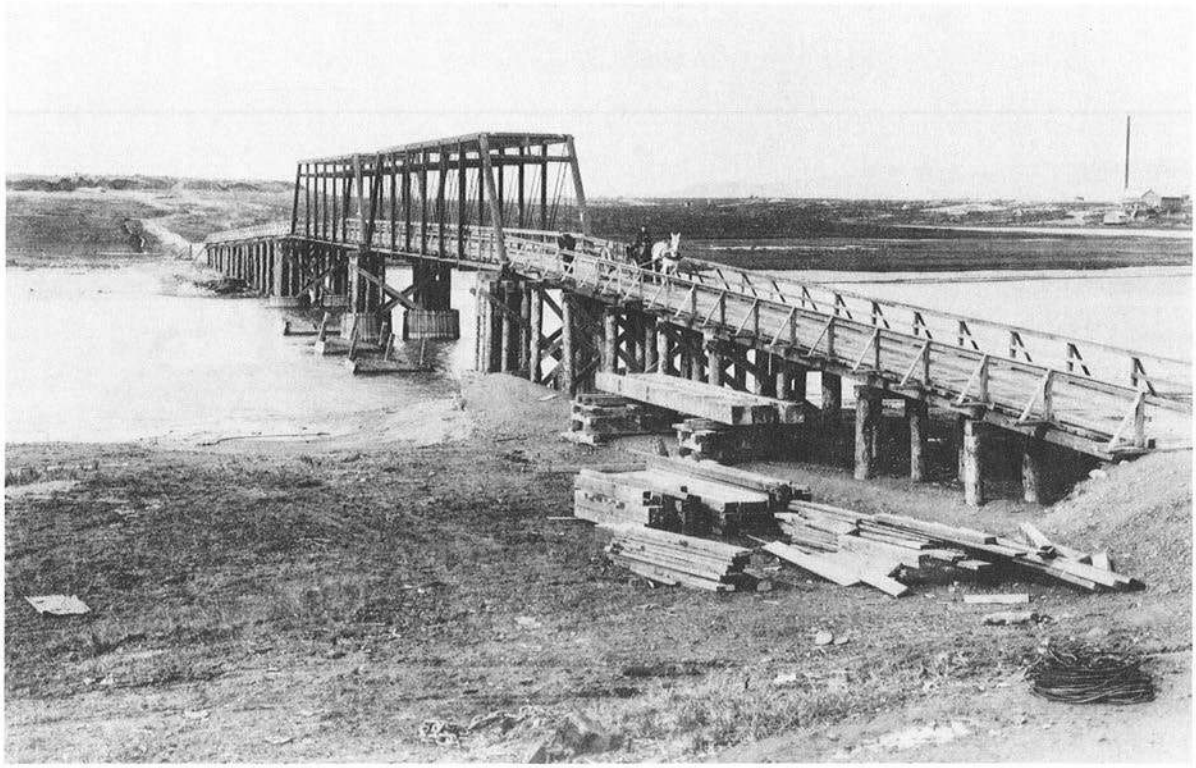
Boiler and pile driver in operation on bridge construction near Valdez, about 1910. John Zug Collection, UAF.

Captain F. A. Pope at Sourdough Roadhouse, 1909. He was the engineer officer of the ARC from 1908 to 1911. Francis E. Pope Collection, UAF.



Major Wilds P. Richardson at summit of Thompson Pass, September 1908. Francis E. Pope Collection, UAF.

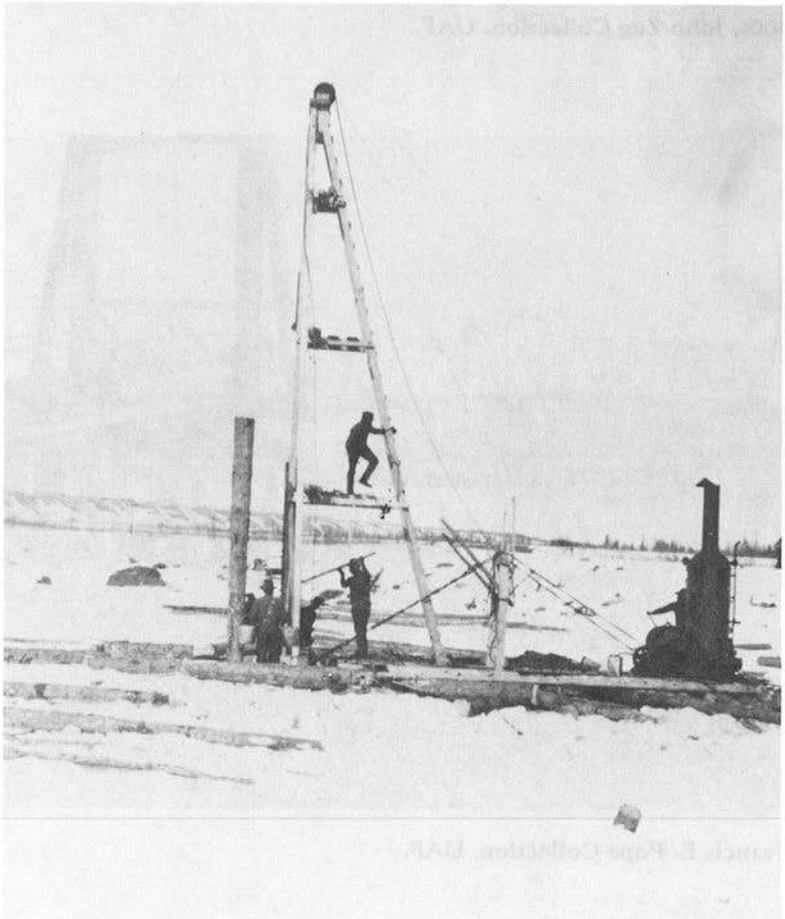
"Ingrams outfit" (ARC) freighting supplies along the Richardson Trail , at Paxson's Roadhouse, 1909. Francis E. Pope Collection, UAF.



A bridge in the Nome area, early 1900s. John Zug Collection, UAF.

Nome River bridge, July 17, 1908. Francis E. Pope Collection, UAF.

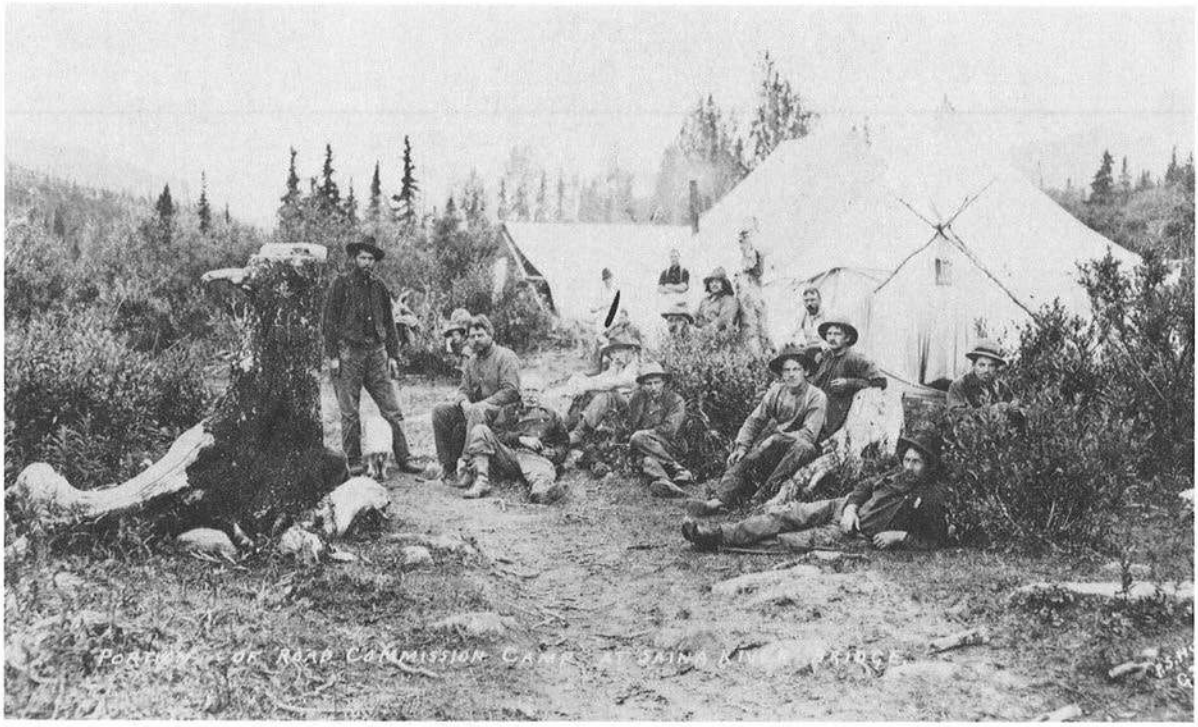
Bonanza River ferry, Seward Peninsula, about 1908. Francis E. Pope Collection, UAF.



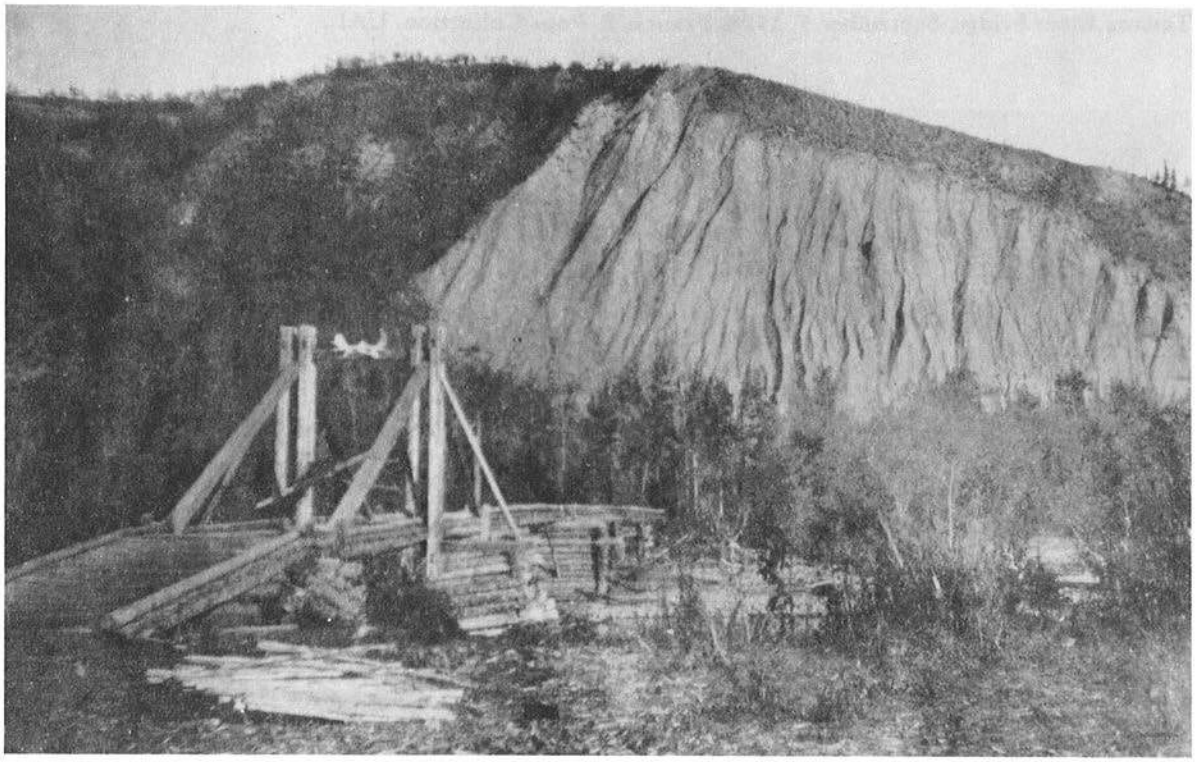
Pile driver in operation on Tazlina River bridge, 1906. Francis E. Pope Collection, UAF.

Tanana River bridge, September 5, 1908. Francis E. Pope Collection, UAF.

Tazlina River bridge, about 1909-1919. Francis E. Pope Collection, UAF.

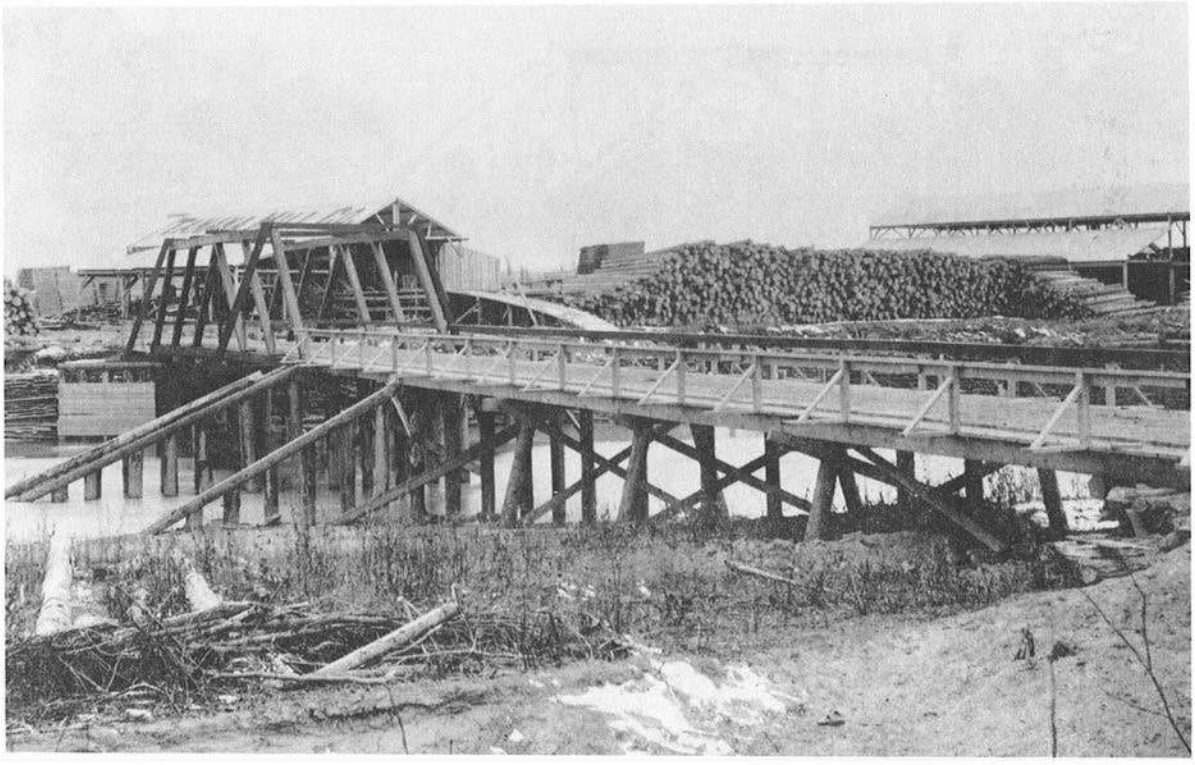


Alaska Road Commission camp at Saina River bridge, 1910. John Zug Collection, UAF.



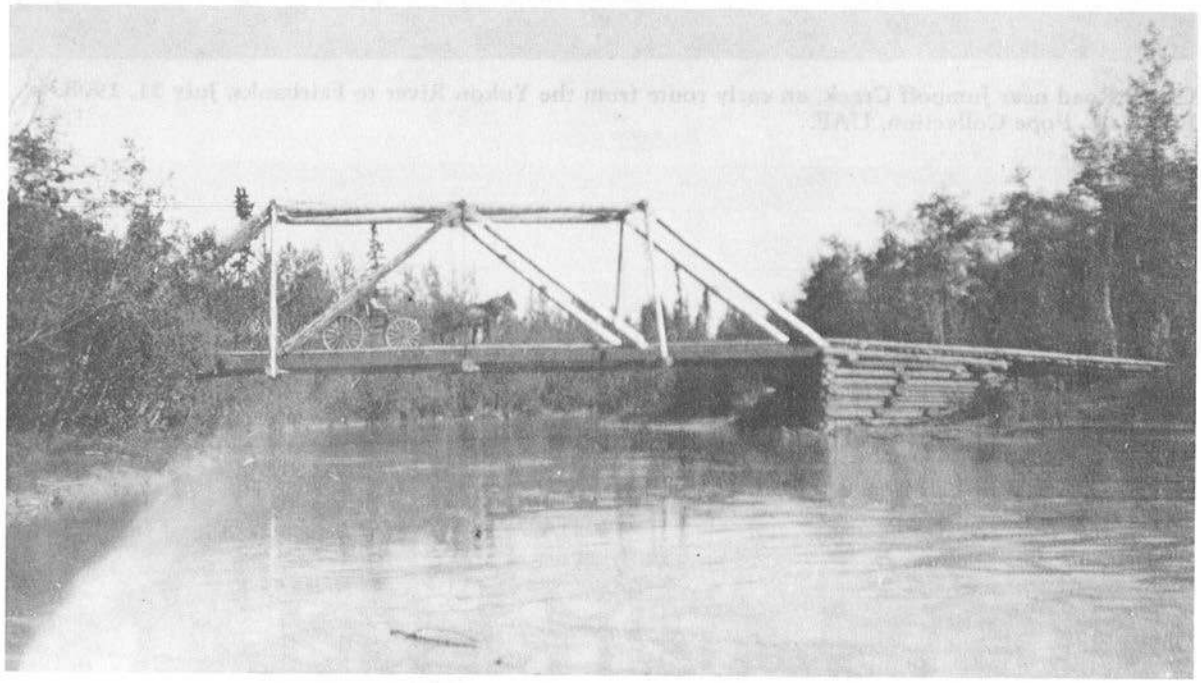
Tonsina River bridge, September 1908. The bridge was built in 1899. No iron was used in construction. Francis E. Pope Collection, UAF.

Circle Road near Jumpoff Creek, an early route from the Yukon River to Fairbanks, July 31, 1908. Francis E. Pope Collection, UAF.

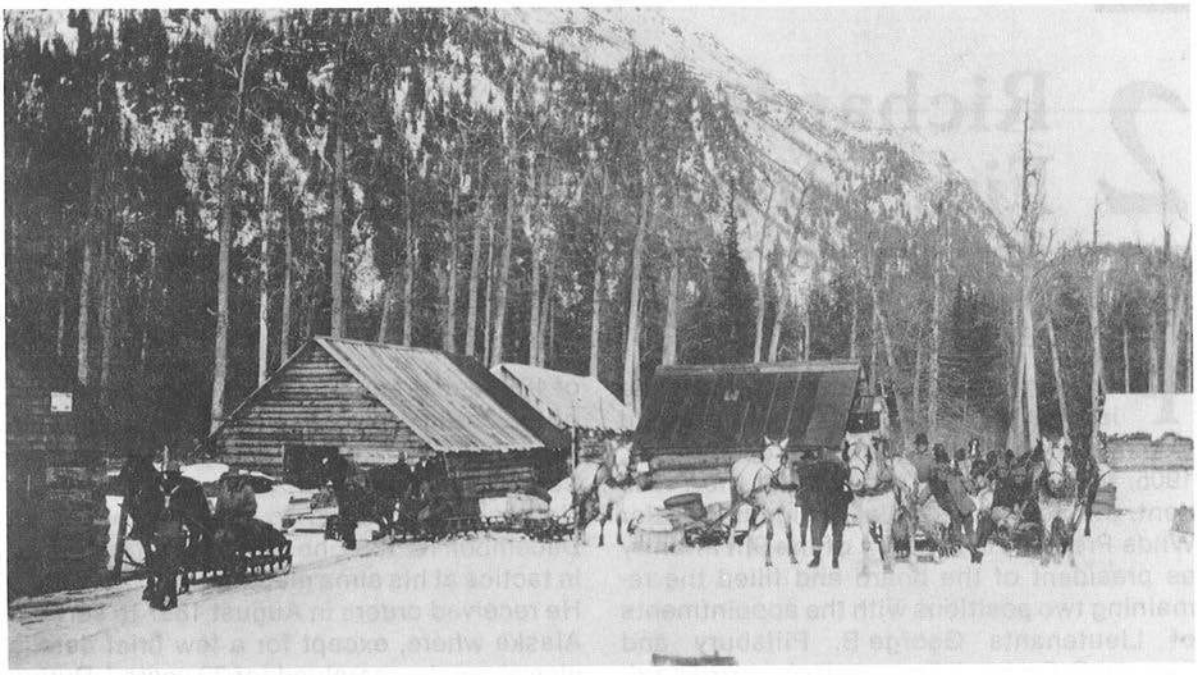


Bridge over Noyes Slough, Fairbanks, early 1900s. John Zug Collection, UAF.

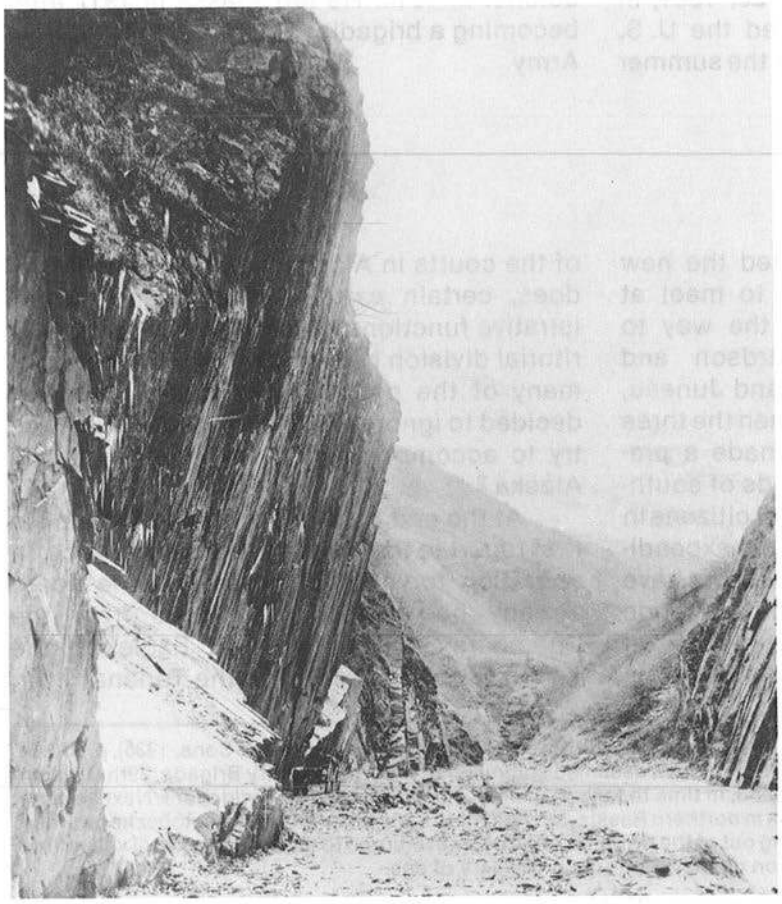
The Valdez-Fairbanks trail; one mile from Fairbanks, August 18, 1909. Francis E. Pope Collection,



Bridge near Fairbanks on the Valdez-Fairbanks trail, August 24, 1908. Francis E. Pope Collection, UAF.



Alaska Road Commission sledding party at Old Camp Comfort, April 1909. Francis E. Pope Collection, UAF.



Keystone Canyon on the Valdez-Fairbanks trail. John Zug Collection, UAF.

2 Richardson: First Board President

President Theodore Roosevelt signed the legislation creating the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska on January 27, 1905. In March, upon the wish of the President, the Secretary of War designated Major Wilds Preston Richardson of the 9th Infantry as president of the board and filled the remaining two positions with the appointments of Lieutenants George B. Pillsbury and Samuel C. Orchard. Roosevelt chose Richardson because he had been favorably impressed with his Alaskan duty during the gold rush years.

Richardson, born on March 20, 1861, in Hunt County, Texas, had entered the U. S. Military Academy at West Point in the summer of 1880 and graduated as a second lieutenant of the 8th Infantry on June 15, 1884. He then served in a garrison in California and on frontier duty in Apache country and in western Nebraska. Promoted to first lieutenant on December 16, 1889, he served as an instructor in tactics at his alma mater from 1892 to 1897. He received orders in August 1897 to serve in Alaska where, except for a few brief details elsewhere, he remained for 20 years.[1] During his tenure in Alaska, Richardson was promoted to captain on April 26, 1898; to major on April 7, 1904; lieutenant colonel in 1908; and colonel in 1914. He left Alaska in 1917 after becoming a brigadier general in the National Army.

The First Year

The War Department directed the new Board of Road Commissioners to meet at Skagway on May 15, 1905. On the way to Skagway from Seattle, Richardson and Pillsbury stopped at Ketchikan and Juneau, where Orchard met the two, and then the three men stopped at Haines. They made a preliminary inquiry into the road needs of southeastern Alaska and soon found that citizens in the region were concerned about the expenditures from the Alaska Fund, preferring to have these spent in the region in which the funds were collected. Richardson reported that "on account of the somewhat exceptional status of the courts in Alaska, embracing as it [sic] does, certain extra executive and administrative functions, a sort of sentiment of territorial division has grown up in the minds of many of the people." The board president decided to ignore these divisions and instead try to accomplish what was best for all of Alaska.[2]

At the end of May, Richardson made his first report to the Adjutant General's office. In operation for only a few weeks, the board already had received petitions from the Chambers of Commerce of Eagle on the Yukon River, Fairbanks on the Tanana River,

1. Dumas Malone, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. 15 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 576. In March 1918, after leaving his Alaska duty, Richardson assumed command of the 78th Infantry Brigade, 39th Division and arrived overseas at Brest on September 3, in time to take part in the closing battles of World War I. Next he commanded the American Forces at Murmansk in northern Russia, arriving there early in April 1919. In October he returned to the United States, and with the mustering out of the National Army he was returned to the rank of colonel and retired on October 31, 1920. He died in Washington on May 20, 1929, at 69 years of age.

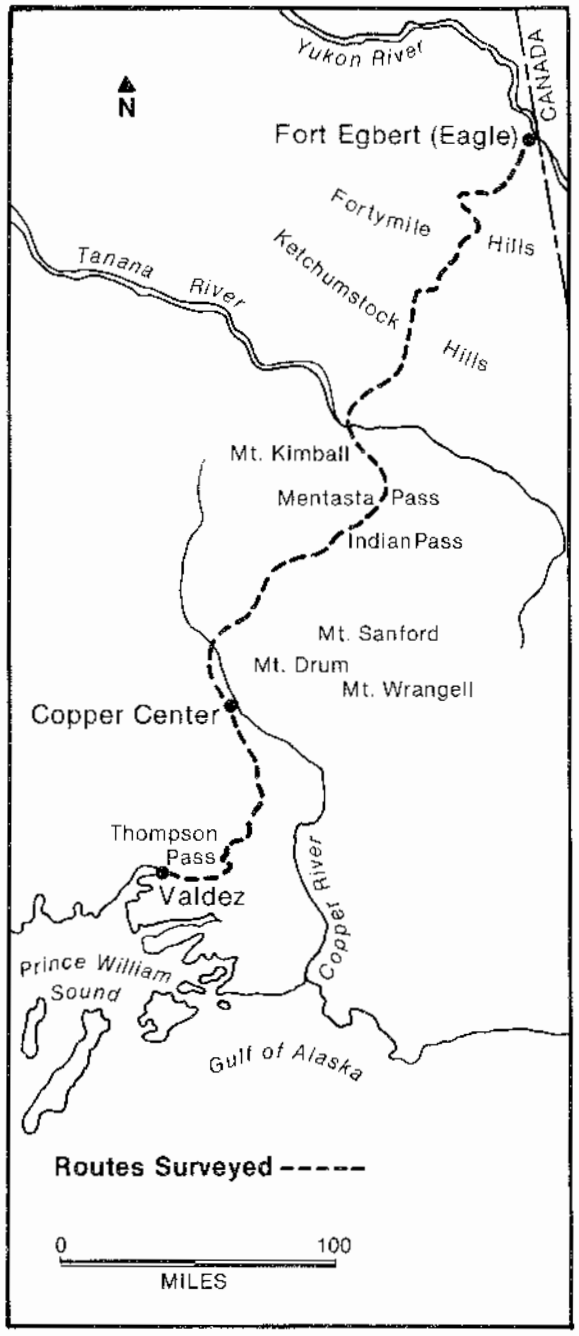
2. *1905 Report of the Board of Road Commissioners*, pp. 4-5.

and Valdez on Prince William Sound, all urging that further work be undertaken on the Trans-Alaskan Military Road or the "All American Route" as it also was called, from tidewater to the middle Yukon. All petitions had mentioned the constantly increasing traffic along this route and its difficulties because of the "wretched condition of the trail in many places, becoming worse each year," and the need to construct bridges or safe ferries across wild streams.

Richardson commented that the route had many advantages but was difficult to build and maintain, and the War Department already had spent large sums of money on it. Alaskan economic conditions just then did not justify the expenditures for a well-constructed highway or wagon road. There was little money for the many needs, Richardson continued, and the law also prevented the board from spending most of its funds on this kind of general work to the exclusion of local needs in various localities. The All American Route was used for supplying and maintaining the military telegraph line, and the board, therefore, had decided to make some improvements at the terminal points of the route at Valdez and Eagle and also in the vicinity of Fairbanks.[3]

Since the route was important from a military point of view, Richardson then asked the army to assign a company of engineer troops to Alaska. This company, to be stationed at Valdez, would work under the direction of the board in improving the military trail and mail route between Valdez, Fairbanks, and the Yukon. Richardson promised that the board would "separate as far as practicable, the duty of the troops from the work of civilians under employment, and would, of course, give consideration to the difference in status, pay, etc., and would endeavor to protect them from unnecessary hardship."[4]

The War Department denied the major's request for a company of engineers, but approved his plans for the organization of the board and the way in which it would conduct its work. Actually, the act of January 27, 1905,



Surveyed wagon road from Fort Egbert to Valdez.

3. Richardson to the Military Secretary of the Army, May 25, 1905, R. G. 94, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s to 1917, AGO Doc. File, various files pertaining to Alaska, N.A.

4. *Ibid.*

which established the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska prescribed the duties of the board in such detail as to make it unnecessary to prepare any regulations. Among other things, the act provided that whenever more than $5,000 were to be expended for road or trail work, the job had to be advertised and awarded to the lowest bidder. Richardson asked, and the War Department agreed, that the general rules and regulations applicable to contracts and purchases for the War Department "generally shall apply to the contractual undertakings of the boards," except that advertisements and proposals were to be submitted in triplicate. One copy was to go to the Returns Office of the Interior Department, one to the Treasury Department, and the third was to be retained by the disbursing officer of the board. The board also was to have the authority to accept bids, award work, and approve contracts negotiated by the disbursing officer "where the construction by contract is found to be advantageous to the public interest." Copies of contracts were sent to the Assistant Secretary of War who was "to be the medium of communication between the board and the War Department."

In addition to the detailed report to be submitted as soon as work on a road or trail had been completed, the board pledged itself to render a full report at the end of each season on the total work performed during the preceding working season. Richardson also stated that the annual report would "contain such information in respect to population, conditions, prospective benefits, etc., as will be necessary to acquaint the department with the character and progress of the work." And finally, Richardson asked that the disbursing officer be authorized, with board approval, "to incur and pay the necessary expenses for office hire, and to purchase such office furniture, instruments, and other materials as may be necessary for the execution of the work" of the board.[5]

The War Department approved all of Richardson's requests, and with the organizational details taken care of, the board members turned to their work. During the summer of 1905 they traveled widely. Richardson went down the Yukon River via White Pass, visiting Eagle, Circle, and Rampart. He went up the Tanana River to Fairbanks and from there down to St. Michael, Nome, and Ophir Creek (Council City) districts, and other parts of the Seward Peninsula. Orchard inspected the Valdez trail and determined what improvements it needed. Pillsbury examined a section of a road from Whitehorse to Yukon Crossing in the Yukon Territory; he then went to Ketchikan and ordered a survey for a road across a short portage of 4 miles on Prince of Wales Island from Cholmondeley Sound to Hetta Inlet; he also ordered a survey for a road from Haines Mission up to the Chilkat and Klehini River valleys toward the international boundary. As if that was not enough for one short season, Pillsbury then went to Valdez in September and crossed Big Delta Pass into the interior, the proposed route of the new trail from the coast. From Fairbanks he went downriver to St. Michael and Nome; he left Alaska by ocean steamer late in the fall.[6]

Richardson estimated that the new town of Fairbanks had a population of approximately 3,000, with another 5,000 miners working on creeks in the vicinity. The Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce appealed to Richardson to have a wagon road constructed between the camp and adjacent mines, for the spring breakup had forced the two stage lines to suspend operations because the trails had become nearly impassable:

> *The town could now only be reached on foot, and it was not uncommon to see miners come in here* [Fairbanks] *late in the evening, almost exhausted, with their clothing torn and draggled in the mud, after a trip of some thirty miles over a trail from six inches to two feet deep in mud, and from forcing their way through the brush and timber to avoid some of the worst places.*[7]

5. Judge-Advocate General to the Acting Secretary of War, June 15, 1905, R. G. 94, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s to 1917, AGO Doc. File, various files pertaining to Alaska, N.A.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

Richardson quickly concluded that Chester W. Purington's 1895 observations on road building in the subarctic had been correct:

> *A serious detriment to the making of a road in Alaska is the thawing of the ground beneath the moss. It has been the universal experience that wherever the moss is cut into, thawing immediately commences, and the trail which was passable becomes a filthy, slimy mass of mud, roots, and broken stone, a difficult route for men on foot, a slow and tiresome road for loaded animals, and an impassable obstacle to any sort of vehicle. In regions further south under temperate conditions, trails frequently are developed into fair wagon roads by much usage. Such development can never take place in any part of the Northwest.*

Purington recommended that in sections with poor drainage the moss be left intact, even be added to by material taken from the side ditches, and the surface then be corduroyed with heavy brush or poles. On top of this a covering of gravel would add insulation.[8]

On Richardson's recommendation, the board then spent a total of $7,851 in the Fairbanks area, building a six-mile road from Gilmore to Summit, designated as route No. 7, and a trunk road from Summit to the mines on Cleary Creek. The Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska contracted the work since it had no employees of its own.[9]

Major Richardson was particularly concerned with the development of interior and northwest Alaska. This necessitated the speedy development of the Valdez-Fairbanks route which consisted of various trail segments. The first of these, from Valdez to Copper Center, essentially followed the military trail Abercrombie had built earlier; the second led up the Tanana River from Fairbanks; and the third connected these two segments from Copper Center to Isabel Pass. Richardson pointed out that the new route would speed mail delivery and thus save time and money. The board president reported that some work, primarily repairs and improvements such as replacing approximately 3,032 feet of worn-out corduroy with stone ballast and building numerous small bridges over dangerous crossings, had already been accomplished on some segments of the trail. He also proposed that the dangerous Tanana River be crossed just above the mouth of the Delta River.[10]

Richardson arrived in the Nome district on August 22 to survey conditions and assess needs. He described the existing forms of transportation there, which consisted of a few narrow-gauge railroads such as the Wild Goose Railroad, or the Nome Arctic Railway, which crossed Anvil Creek and extended about 16 miles across the valley of the upper Nome River; the Solomon River Railroad from the mouth of the Solomon up to the mouth of the East Fork, approximately 14 miles; and the Council City and Ophir Creek Railroad, running from Council to claim No. 15 Ophir, approximately 8 miles. There were a few stagecoaches and numerous gasoline boats and "horse boats," 5-ton scows pulled by horses along the banks of the creeks where safe footing could be found or in the stream when it was not too deep. When all else failed, men poled the scows upriver. Residents of Nome petitioned the board to survey and construct a road leading directly into the heart of the peninsula, a distance of about 175 miles. Although such a road was too expensive to construct all at once, Richardson believed that, as funds permitted, short sections should be built where they were most needed.[11]

Richardson proposed to the War Department the construction of about 300 miles of roads and approximately 1,200 miles of trails, all urgently needed to further Alaska's economic development. He estimated that it would cost about $2,500 to $3,000 per mile of road and approximately $250 per mile of trail. The Alaska Fund was totally inadequate to

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

9. *1905 Report of the Board of Road Commissioners*, pp. 15-17.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-19.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-27.

meet these needs, and Richardson therefore suggested that Congress appropriate $1 million outright. "Such an expenditure at this time," he argued, "would be of immense benefit to the country in the way of increased production and the opening of new fields." With it, the board could purchase its own animals, tools, and equipment and organize its work on the most economical basis. He explained that the board had overexpended its $28,000 budget by $1,786.61, made necessary by building a permanent organization.[12]

The major was an ambitious and capable man. In order to gain success and prestige in his profession as a military engineer on the frontier, he needed to build his own organization and substantially increase the size of his budget. This, he probably reasoned, would give him the flexibility to build a transportation system in the North which, in turn, would enhance his career.

Back in Skagway at the end of the summer season, Richardson developed a grandiose plan for an integrated railroad and road system. The major briefly described some of the existing railroads, six altogether with relatively short mileages. For example, there was the White Pass and Yukon Railway between Skagway and Whitehorse; the Alaska Central Railroad, which had completed about 50 miles from Seward intending eventually to reach Fairbanks; and some 26 miles constructed from Chena and Fairbanks to the mining creeks in the Tanana valley. Only the Alaska Central and Solomon River railroads featured broad gauges; all the others were narrow gauge.[13] Farsightedly, the major stated that "the time has now arrived when the government should in some way undertake to control and promote this [railroad] construction in Alaska, by prescribing a uniform gauge....for all roads and....by giving substantial aid to some one road which might be regarded as a trunk line for the whole territory."

He then suggested a route for such a trunk line. It would start from Haines Mission, proceed up the Chilkat and Tlehini (now know as the Klehini) rivers and go into the interior over an easy pass. Once over the mountains the route led west and north over a rolling plateau country, intersecting the upper waters of the Alsek and White rivers, to the headwaters of the Tanana and thence down to Fairbanks. From or near Fairbanks, the route led across the country toward the Rampart mines to about 25 miles below the town of Rampart. If necessary, the Yukon River was narrow enough in that spot to be spanned by a bridge, in fact, that was "the only point that I know of for 1,500 miles on the Yukon where a bridge can be sucessfully thrown across at reasonable expense," Richardson asserted. This then was the proposed main trunk line.

"Omitting for the present the gap along the Yukon" between the crossing point and Kaltag, he continued, "the line should be taken up again" at Kaltag and continued to Unalakleet and thence along the coast. One branch would lead to St. Michael near the mouth of the Yukon, and another to the head of Norton Sound at Council City where the main trunk line would connect with the small system of roads already under construction in the area.[14]

Richardson admitted that the existing railroads might reject this main trunk line, but he dismissed the potential opposition as unimportant. The most significant advantage of his plan was that it would open the country from a protected harbor in southeastern Alaska. Trade would "develop along natural lines all the way to the westward, instead of going from Seattle....in broken lots to southeastern Alaska, Valdez, Resurrection Bay and Nome." In case the War Department rejected the railroad proposal, Richardson suggested that the government consider the construction of a road from Valdez to the upper Tanana and thence to Fairbanks and Rampart. Should this option be adopted, the major suggested that the "best solution for the question of territorial or other form of government for Alaska would be to separate

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30, 44-45.

13. Richardson to Major General F. S. Ainsworth, October 18, 1905, Confidential, R. G. 94, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s to 1917, AGO Doc. File, various files pertaining to Alaska, N.A.

14. *Ibid.*

southeastern Alaska altogether from the rest of the territory and attach it to the State of Washington." For without the railroad, southeastern Alaska would not be tied into the rest of Alaska either commercially, economically, or politically, while the Valdez-Fairbanks-Rampart road would connect the bulk of the territory commercially and politically, and make it a close trading partner for Seattle.

Richardson also urged the War Department to establish a military post at Kaltag, a key point for the lower Yukon River and the northwestern part of Alaska. This post would easily serve the purposes of Fort Gibbon, St. Michael, and Fort Davis combined. Should the Haines-Fairbanks-Rampart railroad be built, the major thought that the military post at Valdez should be relocated at a point on the upper Tanana where the route crossed the boundary. In that scenario the posts at Haines Mission, Eagle, the upper Tanana and Kaltag would "meet the needs of the whole territory in the way of military supervision."[15]

Much to his chagrin, the War Department did not respond favorably to most of his suggestions, except for approving the construction of a wagon road from Valdez to Fairbanks. Still, the board could look back on a productive first year. It had directed various reconnaissances and surveys, undertaken some repairs and improvements, built short stretches of road from Haines up the Chilkat River to the Indian villages of the Chilkat valley, and accomplished similar projects in the Fairbanks and Nome districts.

Nevertheless, the three men agreed that the monies accruing to the Alaska Fund and available for road construction were wholly inadequate to meet even the most immediate and pressing transportation needs of the territory. Furthermore, amounts from this fund varied and arrived at irregular intervals, making it almost impossible to plan ahead and commit funds for long-range projects. The members of the board were united in their opinion that the law which had created the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska needed to be amended. In November 1905 the army called Major Richardson to Washington to give a personal report and spell out needed changes. In early 1906 Congress amended the legislation as requested, regularizing the collection of license money and raising the cost of roadwork which could be performed by government forces from $5,000 to $20,000.[16] Congress also made a direct appropriation of $150,000 to be expended at the discretion of the board.

To carry out the necessary work over such a vast territory, properly supervise it, and protect expenditures, the board gave much thought to the organization of the office and to the transfer of funds and methods of payment. It divided Alaska into districts, with suboffices and with a civil engineer as superintendent in charge of each district. These superintendents were to act as disbursing agents for the board. After the board had laid out the work, the engineer officer became responsible for seeing it carried out. For that reason he was in charge of the organization of all working parties and for their immediate direction in the field, as far as possible and as consistent with the responsibilities of the other board members. The disbursing officer, for similar reasons, had great freedom in supervising all office details relating in any way to his responsibility of accounting for funds, property, and records.[17]

In order to pay for labor and supplies at distant points, the board made agreements with local banks to cash checks drawn by the various superintendents. The board had suitable checkbooks printed and distributed. The superintendents were to keep receipts and make a careful accounting. Since there were no banks in some areas where work was performed, it soon became necessary to extend this system to some kind of arrangement with commercial or trading companies. This was done by entering into a written agreement with such companies to furnish supplies and

15. Richardson to Major General F. C. Ainsworth, October 24, 1905, R. G. 94, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s to 1917, AGO Doc. File, various files pertaining to Alaska, N.A.

16. 34 Stat. 192.

17. War Department, *Report of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, 1913* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1914), p. 8.

pay the laborers. Eventually, the board established a system of payment of the overdraft principle. It reimbursed the bank or commercial company each month (or more often if desired) for amounts paid out, paying a negotiated rate of exchange varying from one-fourth to one-half of one percent.

With the framework in place, the board accepted a 1906 budget of $230,500, eight times larger than that of the previous year. Of the total, $80,500 accrued from the Alaska Fund. In addition, Congress also appropriated an extra $35,000 for a reconnaissance and preliminary survey of a mail and pack trail from the navigable waters of the Tanana River near Fairbanks to the vicinity of Council City on the Seward Peninsula, a distance of approximately 600 miles. The board hired a civil engineer, J. I. McPherson, who selected a feasible route.[18]

The Board's Second Year of Operation

The Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska was not idle during the winter of 1905-1906. It shipped rations, forage for the animals, and tools from Valdez and Fairbanks and distributed them in caches along the trail, constructed a bridge across the Tazlina River, made a reconnaissance of a part of the route from Fairbanks to Rampart, and flagged 247 miles of exposed trails on the Seward Peninsula. The board used two assistants and a seven-dog team for flagging—red flags placed at 50 to 150 feet apart (depending on the terrain) to make winter travel less hazardous by keeping travelers from getting lost.[19]

As 1906 wore on, the board also improved another 40 miles of road, cut 285 miles of new trail, and upgraded another 200 miles already in use. Additionally, it located and surveyed another thousand miles of roads and trails.[20] Specifically, that season the board accomplished the location surveys and the construction and trail marking shown in the following tables.

The board accepted $7,366.50 which the citizens of Nome had collected to enable the construction of a road from town to the so-called second beach line, about 3 miles back from the coastline. That, together with what the board was able to spend, resulted in the construction "of a veritable boulevard, 22 feet between ditches, over which thousands of tons have been transported" where formerly only the lightest wheeled traffic was possible.[21]

Early in the construction season the board decided to purchase its own horses rather than to pay the high price of hire. Team rentals at Nome, Fairbanks, and Rampart then cost between $15.00 and $18.00 per day. At that price, the board reasoned, it paid monthly what it would cost to buy a team outright. And if funds permitted in 1907, it intended to purchase its own animals for all projects.[22]

In 1906 the board and the Signal Corps began a close working relationship. Wherever practical, the latter changed the route of the telegraph lines to follow the location of permanent trails. This, of course, was to facilitate maintenance. For example, it changed the course of the line to follow the cut-off section from Gulkana to the mouth of the Delta River and modified the line between Fairbanks and Rampart and the one running from Kaltag to Unalakleet.[23]

18. Board of Road Commissioners, *Report upon the Construction and Maintenance of Military and Post Roads, Bridges, and Trails, Alaska, 1906* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907), pp. 2-3, 61.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-6.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 60.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

By the end of 1906 the board had given form and structure to its organization. Within only two years of its establishment, it had become an important federal agency. Major Richardson, as president of the board, had gained considerable influence in Alaska; for the agency he directed had begun to provide northerners with the basic framework of a transportation system, and he also controlled a sizable payroll.

1906 Location Surveys

Place	District	Distance (in miles)
Gulkana to Donleys	Valdez	121
Fairbanks to Donleys	Fairbanks	127
Delta to Banner	Fairbanks	13
Donleys to Banner	Fairbanks	51
Fortymile to Eagle	Fairbanks	57
Rampart to Glenn	Fairbanks	30
Hope to Sunrise	S.W. Alaska	39
Preliminary survey	Fairbanks	18
Sundry surveys	Seward Peninsula	19
	Total	475

Source: Board of Road Commissioners, *Report upon the Construction and Maintenance of Military and Post Roads, Bridges, and Trails, Alaska, 1906* (Washington: GPO, 1907), pp. 2-3, 61.

Road Construction and Trail Marking

	Distance
Wagon roads	46.5 miles
Roads maintained and improved	40.0 miles
Sled trails - full width for double sleds	181.0 miles
Trails - cleared half width	81.0 miles
Winter trails flagged	247.0 miles

Source: Board of Road Commissioners, *Report upon the Construction and Maintenance of Military and Post Roads, Bridges, and Trails, Alaska, 1906* (Washington: GPO, 1907), pp. 20-21.

The Economic Impact of the Board's Work

Numerous economic benefits were quickly opening from the work of the board. For example in the Fairbanks district it had built a 4.07-mile-long road, costing $2,439 per mile, connecting Summit to Cleary. Some 5,000 tons of freight moved over this segment at a reduction of $10.00 per ton, saving Cleary miners $50,000 in 1907 alone. A parallel road from Summit to the mines of Fairbanks Creek, 9.22 miles in length and costing $1,300 per mile, had produced a reduction of freight rates by $20 per ton. The Fairbanks Creek miners had saved an estimated $40,000 on the transportation of their supplies.[24]

Improvements in the overland trails produced speedier mail deliveries. In 1906 the first winter mail arrived in Nome on December 5, taking only 49 days from Seattle. The previous year it had not arrived until December 29, and the year before that not until December 31. This represented a time saving greatly appreciated by the citizens of Nome and the Seward Peninsula. In the interior, Ed S. Orr and Company operated a stage line over the 376 miles between Valdez and Fairbanks. The company held the contract for carrying the winter mail between the two cities. Between November and April, mail and passenger stages left Valdez and Fairbanks weekly. It usually took 9 days to reach Fairbanks and 8 going back to Valdez, but the company set a record for the 1906-1907 winter season of 6 days, 10 hours, and 10 minutes. There were 39 stations along the route, and it took 180 horses, run in relays, to keep the stages moving.[25]

Back in Washington, Richardson's lobbying efforts paid off handsomely for the 1907 fiscal year when Congress allotted $250,000 for his Alaskan projects. Together with $90,000 from the Alaska Fund, the board utilized a record budget of $340,000.[26]

24. "Road Building in Alaska," *Alaska-Yukon Magazine*, March 1907, pp. 20-21.

25. *Report of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska to the Secretary of War, 1907, in Annual Reports, War Department, Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1907* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907), pp. 5-6; "Ed. S. Orr & Company's Stage Line," *Alaska-Yukon Magazine*, June 1909, p. 190.

26. *Report of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, 1907*, p. 6.

Unfortunately, requests for road and trail construction from all sections of Alaska poured into board headquarters "so far in excess of the abilities of the board to meet, with the funds available or likely to become available in the near future," that board members thought it wise to issue a circular explaining construction policies and limitations to Alaskans. In its circular, the board drew a distinction between monies accruing from the Alaska Fund and special congressional appropriations for the "construction and maintenance of military and post roads, bridges, and trails." The board had decided to use money from the former source mainly for local improvements and from the latter for "the location and construction of main trunk lines of communication through the territory, and especially the through mail route from Valdez to the Seward Peninsula." The board welcomed petitions for projects but requested that each be accompanied by the best information available, such as character of the route desired, tonnage to be transported, number of people to be benefited, the probable permanence of the community, and the approximate cost of the desired undertaking. But the board also reminded its constituents of Alaska's vast size and that it would take years before all regions requiring aid could even be examined. Actual construction work had to wait for these preliminary reconnaissances. Finally, the board encouraged monetary contributions from communities in order to stretch funds.[27]

In his report to the Secretary of War board president Richardson differentiated among three different types of construction used. Wagon roads had to accommodate year-round traffic of considerable tonnage. Therefore, they had to be located with suitable grades and be crowned, ditched, and drained and corduroyed or planked where necessary. Winter sled roads had to meet the requirements of winter travel only, therefore no crowning, ditching, or draining was necessary, nor was there a requirement for extensive corduroying. They did have to be wide enough through timbered areas and sidehill cuttings to permit the passage of double teams, however. In addition, winter sled roads had to have the proper grade for fairly heavy loads, and most of the tree stumps and surface inequalities had to be removed to provide a fairly even surface. Some stretches of winter sled roads had been so well built, in fact, that they even permitted light-wheeled traffic in the summer. Lastly, the dog team and pack horse trails were the least expensive to build. They differed from the winter sled roads in that they were narrower and had steeper grades and more surface unevenness. By 1907 the Board of Road Commissioners had completed about 166 miles of wagon road, 384 miles of winter sled road, 242 miles of dog team and pack trail, 382 miles of flagged winter trail, three river bridges, and had installed three ferries.

The board had to cope with wide variations in construction costs among various regions of Alaska. During the 1907 season, for example, the cost of labor had ranged from $2.50 to $5.00 per day. Board was provided and subsistence costs ranged fromslightly more than $0.50 per day in southeastern Alaska to $3.00 per day in the interior. The higher expenses reflected the inadequate transportation system: southeastern Alaska, for example, could rely on competitive and cheap ocean freight rates. Similarly, wages differed significantly, again reflecting the cost of living in the different regions. Superintendents, locating engineers, foremen, and assistant foremen received anywhere from $150 per month to $10 or more per day. The cost of hiring work animals also varied greatly, ranging from $10 per day for a four-horse team including feed to $13 per day for a single horse and no feed. Not surprisingly under these circumstances, and given the added diversity in climatic, timber, and soil conditions, mileage costs of construction ranged from a low of $100 to a high of several thousands of dollars per mile. Although considerable economy had been achieved with the purchase of four road machines, each drawn by a team of six to

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

eight horses and used in ditching and sidehill grading, it still cost an average of approximately $2,200 for each mile of wagon road built. Winter sled roads cost $250 and pack trails $100 per mile.[28]

By 1907 the board had become a smoothly working organization, but as with any growing entity emerging complexities called for clarifying directives. Thus in Circular No. 2, issued May 6, 1907, it stated that superintendents of districts and disbursing agents of the board were required "to furnish bonds for the faithful performance of their duties, when deemed necessary by the Board of Road Commissioners." The bonding, however, was not to be charged against the salaries of such employees but was to be paid from board funds. A day later, Circular No. 3 instructed superintendents of districts and foremen in charge of working parties to notify all employees that the board did not assume responsibility for "injuries or sickness of men so employed." The board modified this statement, however, by adding that in case of serious illness or injury through unavoidable accidents it would procure a surgeon or physician without charge in order to prevent loss of life. If necessary, it also would transport victims, free of charge, to the nearest suitable medical or hospital facility.[29]

On May 8, Circular No. 4 regulated pay periods, and in July, Circular No. 5 specified that all roads and trails located, constructed, and maintained by the board were to be 60 feet wide, 30 feet on each side of the center line, except in special cases where a lesser width might be employed. There was to be no encroachment on this 60 feet of right-of-way unless the board had granted prior authority.[30]

In the meantime, Richardson continued to lobby successfully for special congressional appropriations. For the fiscal years 1908 through 1911, Congress provided $244,857.18 (1908), $236,674.97 (1909), $237,498.50 (1910), and $100,000 (1911). Together with money from the Alaska Fund, this gave the board budgets for those years of $365,629.90 (1908), $383,646.89 (1909), $340,396.79 (1910), and $266,777.95 (1911).[31]

In 1911 the board reported that a total of 759 miles of wagon roads, 507 miles of winter sled roads, and 576 miles of pack trails had been built. Additionally, every year the board had staked several hundred miles of winter trails over treeless and exposed sections of the territory for the guidance and safety of travelers during storms. It also had continued its program of constructing bridges and installing ferries. The board once again called attention to its wagon roads and explained that this designation had been applied in a restricted sense in Alaska, and these certainly did not meet the standards of those found in the contiguous United States. Alaska's wagon roads, the board explained, were designed to be good country roads capable of accomodating year-round traffic of considerable tonnage. They had been located with appropriate grades, been crowned, ditched, and drained, and corduroyed or planked where necessary. Wherever soil quality permitted, ordinary graded earth roads were built. In areas with poor soil conditions, where an ordinary earth road could not support the traffic, the board had put down a light corduroy of small spruce trees covered with several inches of earth. In fact, most of the wagon mileage constructed consisted merely of such corduroy and therefore rutted badly during prolonged periods of rain. While the board had worked in most sections of the territory, it had constructed the best system of local roads in the Fairbanks and Nome mining districts. This had been accomplished, in part, because of the substantial financial assistance local residents had rendered.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-15.

29. Circulars No. 2 and 3, May 6 and 7, 1907, R. G. 94, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s to 1917, AGO Doc. File, various files pertaining to Alaska, N.A.

30. Circulars No. 4 and 5, May 8 and July 10, 1907, R. G. 94, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s to 1917, AGO Doc. File, various files pertaining to Alaska, N.A.

31. U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of the Territories, Alaska Road Commission, *Annual Report for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1956* (Juneau, Alaska: August 31, 1956), p. 43.

In 1904 Congress had passed legislation that required all able-bodied Alaskan males between the ages of 18 and 50 who resided outside incorporated towns to work two days each year on the public roads or, failing to do so, either to furnish a substitute worker or to pay $8 in cash. Gradually, the court commissioners had made the law effective, and by 1911 it had yielded the equivalent of approximately $100,000 in labor and money payments. In fact, roads were in such good shape in the Fairbanks mining district in the summer months that automobiles carried both passengers and freight between the town and the creeks.[32]

By 1910 census records showed that Alaska's interior, principally Fairbanks and the Tanana valley, had a total population of 13,064. This made the region the second most populous in the territory, topped only by a population of 15,216 in southeastern Alaska. The board members agreed that it was of the utmost importance to connect the thriving interior mining district with the coast at Valdez. Construction of the Valdez-Fairbanks wagon road would continue on a priority basis. Already, more than half the total wagon road mileage in the territory had been constructed along this route. A branch had been added to this main road some 90 miles inland at Willow Creek; from there a wagon road now ran to Chitina on the Copper River and Northwestern Railway, which connected with Cordova. In short, the board could point to substantial accomplishments by 1911. Its system of wagon roads, winter sled roads, and pack trails had reduced the expense of moving freight, made possible speedy and regular mail service to interior and northwestern Alaska, and increased the safety of travel in general.[33]

32. Sidney Charles, "Progress of Road Building in Alaska," *Alaska-Yukon Magazine*, January 1911, pp. 38-40.

33. George W. Rogers and Richard A. Cooley, *Alaska's Population and Economy: Regional Growth, Development, and Future Outlook*, vol. II., Statistical Handbook (College, Alaska: University of Alaska, Institute of Business, Economic, and Government Research, 1963), p. 28; Sidney Charles, "Progress of Road Building in Alaska," *Alaska-Yukon Magazine*, January 1911, pp. 38-40.

3 Wilds P. Richardson and James Wickersham

It was not surprising that Richardson was called upon by members of the executive and legislative branches of the federal establishment for advice on many different matters affecting the northern territory. At the end of the construction season each year, the War Department recalled him to Washington where he served in various capacities between November and April. In the course of his work Richardson came into contact with many influential lawmakers and bureaucrats, and over the years he made friends in high offices.

Richardson had known James Wickersham for a considerable period of time, first when Wickersham was a federal judge and then as Alaska's newly elected delegate to Congress. Wickersham took his seat in the House of Representatives in March of 1909. While running for the office, he had promised territorial voters that he would get through Congress a bill allowing them to elect their own legislature and also granting them a greater degree of home rule. As promised, the new delegate submitted his measure on June 7, 1909. It was referred to the House Committee on Territories, of which he was a member, for hearings and consideration. However, William Howard Taft, the new President, had served as governor-general at Manila in the Philippine Islands, and he favored the creation of a government for Alaska similar to that with which he had worked in the islands. President Taft wanted to combine the Alaska and Philippine governments under the control of the Bureau of Insular Affairs in the War Department. For this purpose Taft called in Paul Charlton, the chief law clerk of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, and Major Richardson. Under Taft's immediate supervision, they prepared a bill which Senator Albert J. Beveridge introduced for the President on January 18, 1910.[1] Former Alaska governors Wilford Hoggatt and Walter E. Clark supported the President's plan, as did numerous federal bureaucrats and lobbyists for corporate interests with financial investments in the territory; so did Major Richardson.

Wickersham strongly opposed the President's plan and quickly attacked those who supported it. He was particularly annoyed with Richardson because he thought that the major had played an important part in drafting the offending legislation. It was not long before the two men had become implacable enemies. In early 1910, for example, the delegate complained to the Secretary of War that, contrary to presidential orders issued the previous year directing territorial officers to spend their time at their duty stations rather than in the nation's capital, Richardson had "arrogated to himself the duty of controlling general legislation for Alaska in a way which I decidedly resent."

Richardson backed the creation of an Alaska Railway Commission which, Wickersham charged, would give away valuable coal lands to the Alaska Syndicate. This syndicate was a combination of the J. P. Morgan and Guggenheim fortunes and was Wickersham's wealthiest enemy. In Alaska, the syndicate's principal mining venture was the Kennecott copper mines. In order to exploit these deposits, it had begun construction of the Copper River and Northwestern Railway. It controlled steamship transportation and a major part of the salmon canning industry.

1. Nichols, *Alaska*, pp. 24-26; Evangeline Atwood, *Frontier Politics: Alaska's James Wickersham* (Portland, Oregon: Binford and Mort, 1979), p. 220.

Most important, the Alaska Syndicate had clashed early on with Wickersham who subsequently had run on an antisyndicate platform in his first campaign.[2]

Then there was the major's support of the Beveridge Bill, which provided for the appointment of a nine-member legislative council with broad powers of legislation for Alaska. An attorney general, a commissioner of the interior, a commissioner of education and health, and a commissioner of mines, together with the governor and four other persons appointed by the President, would make up this legislative council. Beveridge had introduced his bill on January 18, 1910, but Wickersham had not learned of it until the next day. He immediately requested a hearing before the Senate Committee on Territories. In his testimony on January 20, the delegate argued vehemently against the measure, and he and Richardson exchanged sharp words. Wickersham related that, after leaving the committee room, Richardson met him in the corridor and in "an angry tone he threatened me for what I had said before the committee of the Senate about his connection with these bills and said that only his position as a Major in the Army and my position as a Delegate in Congress protected me."

Wickersham rejected the whole scheme but was particularly offended by a provision of the measure that would allow army officers to fill one or more of the commission positions. If an officer should be appointed commissioner of the interior, he would simultaneously become the president of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska. The delegate feared that Richardson had included this section so as to become the commissioner of the interior and a member of the Legislative Council and the Alaska Railway Commission, thereby making himself a very powerful individual indeed. The major would become "the dispenser of franchises, privileges, and concessions of the public resources of Alaska."

Wickersham accused Richardson of favoring the Alaska Syndicate, thus betraying the trust of the miners, businessmen, newspapers, and most Alaska residents opposed to placing control of the territory's resources "into the hands of an appointive Military Commission" of the Alaska Syndicate. Wickersham claimed to represent all the people of Alaska, "excepting only one or two big interests which hope thus to control the great undeveloped resources of the Territory, as well as its government," in that fashion.[3]

Wickersham just plain did not like Richardson. He considered it his own prerogative to speak for Alaska and to represent the territory's needs before Congress and the executive branch of government. What he failed to take into account was that Richardson had become an Alaska expert—and being an ambitious officer, he offered his expertise to Congress and the executive branch. Wickersham also resented the four senators who had traveled to Alaska in 1903 and on the strength of that one visit had also become "Alaska experts," particularly Senator Knute Nelson.

Delegate Wickersham not only protested the major's conduct to his superiors, he also asked that the officer be sent back to Alaska to perform the duties of his job instead of lobbying in favor of legislation which the delegate opposed as being "inimical to the interests of the people of that Territory." In fact, it seemed as if Wickersham's animosity toward Richardson had gotten the better of him and clouded his judgment. The major was not an Alaska territorial officer subject to the supervision of the Secretary of the Interior, as Wickersham alleged, but rather served under the direction of the Secretary of War, who had ordered him to Washington. Further, Richardson denied any lobbying for the Alaska Railway Commission. He stated that he had been asked to supply some ideas involving coal lands, and that he had done so. Richardson stated that he "would not have done even that much had I not been authorized by the President, when Secretary of War, to follow up the railroad developments in the Territory, and keep him advised as to the feasibility and

2. Naske, *Statehood*, pp. 26-27.

3. Wickersham to Secretary of War J. M. Dickinson, January 2, 1910, file Richardson, Wilds P., General Correspondence, Adjutant General's Office, R. G. 94, N.A.

necessity of aid by the government in such construction."

In fact, the so-called bill he had supposedly written was merely a rough draft. The allegation that Richardson was in large part responsible for the Beveridge Bill was pure nonsense. The major stated, however, that "my connection with such a proposed government would not do any more injury to Alaska than Mr. Wickersham's presence here as a Delegate; nor do I think I would have a smaller percentage of the whole people's support."[4]

Richardson told his military superiors that the delegate had received a mere 3,802 votes out of a total of 9,625 cast in the last election, divided among five candidates. The major disclaimed any connections with the Alaska Syndicate and in turn accused the delegate of making statements "wholly false as to fact, malignant in motive, and unwarranted from what he knows of my work in the Territory and from my past relations with himself."

After considering all the facts, the Secretary of War rejected the delegate's complaints and held that since Wickersham had made the remarks to which Richardson had objected before a Senate committee rather than on the floor of the House under his privilege as a member of that body, the major had acted properly under his rights and privileges as a citizen.[5]

Wickersham, however, was a contentious and scrappy individual, and not to be deterred in his quest for substantially reducing Richardson's influence with the executive branch and Congress. He drew up a long list of allegations and complaints designed to demonstrate Richardson's long history of lobbying before Congress. The delegate used selected passages from various hearings to implicate and discredit Richardson. As early as 1904, for example, even before taking up his road work, the officer had offered to come to Washington "to lay the facts before the Secretary of War and before the proper committees of Congress." As a result of this offer, Richardson had "been ordered by the Secretary to report to Washington in order to go before the committees and represent the needs of Alaska."

Even favorable comments of Richardson's performance could be taken as support for the delegate's assertions, and he quoted them as proof of the major's inappropriate involvement. For example Senator Knute Nelson, one of the members of the Senate subcommittee that had visited Alaska in 1903, had become acquainted with Richardson there; Nelson praised the major for his great assistance in getting special appropriations from the military committees for the Alaska road work. In fact, Nelson had stated, "He and I have frequently conferred about Alaskan matters. . . . and I have found him very helpful. He has given me lots of valuable information about Alaska; and I think he has been very helpful in securing not only appropriations but other legislation." In his lengthy indictment of Richardson, the delegate cited innumerable alleged wrongdoings and finally reiterated his demand that the Secretary of War remove the major from Washington.[6]

Wickersham was unfair in his continuing attacks on Richardson, but they did serve to gain the attention of Alaskan newspapers and citizens and focus them on the inadequacies of the Beveridge Bill. In fact Richardson had made several recommendations which had been incorporated in the draft legislation, and it had been President Taft who had proposed the peculiar provisions of the Beveridge Bill. On December 11, 1909, the President had stated that

> *Senator Beveridge is willing to father such a bill, and I am anxious to have it embody the features that I suggested. The truth is that what you might do is to take the Philippine Act of 1902 and go*

4. *Ibid.*

5. Richardson to Chief of Staff, January 27, 1910, Secretary of War J. M. Dickinson to Wickersham, Janaury 29, 1910, file Richardson, Wilds P., General Correspondence, Adjutant General's Office, R.G. 94, N.A.

6. Wickersham to Secretary of War J. M. Dickinson, February 12, 1910, file Richardson, Wilds P., General Correspondence, Adjutant General's Office, R.G. 94, N.A.

through it and strike out the things that are peculiarly applicable to the Philippines and insert those things that you may know from Richardson or otherwise in reference to Alaska. When you have it, send it over to me and I will send it to Senator Beveridge and he will shape it with his knowledge of existing conditions in Alaska and introduce it, and I will see what I can do to help it through.[7]

In the meantime, Wickersham's dislike of Richardson increased, and he became almost paranoid about the latter's intentions. To a constituent he suggested that the major assisted "his friends the Guggenheims to defeat me for reelection. I shall expect you to offset the Major's influence.... and assist me to be reelected for the purpose of defeating his appointive military legislative bill with the major at the head of it to control Alaska in the interests of the big corporations." The delegate concluded that "we have got to fight to protect the Territory from this band of grafters....[8]

What Wickersham clearly hoped was that his continued barrages against Richardson, tainting him with allegations of ties to the Alaska Syndicate, would eventually ruin his military career by making him so controversial that the army would decide to replace him. In a public speech in Fairbanks, Wickersham continued his harangue against the president of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska. He asserted that the major had "assisted in drafting the Beveridge Bill, so that he might be appointed in charge of the railroad board" and that "the bill was plainly intended for the benefit of Major Richardson, and the fattest job was for the Major."

Not only was Richardson self-serving, Wickersham charged, but a coward as well: although there had been two foreign wars since he had been in Alaska, he had served in neither. What Wickersham did not know was that Richardson had applied for duty in the Philippine Islands in 1899 while stationed at Fort Egbert, Alaska, but had been refused because the army needed him in the North. It was an editorial in the *Fairbanks Daily Times* which perhaps accurately summarized Wickersham's vendetta: "And now comes a politician, who, having been elected to attend to the representation of Alaska in Congress, abuses his position to vent a petty spite upon Major Richardson."[9]

Richardson learned of the delegate's unremitting attacks against him while working at Kaltag on the Yukon River. He was desperate and helpless because he did not command the attention of the press as the delegate could. In a letter to the Fairbanks newspaper, he reiterated that he had merely followed orders when providing background information for the Beveridge Bill. "His outrageous assault upon me," the major stated, "was unjustified by any single act of mine, official or personal, toward himself or the people of Alaska. It was as unexpected as it was vindictive and malevolent and it is now continued....with no restraint or moral responsibility, respect for the truth, or sentiment of common decency."[10]

Wickersham gained reelection in 1901 after having waged a campaign in which he criticized the absentee-owned fishing industry for not paying its share of taxes to the territory, assailed the Alaska Syndicate, and attacked President Taft's scheme for governing Alaska while advocating his own version of home rule for the North.

7. Confidential Memorandum for the Secretary of War, February 17, 1910, file Richardson, Wilds P., General Correspondence, Adjutant General's Office, R. G. 94, N.A.

8. Wickersham to Martin Gateley, May 20, 1910, file Richardson, Wilds P., General Correspondence, Adjutant General's Office, R. G. 94, N.A.

9. *Alaska Citizen*, July 23, 1910; *Fairbanks Daily Times*, July 27, 1910.

10. Richardson to *Fairbanks Daily Times*, August 7, 1910, file Richardson, Wilds P., General Correspondence, Adjutant General's Office, R. G. 94, N.A.

The Misfortunes of Lieutenant Sam C. Orchard

The delegate had not forgotten Richardson and the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska. In 1911 constituents informed Wickersham of a local rumor that Lieutenant Sam C. Orchard, the disbursing officer of the board, was short in his account. In fact, one of Wickersham's informants labelled Orchard an "embezzler to the extent of $17,000" from the Road Commission fund. According to the delegate, another told about the lieutenant's "heavy drinking for the last three years and his spending large sums of money in politics attempting to defeat my [Wickersham's] election last August."

Although his informants had no factual information which might throw light on the situation, Wickersham asserted that as a public official it was his responsibility to bring this information to the attention of the War Department so that an investigation might be undertaken. The delegate was happy when he learned that such a probe already was underway because the War Department had received similar information earlier.[11]

Who was this First Lieutenant Samuel Chandler Orchard? He was born on August 31, 1868, in Fayette County, Texas, and received a commission as a first lieutenant in the First Texas Volunteer Infantry on May 14, 1898. He served as inspector of a rifle range and as a quartermaster but did not participate in any battles during the Spanish-American War. On April 18, 1899, Orchard was honorably mustered out but was reluctant to return to his former occupation in a wholesale grain and hay business. He had taken a liking to the military life and applied for an appointment in the regular army, but he failed his examination on August 17, 1901, in San Antonio, Texas. Despite this, the review board recommended that he be considered eligible for appointment. The army commissioned him a second lieutenant on November 7, 1901, retroactive to February 2 of that year. Orchard served at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, at the Presidio in San Francisco, California, and at Fort Thomas, Kentucky, where he performed the duties of battalion quartermaster, headed the commissary, and was in charge of the prisoners. In May 1904 the army ordered him to Fort Liscum at Valdez, Alaska. From July 1, 1904, to March 1, 1905, Orchard supervised the construction of public buildings at the fort; then he was appointed disbursing officer for the newly created Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska.[12]

Efficiency reports in subsequent years by his superior, Major Richardson, rated Orchard highly. In 1906, for example, he stated that Orchard's attention to duty and his professional zeal were excellent and that he seemed to have a good business ability. In 1908 he again remarked that Orchard had shown a special fitness for detail in the pay department as disbursing officer for the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska. In 1910 Richardson again gave his subordinate high marks, noting that he was qualified for his position, should be entrusted with important duties, and had performed his responsibilities as disbursing officer well.

But praise in the preceding years—even in 1910—could not save his career from the clouds gathering about him in 1911. On April 7 of that year, Richardson had left New York to return to Alaska. In Seattle, the board president met with Sidney L. Carter, who had been chief clerk of that board since 1909;

11. Wickersham to Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, July 6, 1911, Major General Arthur Murray to Wickersham, July 11, 1911, file Orchard, Samuel C., General Correspondence, Adjutant General's Office, R. G. 94, N.A. For more details on the 1910 delegate race, see Atwood, *Wickersham*, Chapter 27, pp. 225-234.

12. Personnel folder, Samuel C. Orchard, file 145360, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s to 1917, R. G. 94, N.A.

Carter there told Richardson that Orchard had been embezzling funds. The two men arrived in Valdez while it was yet April, but did not inform Orchard of their suspicions until May 14. They then accused Orchard of having embezzled approximately $12,500 that should have been paid to the Northern Commercial Company in January 1909.[13]

Orchard denied the accusations and demanded an inspection. Richardson, however, urged his subordinate to straighten up the matter and suggested that Carter be asked to find out where the shortages were. Richardson further persuaded Orchard to make good any shortages until a full investigation of the accounts could be made, ostensibly to prevent official charges being brought against Orchard. Thereupon Orchard wired the Northern Commercial Company asking that he be given time to find the mistake and that, in the meantime, he "would pay any shortage that was found to exist." That was a foolish move on Orchard's part because it seemed like an admission of guilt. In June 1911 an inspector arrived in Valdez and shortly thereafter a general court martial was appointed.[14]

Orchard's civilian lawyer, J. M. Cobb, asked for a postponement of the trial for at least 30 days to enable him to hire an expert accountant to examine "the great mass of papers, vouchers and documents on file in the Road Commission's office" which would enable him to prepare the defense. This was denied, but at Orchard's request, the court martial adjourned for 10 days to enable him to prepare his defense. The court martial reconvened in Valdez in early October, 1911.[15]

Richardson was acutely embarrassed about the scandal, coming as it did on top of Wickersham's relentless criticism of his organization and of himself. This case, he reasoned, would only furnish the delegate with further ammunition against the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska. What made matters worse, in Richardson's eyes, was that Orchard told friends that all of his troubles had arisen because the president of the board had "turned against him and that it was due to politics."

Then, as Richardson reported to the Adjutant General's Office, instead of preparing his defense, the accused and his civilian attorney proceeded to try their case in advance on the streets of Haines, Skagway, Juneau, Cordova, and Valdez, contending that an innocent man was being persecuted and that they possessed the evidence to show it. Additionally, the two made threats and insinuations against the president of the board and against board employees who were compelled in the performance of their duty and under oath before the court to give testimony in the case, according to Richardson.[16]

In the meantime, Orchard had made several sworn depositions. He stated that he had been a member of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska from April 15, 1905, to July 17, 1911, and was familiar with the details of the work carried on by the board during this period. In early 1907, he continued, the board agreed to purchase all necessary supplies from the Northern Commercial Company at Eagle, Circle, and Tanana on the Yukon River. In return, the Northern Commercial Company agreed to furnish the funds for payment of the employees of the board "at such stations and be reimbursed by United States depository checks, sent to the headquarters office of the company at San Francisco."

Orchard added that bids were called for, but that the board knew that only the Northern Commercial Company was capable of advancing funds to the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska. The agreement had been made by members of the board before Orchard had been informed, but as secretary of that organization he drafted the terms. In

13. J. M. Cobb to Judge L. G. Denman, November 8, 1911, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s to 1917, AGO Doc File, various files pertaining to Alaska, R.G. 94, N.A.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. Richardson to Adjutant General, October 23, 1911, file Orchard, Samuel C., General Correspondence, Adjutant General's Office, R.G. 94, N.A.

the latter part of 1907 it expanded the agreement with the Northern Commercial Company and charged the latter with performing the banking business for the board in Fairbanks.[17]

Orchard also accused Richardson of involving himself actively in partisan politics. In the summer of 1910, Richardson supported the candidacy of Ed S. Orr for delegate to Congress. Orr was an employee as well as business associate of the Northern Commercial Company, the Katalla Company, and "other allied corporations in said district." Orchard swore that Richardson "had [the] authority of the Secretary of War to use every resource within his power" to defeat the reelection effort of Delegate James Wickersham. Orchard stated that Richardson frequented saloons, drank heavily, and campaigned for Orr. On several occasions, he claimed, he had reminded the president of the board that such conduct was unbecoming for an army officer—but to no avail. In fact, on one occasion Richardson stated that he would help defeat Wickersham even "if he had to drink his heart's blood."[18]

A number of Valdez citizens testified that members of the military court martial had been observed in various stages of public drunkenness. Colonel Richardson had often participated in these drinking bouts, and he and members of the court, most inappropriately, had publicly discussed the merits of the Orchard case. In one instance, members of the military court dined in one of the restaurants in Valdez. During the dinner one of the officers loudly observed, "Why, of course, he [Orchard] is guilty." Another replied that there was "nothing in the evidence so far to justify the assertion," whereupon the first speaker observed, "It doesn't make any difference about the evidence. He is guilty, for it would be impossible to lose that amount of money, or to be mistaken to that extent."[19]

During the court martial it was discovered that the board actually kept no books. Its accounting system consisted of checks and vouchers. The office retained the check stubs and duplicates of the vouchers, and the original vouchers and checks were sent to Washington to the Auditor's Department. If the checks drawn and the vouchers forwarded corresponded, the auditors approved the accounts. The War Department deposited the funds Congress appropriated in the U.S. Depository in Seattle to the credit of the disbursing officer of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska. Because Alaska had insufficient banking facilities, the War Department had authorized the disbursing officer to draw money upon checks and retain it in his personal possession to be accounted for as cash. From 1905 until 1909 no inspector ever examined Orchard's accounts, although expenditures during this period amounted to more than $1.5 million. In May 1909 an army auditor began inspecting Orchard's accounts, closing his examination on May 28, 1910. He found that the accounts were correct to a cent.[20]

Orchard's lawyer Cobb quickly became disenchanted with military justice. Cobb had seen "a great deal of political courts" during his 14 years' residency in Alaska, courts whose decisions were entirely controlled by matters extraneous to the record. He exaggerated for effect, however, when he stated that he had never seen "anything which was as scandalously misconducted" as the court that tried Orchard. Cobb had gained the impression that the members of the court martial from the very beginning held the opinion that the case was a fight between Richardson and the accused. Throughout the trial that aspect of the case was publicly discussed, and various members of the court martial stated that Richardson "was the biggest man

17. Sworn deposition by Sam C. Orchard, October 6, 1911, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s to 1917, AGO Doc. File, various files pertaining to Alaska, R. G. 94, N.A.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Sworn depositions by George W. Nelson, E. A. Amundson, November 8, 1911, Alice Neice, November 17, 1911, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s to 1917, AGO Doc. File, various files pertaining to Alaska, R. G. 94, N.A.

20. J. M. Cobb to L. G. Denman, November 8, 1911, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s to 1917, AGO Doc. File, various files pertaining to Alaska, R. G. 94, N.A.

in Alaska and that he had the strongest pull with the President of any army officer."[21]

According to Cobb, affidavits had been furnished to James Wickersham alleging that the Road Commission superintendents on the Yukon and the Northern Commercial Company were grafting; he could not give the details of these charges, but knew that Wickersham had placed them before the War Department. The War Department had then referred them to Colonel Richardson, "who spends most of his time in Washington while building roads in Alaska. Col. Richardson [as soon as he learned of the charges] at once left with the lobbyist of the Northern Commercial Company, an institution which it and its interests the Guggenheims have been supporting in Washington for some time, for the headquarters of the Guggenheims in New York, the lobbyist paying all expenses of the trip."[22]

Furthermore, Cobb claimed that when Richardson left the Guggenheims in New York and met Carter in Seattle, "at Richardson's suggestion [Carter] began keeping [a] notebook or diary to be used in the prospective prosecution of Orchard and which was used so."[23]

Cobb was not content with portraying Richardson as a man of unseemly political and commercial behavior; the colonel's social side was none too savory either. Most members of the court drank and caroused with Richardson almost every night during the trial. In fact, one morning in early October during the introduction of evidence Captain Simonds, a member of the court martial, "fell out of his seat in a drunken stupor," forcing a court recess until he could be revived.[24] Simonds, an alcoholic, had been carousing with Richardson the night before until 4 o'clock in the morning.

Wickersham, of course, was delighted at the discomfiture of Richardson, and in his 1911 Alaska Day speech in Fairbanks on October 18 he reminded his listeners that nearly $2 million had "been spent on public roads in the territory of Alaska; and yet they say you can't get over to Valdez in an automobile." Even worse, the delegate continued, "your newspapers don't tell you that they have prosecuted Sam Orchard.... down at Valdez and Haines for the embezzlement of $17,000 that you paid into the Alaska Road Fund. They don't tell you how that money has been wasted, embezzled, and thrown away." In comparison, the Canadian government had expended $140,000 to build a perfectly good road, some 340 miles in length, between Whitehorse and Dawson. It only cost $10,000 annually to maintain, and the Canadians ran automobiles over it. In contrast with the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, the Canadians had not wasted their funds. "They didn't build three and four parallel roads. The road business up there wasn't ruled by incompetency as it is here." The board should not receive another dollar, Wickersham declared, and instead the funds should be entrusted to men who will go out there and build roads and who will not draw blue prints and maps."[25]

At the conclusion of the court martial in October 1911, Orchard was ordered to proceed to Ft. Lawton, Washington, to await the action of the higher authorities. He was accompanied by Lieutenant Ralph Drury when he left Valdez on the steamship *Bertha* on October 6, 1911.[26] The court martial found Orchard guilty of having embezzled $16,731.28 and sentenced him to be dismissed from the army, imposed a fine in the amount of the embezzled funds, and directed that he be imprisoned for 5 years at hard labor. President Taft affirmed Orchard's sentence on February 17, 1912, and on the recommendation of the Secretary of War

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

25. *The Daily Alaska Dispatch*, December 23, 1911.

26. *Valdez Daily Prospector*, October 6, 1911.

mitigated it to dismissal and imprisonment at hard labor for 2 years because of the time Orchard already had spent in solitary confinement at Fort Lawton. Protesting his innocence, he commenced his prison term in the federal penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas.[27]

In retrospect, the evidence suggests that the court martial did not render an impartial judgment. Orchard, perhaps, became the victim of the unorthodox financial procedures the Board of Road Commissioners employed. Alaska was a vast territory, and the board had projects in many different sections of this far-flung land. There were very few banking institutions, and communication between the field parties and headquarters was slow. In order to meet payroll and purchase supplies, the board made arrangments with a couple of mercantile organizations to advance funds in the field. These organizations, in turn, charged a small handling fee and were reimbursed by the board. Under these circumstances, bookkeeping procedures were lax.

But even before the court martial had reached its verdict, the beleaguered Richardson received notification from the Secretary of War that he would be relieved of his duties not later than November 1, 1912. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson informed Richardson that the department had adopted a new policy designed to return to duty army officers who had been on special assignments for four or more years; the reassignment was not connected to his troubles in Alaska.

Richardson was mortified by this latest turn of events because it would appear to vindicate his detractors. He hastily explained that his relief "would naturally give rise to conclusions in certain quarters as to the integrity of my work in Alaska, where I have spent the best years of my life, unjustified by the facts and which constitute a grave reflection upon me professionally." He reminded his superiors that the President himself had initially directed his appointment as presiding officer of the board, presumably because of his previous experience in Alaska. "The duty came to me unsought," he asserted, "and, as I foresaw, fraught with many difficulties of climatic and local conditions entirely out of the ordinary...." Because of insufficient funds, the board had been unable to respond fully to the transportation needs of a "a restless and impatient population" and had been subjected to some harsh criticism. Delegate Wickersham had seized upon this criticism "to bolster up in part an unwarranted and malevolent attack, for political purposes....aimed directly at myself, but indirectly and persistently since, in the effort to discredit the War Department and Administration generally in the Territory."[28]

There also was the fact that two of the three officers on the board had changed within the last year: Orchard was replaced with Lieutenant Robert L. Weeks who served from 1911 to August 26, 1913, as the disbursing officer and secretary; Captain F. A. Pope, who had served as an engineer officer from 1908 to 1911 was reassigned to the contiguous states, and he was replaced by Captain Glen E. Edgerton who served from January 1911 to September 11, 1915. Richardson, therefore, provided the much-needed continuity to implement the construction plans of the War Department in Alaska. Lastly, service in the North had "never been in any respect a 'fancy duty'." With few exceptions, it had been as severe as could be imposed in the field or in campaigns outside of actual war. "If not always health-destroying, it had often been heartbreaking and has called for the full resourcefulness and best spirit and courage, moral as well as physical, of which the officer or soldier is capable."[29]

Richardson's eloquent appeal was successful. President Taft intervened and directed his Secretary of War to exclude Richardson from the newly adopted policy of rotation. The President stated that he was

27. War Department, General Orders No. 4, February 17, 1912, file Orchard, Samuel C., General Correspondence, Adjutant General's Office, R. G. 94, N.A.

28. Richardson to Adjutant General, February 9, 1912, file Richardson, Wilds P., General Correspondence, Adjutant General's Office, R. G. 94, N.A.

29. *Ibid.*

sufficiently familiar with the lieutenant colonel's service in the North "to realize that it is to the advantage of the country, especially of Alaska" that outweighs any advantage to the army "in sending him back to his command, to have him on duty in that new territory with which he is familiar from one end to the other...."[30]

While Richardson successfully battled to retain his duty assignment, more than 400 supporters of Orchard signed a pardon petition in Valdez, and his father and wife appealed to the Secretary of War for clemency—all to no avail. In July, Orchard appealed to his father to use every political means available to gain a commutation of his sentence from the President. Orchard was bitter, claiming that if "I can get to my papers for 60 days I am sure I can show the proper parties up in such light that the President will be forced to act" on the commutation appeal. He was convinced that "Richardson has brought all the influence possible to bear to keep me here until he leaves Alaska...."

Although Orchard became eligible for parole in October 1912, Secretary Stimson refused to sign the necessary papers. Orchard presumably served out his two-year term at Leavenworth.[31]

The Board's Accomplishments During Richardson's Difficult Years

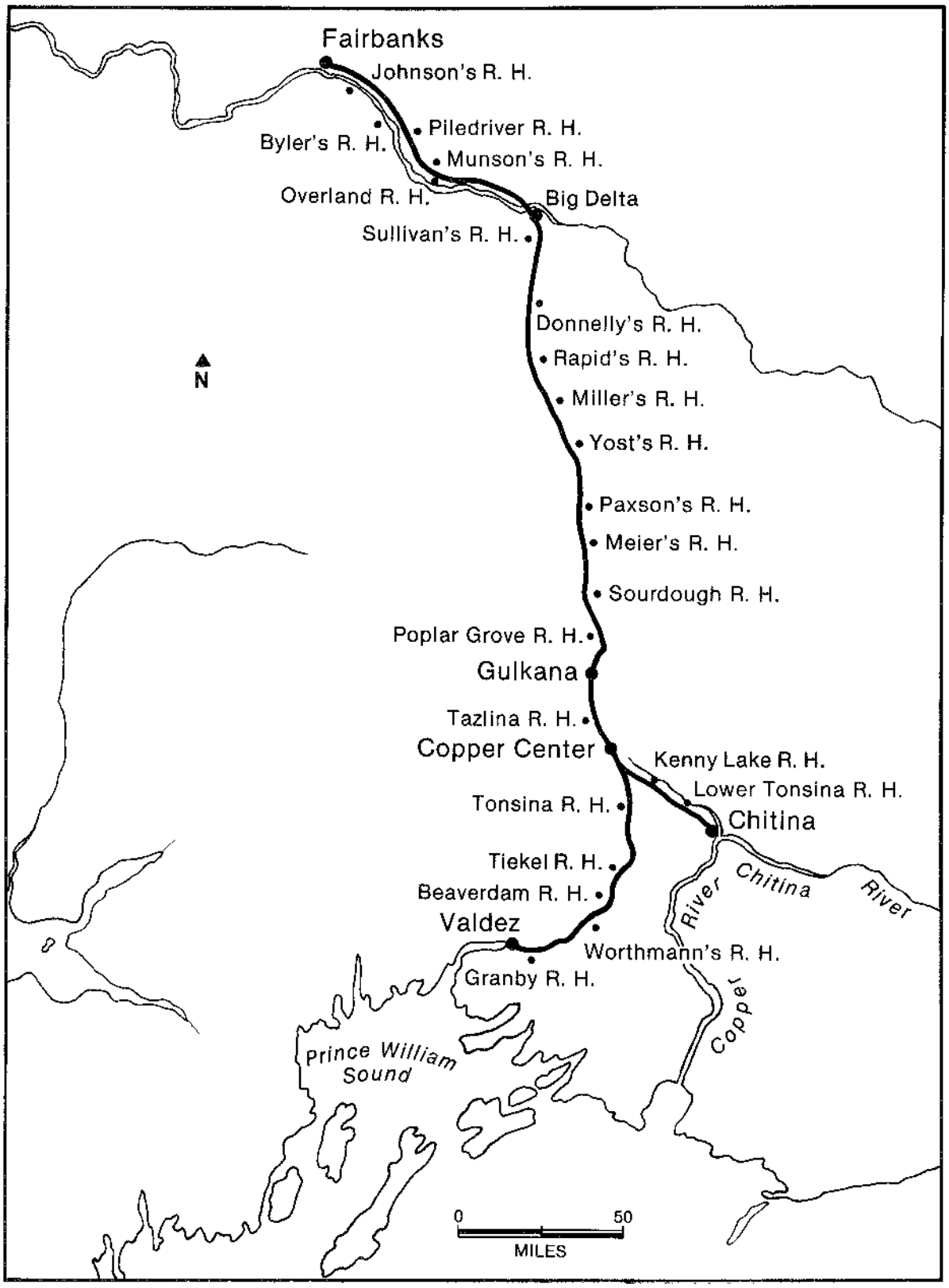
The years 1911 and 1912 had been difficult times for Richardson. His 1912 annual report was brief. He explained that the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska had expanded its work continuously and had included new projects each year, some in remote sections of Alaska and not on established mail routes. Although Congress had appropriated $125,000 for the work, the money did not become available until late August of that year. Fortunately for the continuation of the board's work, the governor of Alaska had transferred $80,000 that had accumulated in the reserve of the school portion of the Alaska Fund to the board for road work. This money, together with the usual receipts from the Alaska Fund, allowed construction to go forward.[32]

But much work was needed. One project involved improvements to the Chitina-Fairbanks road, a route capable of accommodating slow wagon traffic. A four-horse team could haul from 3,000 to 4,000 pounds about 20 miles per day on this road at any time during the summer. There were no impassable stretches, but some of the streams and creeks caused inconveniences, delays, and sometimes danger to wagons crossing during times of high water, breakup in the spring, and when the ice formed in the fall. A number of streams required bridges. The one across the Klutina River, constructed in 1900 as a pack trail, needed to be replaced. A ferry crossed the Gulkana River, but it was not an entirely satisfactory arrangement to deal with the great variation in the depth and current of the river. Greer Creek was usually fordable, and pilings for a bridge had been driven there; Richardson hoped to complete the superstructure during the 1912 construction

30. Secretary of War to Richardson, January 31, 1912, February 16, 1912, Richardson to Adjutant General, February 9, 1912, President to Secretary of War, March 25, file Richardson, Wilds P., General Correspondence, Adjutant General's Office, R. G. 94, N.A.

31. *Valdez Miner*, April 7, 1912; John Orchard to Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War, February 19, 1912, Lola M. Orchard to Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War, April 25, 1912, Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War, to John Orchard, June 28, 1912, Sam C. Orchard to John Orchard, July 14, 1912, Lola M. Orchard to Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War, November 14, 1912, file Orchard, Samuel C., General Correspondence, Adjutant General's Office, R. G. 94, N.A.

32. War Department, *Report of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, 1912* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1912), pp. 5-6.



The Richardson Highway, Valdez to Fairbanks, showing the roadhouses along the way, and the Edgerton cutoff to Chitina.

season. The Delta River was fordable; usually, so were two glacier streams that were nevertheless dangerous because of their swift currents and large boulders. Jarvis Creek was fordable, while the Tanana and Salcha rivers were crossed by ferries, as was Pile Driver Slough. Richardson intended to bridge all of these streams and rivers, except the formidable Tanana, as soon as funds became available. He also planned to have a completed roadway 16 feet wide, crowned, and with side ditches and culverts. Funds did not permit covering the road with gravel so the natural soil had to suffice.[33]

By June 30, 1911, the board had constructed 800.2 miles of wagon roads, 534 miles of sled roads, and 1,557 miles of trails. (See Appendices for the breakdown of costs and mileage.) Undoubtedly, the board's accomplishments from 1905 to 1911 had been impressive. Yet, in a country as large as Alaska they seemed miniscule. Early in 1912, journalist J. J. Underwood declared in a magazine article that there were two artificial barriers preventing large-scale settlement of the territory: (1) no township surveys and (2) the lack of transportation facilites to enable Alaskan products to reach markets. Underwood echoed Richardson when he proposed that the federal government underwrite the construction of a railroad from tidewater to the interior and that Congress appropriate substantial sums to build roads, "especially in the interior country." Once this was done, he predicted, thousands of emigrants, "millions perhaps—Scandinavians, Germans, Italians, Slavonians, Spaniards" would rush to the wilderness of Alaska "to make productive fertile valleys and plains of that northern Land of Promise; building their towns and villages, creating their own prosperous ranches and farms, as their compatriots have done in Minnesota, Iowa, and other states...."[34]

Then his imagination ran away with him. These prospective Alaskans, he predicted, would leave the "fetid atmosphere of the sweatshops of New York and Philadelphia" and give up their struggles "for a half-starved subsistence in the slums of Chicago and Boston" and leave the toil in "the furnace rooms of the steel mills of Bethlehem and Pittsburg" in order to "live in the free and open country of immeasurable distances, of exhilarating temperature atmosphere, of rushing mighty rivers and majestic mountains," and rear their children in an environment "calculated to make them a race of vigorous, happy, and contented people."[35] But before this could happen, Alaska needed a transportation network. Once a railroad to the interior had been built, proper aids to navigation installed, and roads and trails stretched across the country in every direction, Underwood predicted "that part of Alaska which lies south of the Yukon will not be a wilderness but an empire."[36]

The Wickersham-Richardson Quarrel Continues

While Underwood spun dreams of a future Alaska, and before the Orchard scandal could fade away, Wickersham prepared his next assault on Richardson. In March 1912 the delegate presented a long list of complaints about the activities of the board to Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson. Together with these complaints, Wickersham furnished numerous affidavits of disgruntled citizens harshly criticizing Richardson and his organization.

33. Memorandum of the proposed improvement of the road from Chitina to Fairbanks, Alaska, December 7, 1911, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s to 1917, AGO Doc. File, various files pertaining to Alaska, R. G. 94, N.A.

34. J. J. Underwood, "Population for Alaska Awaits Transportation Facilities," *Alaska-Yukon Magazine*, February 1912, pp. 20-27.

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*

The delegate pointed out that between 1905 and January 1, 1912, the board had expended $1,419,631.78 from congressional appropriations and $838,455.18 from the Alaska Fund, for a total of $2,258,086.96.[37]

In Wickersham's view, little had been accomplished for all these expenditures. In fact, "some of the government roads in Alaska are a disgrace to the nation," consisting of a "strip of mud, roots, and rocks, unfit for the use of man or beast, and positively ruinous, both to a man's body and soul." Wickersham suspected that the board had probably spent the better part of $2 million on the Valdez-Fairbanks road, and yet it remained merely an earthen structure which had already deteriorated significantly and became nearly impassable during long periods of wet weather.[38]

Wickersham continued that the board always answered criticism by pointing out that it had constructed a much greater mileage than the Canadians and that accounted for the greatly increased total dollar amount. The delegate demolished that argument to his satisfaction. The board, in addition to wagon roads, built winter sled roads, trails, and temporarily staked winter trails. The latter, he observed, were not roads at all but consisted of the "unmarked wilderness over the natural surface" on which roadhouse keepers, miners, mail carriers, and "in some few instances the board, have set a few poles to keep the weary "musher" from losing his way. There is no road, no trail—but only a pole set up here and there as a guide." Wickersham felt it was a sham that the board included this "mileage" in its annual report, for it was merely "padding" to inflate the figures.[39]

He dismissed the trails as merely "a more cunning claim of more figures to increase the official statement of mileage." It was easy to increase the mileage from year to year by spending a few dollars on trails blazed by the miners and then add the whole of the trail mileage to the official figures. Winter sled roads offered "just as many chances for fine literary efforts on a minimum of good road work" as did trails. Anything level enough to hold snow and where the brush was not too thick nor the stumps too high qualified as a winter sled road, the delegate asserted.[40]

In summary, Wickersham charged that $2,258,086.96 devoted to the construction of wagon roads, bridges and trails in the North had "been wasted, embezzled, and taken by two big mercantile companies, unfairly and without reasonable value." He stated that Richardson had not embezzled any of that for he was an honest man—merely incompetent. Richardson had no "money sense" in that he blindly trusted two big mercantile firms in Alaska, the Northern Commercial Company and S. Blum and Company, to manage the road monies for him. These two firms, in turn, had established a system resulting in "incompetency, waste, failure in the management of the road work, and profit to themselves." In short, the board had expended in excess of $2 million and had nothing "permanent or satisfactory to show for it."[41]

Wickersham asked Stimson to change the personnel of the board and particularly to relieve Richardson of his duties for "his habits and incompetency have wrecked the plan of road building in Alaska." In his stead should be appointed an officer who was "both temperate and competent" to accomplish the desired goals. With a veiled threat, the delegate stated that he anticipated that the War Department desired "to correct this situation as agreeably as possible" and that he, therefore, would not publicize his charges.[42]

37. Wickersham to Stimson, March 26, 1912, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s to 1917, AGO Doc. File, various files pertaining to Alaska, R. G. 94, N.A.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*

Stimson informed Richardson of the charges, and the latter's first impulse was to tell the secretary that Wickersham's allegations did not "merit the dignity of an extended reply...." But reply he did, and in detail, refuting all of the delegate's charges. Richardson was particularly incensed with one affidavit the delegate had included in which Lt. Orchard accused him of working against Wickersham's election. Richardson flatly stated that Orchard's affidavit was "an absolute and unqualified falsehood." In fact, Richardson had called Orchard into his office some time before the election and told him not to engage in any type of political activity, and "gave preemptory orders throughout the territory to this effect...." Richardson considered Wickersham's repeated attacks against him "as a personal matter engaged in by him for reasons unknown," and had tried to deal with them without in any way injuring the interests of the public service with which he was entrusted.[43]

Richardson asserted further that the delegate had ignored the fact that the board could only distribute a relatively small amount of money "over a great stretch of country with widely separated settlements in the endeavor to give passable routes and meet the immediate needs," instead of expending all funds for short but perfect roads. Richardson reminded the secretary that in 1911 an average of $46.70 per square mile was expended in the contiguous states for road construction—but only 45 cents per square mile had been available in Alaska. Furthermore, taking into account the high Alaskan labor costs, harsh climate, and vast distances, it was unfair to complain about the board for its failure to provide good roads "for a pittance of a few cents per square mile."[44]

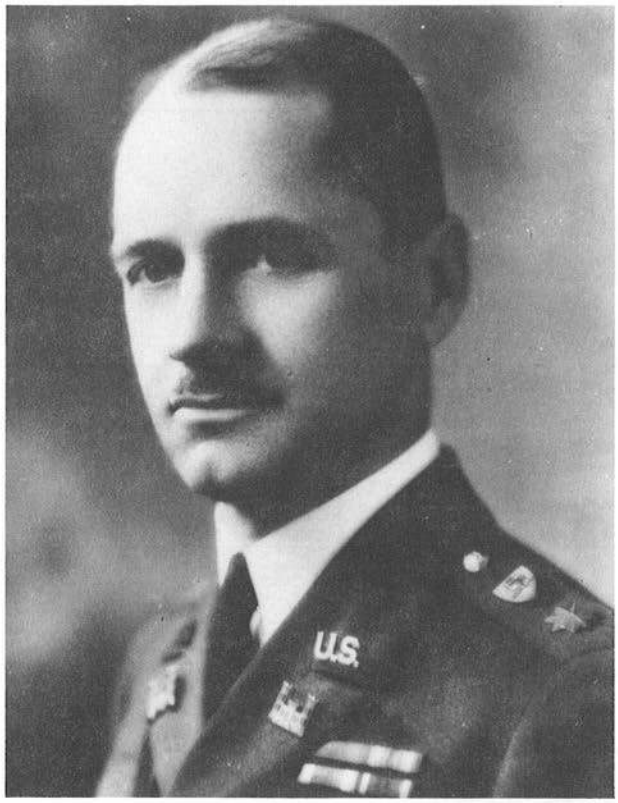
Richardson stated that Wickersham's allegations were unsupported "by any evidence worthy of the name" and merely added

> *another chapter to the attack which he has been waging upon me for two years, and which is nothing short of inhuman. It has disclosed to me a character the moral quality of which was heretofore utterly beyond the horizon of my experience, a character which would apparently without hesitation destroy, if possible, the good name and reputation of any man whom he thought in the smallest degree in the way of his own plans, regardless of any obligation to truth or sentiment of fair dealing between men.*[45]

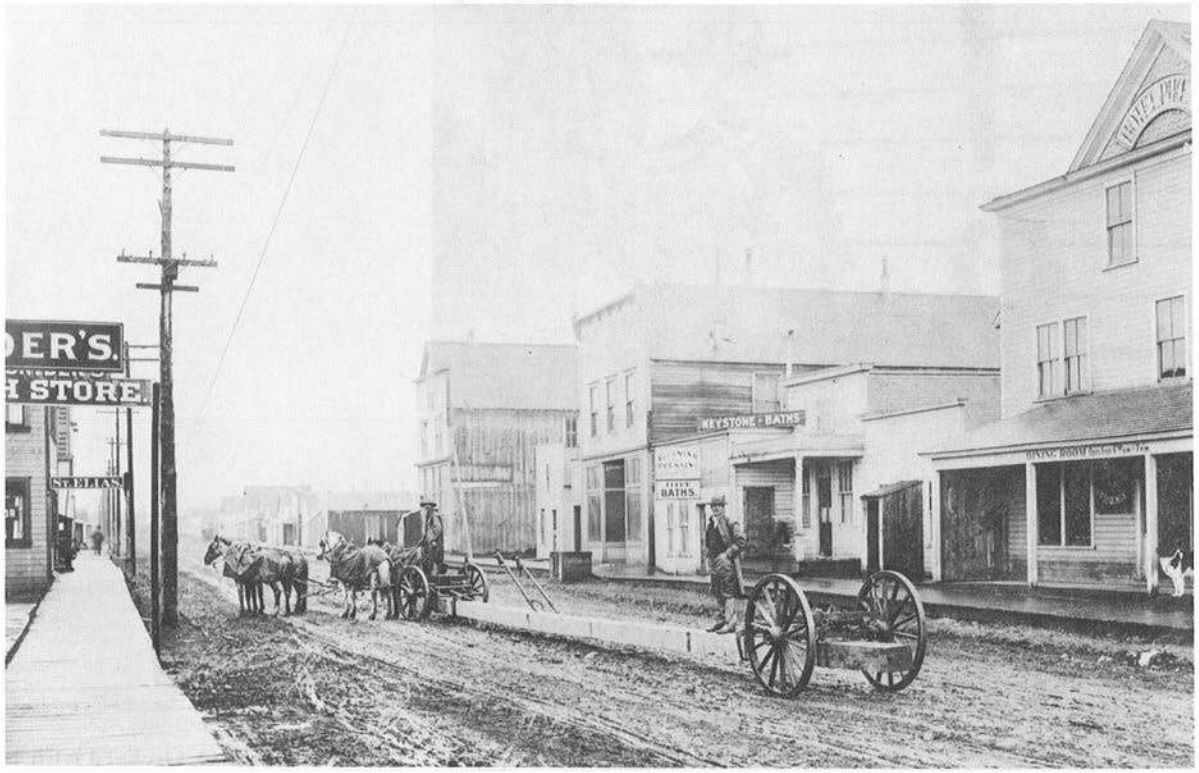
43. Richardson to Stimson, April 15, 1912, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s to 1917, AGO Doc. File, various files pertaining to Alaska, R. G. 94, N.A.

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*

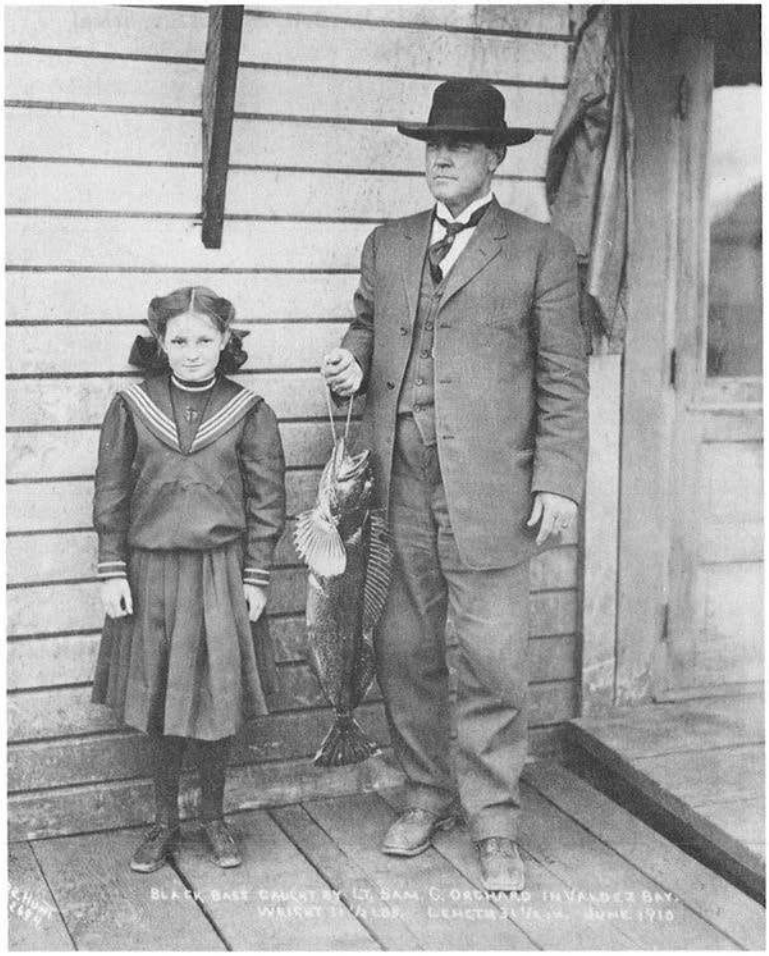


James C. Steese, president of Alaska Road Commission from July 7, 1920 to October 15, 1927, president and engineer officer from March 27, 1924 to August 4, 1924. The Steese Highway, connecting Fairbanks with Circle City on the Yukon River is named for him. Alaska Road Commssion Collection, Alaska Historical Library (AHL).



Bridge timber for Alaska Road Commission, cut by the Copper River Lumber Co., Valdez, about 1912. John Zug Collection, UAF.

Bridge construction on the Richardson trail, about 1913. John Zug Collection, UAF.

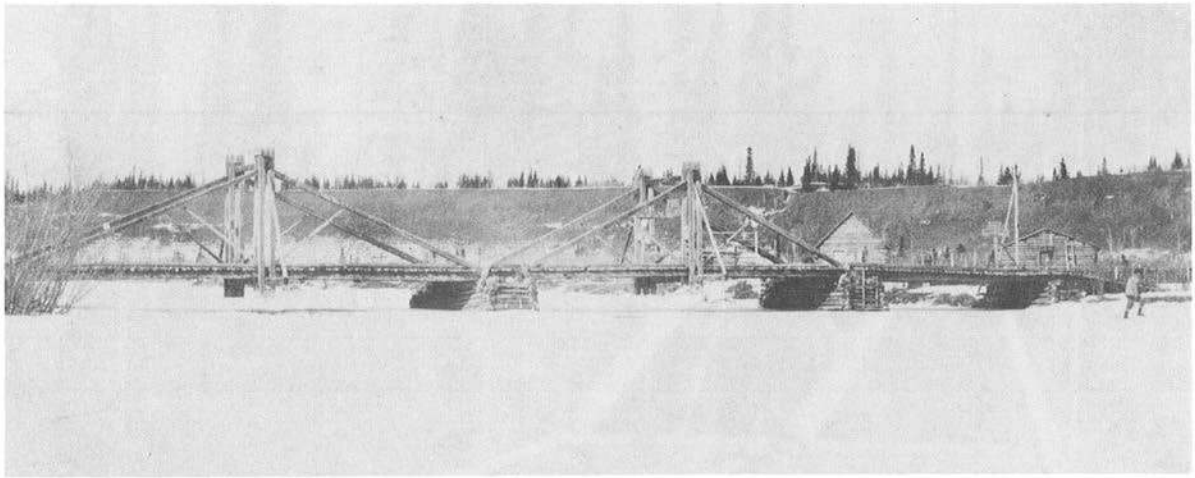


Lieutenant Sam C. Orchard with "black bass," caught in Valdez Bay, June 1910. (Child unidentified) Francis E. Pope Collection, UAF.

Small bridge along the Richardson trail, about 1913. John Zug Collection, UAF.

Work crew digging embankment, Richardson trail, about 1913. John Zug Collection, UAF.

Bridge construction detail, about 1913. John Zug Collection, UAF.

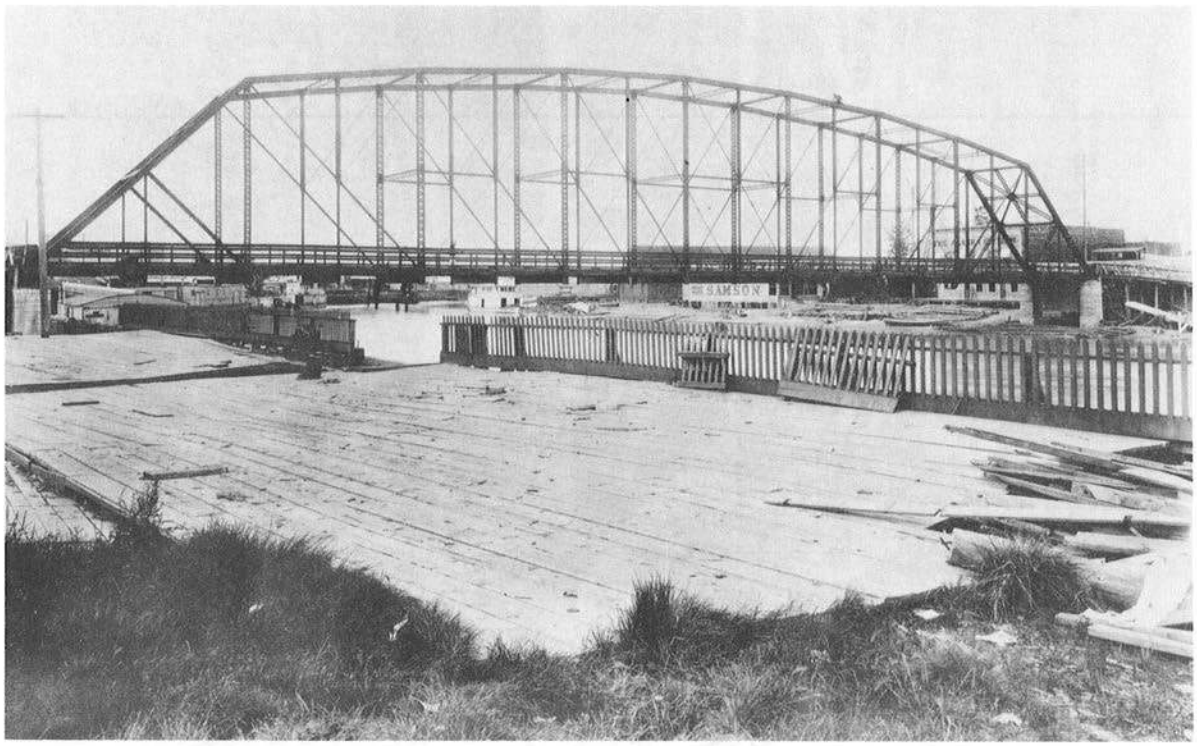


Klutina River bridge, March 26, 1910. Francis E. Pope Collection, UAF.

Footbridge over the Tolovana River, 1915. John Zug Collection, UAF.

John Zug. John Zug Collection, UAF.

Noyes Slough bridge, Fairbanks, 1913. John Zug Collection, UAF.



Cushman Street bridge across the Chena River, Fairbanks, built in 1917. John Zug Collection, UAF.

Alaska Road Commission barn on Garden Island, Fairbanks, about 1913. John Zug Collection, UAF.

4 The Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, 1912-1917

To no one's surprise, Secretary Stimson ordered a thorough inspection of the work of the board and entrusted Lieutenant Colonel Thomas H. Rees with the task. The colonel arrived in Nome on July 2, 1912, and accompanied by Lieutenant Glen E. Edgerton, the engineering officer of the board, began a two-month tour of Alaska. Rees noted the difficulties the board had encountered when constructing roads over terrain underlain by permafrost, and "the fact that roads have been built which carry heavy traction engines and heavily loaded trailers, as well as 6-horse teams with heavy loads, at a cost of about $8,600 per mile (including maintenance for six years) is a very creditable showing."[1]

Rees found the Nome office in excellent condition; Superintendent R. F. Hoffmark, who headed the office, readily produced all called-for records, reports, vouchers, and accounts. He also maintained a thorough system of cost accounting. In conversations with businessmen, miners, and travelers who did not know that Rees was an inspector, all commended the work of the board and the results it accomplished. The only criticism the colonel encountered was that the work did not go far enough "as nearly everyone knew of a road that should be built to a locality in which he was interested."[2]

Rees next traveled to St. Michael where he met Bishop P. T. Rowe of the Episcopal Diocese of Alaska. The bishop traveled constantly to all inhabited parts of Alaska, and therefore was thoroughly familiar with the roads and trails and with the work of the board. Rowe highly praised Richardson who was his personal friend and frequent traveling companion.[3]

Lack of time prevented Rees from visiting the Innoko region or the new mining camps near Ruby. Both regions, Rees found, well illustrated a major difficulty constantly facing the board. A new gold strike caused a stampede and immediately there were demands for supplies to support the community. In order to transport needed goods, miners and freighters opened trails. Soon the stampeders demanded that the board build roads leading to the new camps. Often, however, the strikes quickly became exhausted and the camps dwindled and disappeared. Only rarely did the camps develop into permanent settlements, and the board did not want to expend funds for roads to certain ghost towns. If roads were not promptly built to all the new camps, however, the board was "censured for inactivity and dilatoriness." If it did build roads to camps which promised permanency but were finally abandoned, the board was charged with building useless roads which "lead nowhere although the demand may have been insistent and well founded when the road was built."[4]

1. Stimson to Brig. General W. H. Bixley, Chief of Engineers, U.S. Army, April 17, 1912, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s to 1917, AGO Doc. File, various files pertaining to Alaska, R. G. 94, N.A.; Lieut. Col. Thomas H. Rees to Chief of Engineers, U.S. Army, March 26, 1913, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s to 1917, AGO Doc. File, various files pertaining to Alaska, R. G. 94, N.A.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

From St. Michael, Rees traveled to Tanana where he talked with William A. Gilmore who opposed Wickersham in the race for delegate to Congress. Gilmore, although disapproving of the board method for conducting road construction, still believed that the work was well and honestly done. Questioned about Richardson, he stated that he had met him several times and was impressed with the man. According to Gilmore, Richardson had never engaged in any political activity. In fact, "at a recent conversation Colonel Richardson had withdrawn from a group of men when the talk turned to political matters and declined to discuss the subject."[5]

From Tanana, Rees moved to Fairbanks where he found the roads leading to the mining areas of Fox, Cleary, Chatanika, Ester Dome and adjacent creeks in excellent condition and suitable for automobile traffic. The Fairbanks office, under the direction of John Zug, was well run and all documentation was in excellent shape. Interviews with various Fairbanks citizens elicited only praise for the work the board performed.

From Fairbanks, Rees traveled to Valdez with a side trip to Chitina in a two-horse buckboard. It took him fourteen and a half days to cover the distance of 460 miles. Rees found the road of uneven quality, but there was no place where a wagon could not move forward steadily and without delay. Rees considered the construction of the road a tremendous undertaking, and the results accomplished in the short time and with the limited funds nothing but remarkable. The road traversed a rugged wilderness with very few inhabitants between the terminal points. The traveler encountered river bottoms, marshes, steep bluffs, mountains, glaciers, rivers, and gorges in alternating succession. Rees observed that supplying this effort was very difficult, the working season short, and labor costs very high. The board had been correct in opening a passable road for the whole distance instead of trying to complete only a portion, for then the road would have been useless for years to come. Richardson had been successful in constructing a good winter road and a passable summer road. Rees found the Valdez office to be in excellent shape, just like the others, and the superintendent of the district, J. H. Ingram, to be a thoroughly practical man with great experience and "a happy faculty of handling men and getting a large amount of work out of them."[6]

Rees next went to Seward, and stopped at Cordova, Juneau, and Ketchikan on his return to Seattle. At all stops he inquired into the specific allegations made by Delegate Wickersham but found "very little evidence either in support or denial of those statements."

In fact, except in a couple of cases, nobody had heard of the incidents Wickersham had cited. Rees concluded that the delegate's allegations were without foundation. Specifically, board funds had not been wasted, embezzled, or taken by the two big mercantile companies unfairly and without reasonable value. These two companies did not dominate, control, or dictate to the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska. No companies had any monopolies in furnishing supplies to the board but rather there had been fair competition. Roads and trails had been built where most needed, and none had been constructed to favor special interests. In fact, many special requests had been turned down. The system of purchases and disbursement in use had been devised to meet the unusual Alaskan circumstances of great distances, poor communications, isolated locations where work was performed, and the physical impossibility of sending all bills and vouchers to the disbursing officer in Valdez and sending back checks in payment in one season. Defalcations that did occur were discovered as soon as the accounts relating to them balanced—and this was all any organization could have done. Contrary to Wickersham's allegations, the board did not pad the mileage in its annual reports nor make any misleading statements. Furthermore, the roads built by

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

the board compared favorably with those constructed in the Yukon Territory, both in quality and cost. Rees did not see any completed roads which could be called a "a strip of mud, roots and rocks," although on roads under construction that description did apply for limited periods.[7]

Rees concluded that Colonel Richardson loved Alaska and its people and was imbued with its spirit of romance and sentiment. Rees found him to be a frank, generous, cordial, and companionable individual who was able to win the friendship and loyalty of the different classes of people he met. Rees had "never known another man so universally liked, esteemed and respected as he is in Alaska. His whole thought, energy and attention are given to the interests and development of Alaska without fear or favor. He is a conscientious, honorable and able man."[8]

Richardson was pleased with the investigation and its results, for it vindicated his honor and showed Wickersham to have been untruthful and vindictive. But the colonel also knew that Wickersham would not abandon his efforts to force him from office.

1912, A Poor Construction Season

Adding to his many troubles, Richardson had to conclude that 1912 had been a very poor construction season because excessive rains had caused considerable damage to the Valdez-Fairbanks wagon road, especially the stretch along the Tanana and Delta rivers. Richardson stated that "the resources of the Board have been taxed to keep the road to the interior open and passable, and at times it has seemed in danger of utter destruction."[9]

The Copper River and Northwestern Railway, the only other outlet to the ocean, had been damaged severely and forced to suspend traffic for several weeks. Richardson reiterated that the board had petitions for road construction in its files which, conservatively estimated, would require expenditures of approximately $1,600,000. Regulations, however, did not allow the board to submit an estimate for funds to meet such demands. By 1913 the War Department ruled that the congressional funds appropriated to the Alaska Fund for road work—which were charged against the general financial support of the army—were now to be limited to only those amounts absolutely necessary to maintain and repair the existing military and post roads.[10]

By June 30 the board had spent $317,303.72 of the total $317,646.59 that was available and built the following additional mileage: wagon roads, 18 miles; winter sled roads, 52 miles; and trails, 32 miles. The board had also allotted $5,000 to begin construction of an approximately 80-mile winter trail from Fairbanks to Chena Hot Springs, and had staked about 450 miles of trails for winter travel only. In addition, the board undertook the following important new projects during the season: wagon roads of 3.1 miles from Juneau to Sheep Creek, 5 miles from Douglas to Gastineau Channel, a 10-mile extension from Circle City to Central House, sled roads of 29 miles from Ruby to Long Creek, and a 12-mile extension from Moose Pass to the Kenai Peninsula.[11]

The year 1912 was an eventful one for Delegate Wickersham as well. In hearings

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. War Department, *Report of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, 1912* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1912), p. 5.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 26.

held in 1910 on the Beveridge Bill, it had soon become evident that there was strong opposition to the President's plan. After some political maneuvering, the administration had abandoned its proposal. The defeat was in no small part due to Wickersham's skillful use of the conservation issue to obtain support for Alaska home rule. The delegate pointed out that the resources of Alaska should be used for the benefit of the entire country. Yet, so far, the territory had been exploited by a few large, absentee-controlled corporations, such as the monopolies which harvested the fur seals and salmon and mined the copper deposits. Home rule, Wickersham asserted, would allow proper utilization of Alaska's wealth.[12]

Wickersham's home-rule scheme gained substantial support in 1911 from the legislatures and commercial associations of Washington and Oregon. The senators and representatives from these states were instructed to vote for Alaska home rule. Democratic presidential aspirants, such as Woodrow Wilson, Oscar Underwood, and William Jennings Bryan, were pledged to support the home rule plank of their party. In this favorable atmosphere, hearings on Wickersham's home rule bill began in the spring of 1911 before the House Committee on Territories, and by late summer of 1911 the passage of the Wickersham measure seemed reasonably assured.

In a special message to Congress on February 2, 1912, President Taft dealt extensively with Alaska. He urged Congress to enact legislation which would help the territory develop its resources. On April 24, 1912 the House unanimously passed Wickersham's elective legislative assembly bill, and on July 24, 1912, the Senate passed the delegate's measure in essentially the same form in which its author had drafted it. On August 24, 1912 the President signed the Wickersham measure into law. The Organic Act of 1912 gave Alaska a senate of 8 members and a house of 16 to be chosen equally from the four judicial divisions. Although limited in powers, the legislature could nevertheless deal effectively with a wide variety of matters.[13]

The first territorial legislature met in Juneau early in 1913 and, among other matters, it dealt with road construction. It repealed the road-tax law of April 27, 1904, which had required two days of labor from each able-bodied male resident on public roads or the payment of $8. In its stead it enacted a substitute, levying a flat tax of $4 inside as well as outside incorporated towns. While the 1904 road tax law had been in force, a substantial amount of work had been accomplished on local projects, but there never had been coordination among projects nor planning of any kind. In some districts, superintendents of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska had supervised the work, although they were never formally charged with the authority or responsibility for handling it generally.[14]

In the spring of 1913 Wickersham renewed his offensive against Richardson. Disappointed that the War Department investigation had exonerated his foe, Wickersham now turned to Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane. The delegate pointed out that Richardson, assigned to special duty in Alaska, had been absent from his military command almost continually for 14 years; appointed president of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska in 1904, he had performed that special duty for 8 years. Such long continued assignments, Wickersham told Lane, violated the law which called for frequent rotations. Even worse, Richardson spent 6 months each year in the capital lobbying for increased appropriations "for his alleged dirt roads in Alaska and in assisting the big interests, the Guggenheim interests, to secure a firmer grip on the resources of Alaska." Richardson spent the summers in

12. Naske, *Statehood*, p. 30.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

14. 33 Stats. 391; Session Laws of Alaska, 1913, Chap. 3, April 5, 1913.

the North where he traveled "by easy routes from point to point" enjoying the hospitality of his friends.[15]

In election years, Wickersham continued, Richardson repaid his corporate friends and Mr. Taft by engaging in political work from Ketchikan to Nome at public expense. The delegate stated that Richardson had successfully aided twice in securing the delegates to the Republican National Convention for Taft. More offensive, in 1908, 1910, and 1912, Richardson had helped the "standpat Guggenheim Republican candidates in their efforts to defeat me." That was a long list of offenses, but perhaps "the meanest thing I ever knew him to do" was to assist the Bureau of Insular Affairs in drafting the "infamous Beveridge bill which was intended to get Mr. Taft to appoint a legislative council over Alaska...." Richardson was to have been a council member, and all nine men on the council, Wickersham charged, "were to be the friends, agents or attorneys of the Morgan-Guggenheim Alaska Syndicate," the delegate's arch enemy. The Beveridge Bill, which fortunately failed, was the "most infamous attempt ever made in American history to loot a great territory and Richardson was to be the principal in the attempted grand larceny of national wealth."[16]

Wickersham also reminded the Secretary of the Lieutenant Orchard scandal and suggested that in addition to the $17,000 Orchard had embezzled, many thousands more were hidden by technically correct accounts. In fact, Wickersham wrote in his best purple prose, "drunkenness, debauchery and embezzlement have oozed from this shameful waste of public funds in Alaska." Much to the delegate's disgust, however, the War Department had protected Richardson and "maintained him in incompetent control under the powerful influence of the selfish interests engaged in monopolizing the resources of our unhappy country." Perhaps, Wickersham suggested, a new administration could right these wrongs.[17]

Secretary Lane knew nothing about the controversies surrounding the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska and therefore transmitted the delegate's complaints to the War Department. Once again, Richardson had to defend himself. He refuted each one of Wickersham's allegations, concluding that, despite repeated accusations that board funds had been wasted for years, Wickersham had not submitted any evidence supporting "such a reckless and unjust statement." Richardson concluded that the work accomplished with the available funds clearly contradicted Wickersham's accusations.[18]

While the two men quarreled, the administration's attitude toward Alaska changed. Even before the passage of Wickersham's home rule bill, President Taft had sent a special message to Congress on February 2, 1912, asking for government construction and ownership of an Alaska railroad. In fact, Wickersham's home rule bill had carried a Taft rider (section 18) authorizing the President to appoint a commission to study and recommend those Alaska railroad routes that would best develop the territory's resources for the use of all Americans. Taft appointed an Alaska Railroad Commission, consisting of an army, a navy, and a civilian engineer in addition to Alfred H. Brooks, an old Alaska hand of the U.S. Geological Survey. The commissioners left Seattle for Alaska on September 10, 1912, and handed their finished report to the President on January 20, 1913.

A variety of railroad bills was introduced in Congress. In early 1914, both houses passed an Alaska railroad measure, which President Woodrow Wilson signed into law on March 12, 1914. Essentially, the act empowered the President to choose the location and authorize construction of a railroad or

15. Wickersham to Franklin K. Lane, April 11, 1913, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s to 1917, AGO Doc. File, various files pertaining to Alaska, R. G. 94, N.A.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

18. Richardson to the Adjutant General, March 13, 1914, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s to 1917, AGO Doc. File, various files pertaining to Alaska, R. G. 94, N.A.

railroads connecting at least one Pacific port with the great interior rivers and one or more coal fields. There were two restrictions on the President's authority. One limited the two aggregate mileages to 1,000, and the other authorized a maximum expenditure of $35 million. President Wilson created the Alaskan Engineering Commission and charged it with constructing the Alaska Railroad. The Engineering Commission, put under the Department of the Interior, consisted of William C. Edes, chairman, locating engineer of some repute; Lieutenant Frederick Mears, chief engineer of the Panama Railroad and an officer with wide experience; and Thomas Riggs, well known in Alaska and the Yukon as a mining engineer and as engineer of the International Boundary Commission.

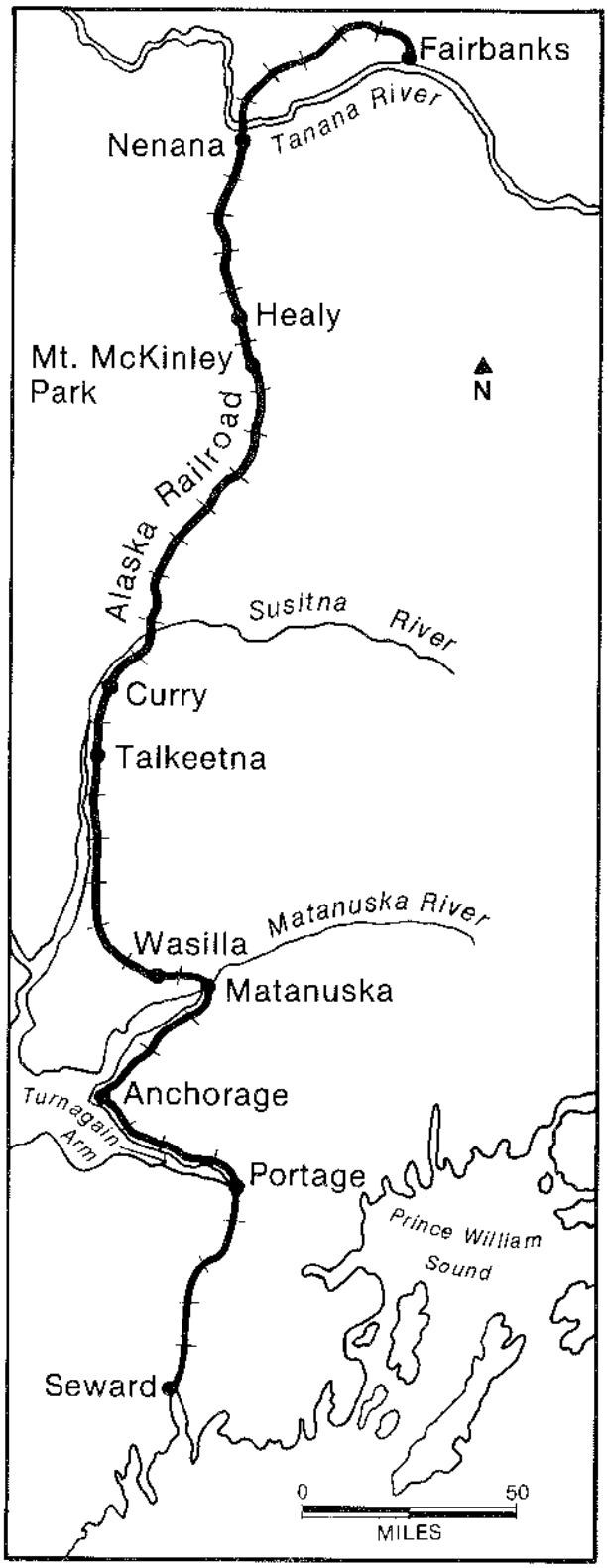
After the President had chosen a route, construction of the Alaska Railroad connecting Seward at tidewater with Fairbanks, 470 miles away in the interior, began in April 1915. It was completed in 1923 at a cost nearly twice that of the original authorization.[19]

While the railroad boom engaged the attention of northern residents, the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska continued its construction and maintenance work but also took the time to assess the work it had accomplished since 1905. Between then and 1913, Congress had appropriated a total of $1,375,000 for the "construction and maintenance of military and post roads, bridges, and trails" in Alaska. The Alaska Fund had yielded $1,160,829.62 in that time span, for a total of $2,535,829.62 from both sources. With those funds, the board had constructed and maintained the following mileage of roads and trails:

Wagon roads	862 miles
Winter sled roads	617 miles
Trails	2,167 miles

The cost per mile, including maintenance and all expenditures by the board, amounted to:

Wagon roads	$2,489.68
Winter sled roads	278.80
Trails	90.44



Route of the Alaska Railroad from Seward to Fairbanks, a distance of 470.3 miles.

19. William H. Wilson, *Railroad in the Clouds: The Alaska Railroad in the Age of Steam, 1914-1945* (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company, 1977), pp. 17-31.

Also, at different times since 1905, the towns of Fairbanks, Nome, and Cordova, as well as some of the large mining companies, had made cash donations of approximately $20,000 to aid the work of the board.[20]

During its eight years of existence, the board had accomplished much, although the mileage constructed so far constituted only the very beginning of a proper transportation system for Alaska. The board considered the 419-mile-long wagon road from Valdez to Fairbanks, including the Willow Creek-Chitina branch, to be its most important achievement so far. With an average expenditure of about $1,500 per mile, the board thought it could be improved to the standards of a fair automobile road. In fact, during the late summer of 1913, the board had sent a three-quarter-ton field truck "of the type being experimented with by the Quartermaster and Medical Corps of the Army" on a round trip from Valdez to Fairbanks. The vehicle left Valdez on July 28 and returned on August 19, after having made a side trip to Chitina. The truck had covered 922 miles, making about 50 miles per day. In some instances, it had to be helped through soft spots on steep grades, but overall the trip had been successful.

The board also had prepared an estimate of what it would cost to complete a system of roads and trails for Alaska that would meet traffic needs 10 years in the future, namely:

Maintenance of present roads	$1,250,000
Completion of projects on which work has already started and maintenance after completion	$1,420,000
Projects approved but on which no construction has been undertaken	$2,780,000
Projects not yet of importance but will become so as other roads are constructed	$1,800,000
TOTAL	$7,250,000

Additionally, the board considered the matter of building a railroad but concluded that Alaska needed wagon roads first. While disavowing any intent to discourage railroad construction, the board nevertheless pointed out that

> *after several years of careful observation and study of the land transportation conditions and of the natural inducements to development and settlement which exist,* [it] *is convinced that no rapid or general development will follow the construction of trunk lines of railroad into the interior unless preceded or accompanied by the construction of numerous wagon roads and trails as feeders, and even then the development will be slow.*[21]

In 1914 the board reported that Congress had appropriated $155,000 but that $54,787.83 had been spent to build a dike around Valdez in order to protect the terminals and buildings of the military cable and telegraph system from glacial floods. The Alaska Fund had yielded $170,688.37. There just had not been enough money to construct much additional road and trail mileage since nearly all of the funds were required for the repair and maintenance of the existing system. In fact, board president Richardson cautioned that "this will become practically a fixed condition from year to year, with the amount of mileage now required to be maintained unless some provision shall be made for increasing the fund to take care of new projects."[22]

Even as the board continued to work on Alaska roads and trails, the Alaska territorial legislature also tried to deal with the problems of surface travel. In 1915 the second territorial legislature created road districts that corresponded with judicial divisions and provided for an elected road commissioner for each district. Each commissioner was to receive as compensation five percent of all money expended by him. And although each

20. War Department, *Report of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, 1913* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1914), pp. 8-10.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-15.

22. *Ibid.*, 1914, p. 5.

road commissioner could appoint two assistants as inspectors, the legislature made no provisions for their compensation. The lawmakers appropriated 75 percent of forest revenues to pay for the work.[23]

Wickersham Again Attacks Richardson

Different communities throughout Alaska presented worth-while projects to the board every year for which there just were not any funds. The City of Fairbanks, for example, had unsuccessfully petitioned the board to build a bridge across the Chena River which divided the city. It then had contacted the Secretary of War and asked for help. Delegate Wickersham also was informed of the request. The delegate quickly fixed the blame for unaccomplished work. It was simple. Richardson just did not ask for enough money in his annual budget presentations. For the fiscal year ending June 30, 1914, Richardson, through the War Department, had requested a mere $125,000. "Instead of asking for $750,000, as Richardson has always talked to you about," Wickersham wrote to Wallace Cathcart,

> *he only asked for a piddling amount, and then he comes to Alaska and lies to you people by saying that he cannot get the appropriation he asks for. The truth is that he makes no effort to secure any appropriation except merely to keep the work going from year to year and to keep up his commission. He does not want to build the bridge across the slough at Fairbanks and never will build it until the Northern Commercial Company tells him to. You know and I know and everybody else knows that Richardson and his Road Commission is under the control of the Northern Commercial Company....*[24]

Wickersham did not mention that, by War Department ruling, the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska was authorized only to submit estimates necessary to maintain the existing road system.

Richardson soon enough heard of the delegate's allegations. On November 25, 1913, he had submitted a special report on the needs for work in Alaska to the War Department and accompanied it with a request for a supplemental appropriation for $750,000. He had not been encouraged by the department, however, but told Alaskans during the summer of 1914 that he still hoped Congress would consider the request favorably. That had not happened. Richardson said that Wickersham's calling him a liar and saying the board was under the control of the Northern Commercial Company was totally unjustified. Indeed, Richardson stated, it was Wickersham who

> *is a purposeful and malignant liar himself and depends upon his position as a member of Congress to escape the just results of any defamatory attack he may choose to make. His entire letter is without justification in any existing facts and is perhaps what one might expect from a scurrilous, political blatherskite, permanently afflicted with about every phase of mental perversion and a complete moral idiocy.*[25]

It was now Wickersham's turn to be outraged. After persecuting Richardson for years, he now found the latter's remarks "so ungentlemanly and abusive in its character as not to deserve reply...." But reply he did, and in great detail at that. Basically, Wickersham's

23. 33 Stats. 391; Session Laws of Alaska, 1915, Chap. 27, April 28, 1915.

24. Wickersham to Wallace Cathcart, December 21, 1914, file Richardson, Wilds P., General Correspondence, Adjutant General's Office, R. G. 94, N.A.

25. Richardson to Wallace Cathcart, June 23, 1915, file Richardson, Wilds P., General Correspondence, Adjutant General's Office, R. G. 94, N.A.

complaint was that Richardson seemingly never had

> *a very clear conception of the duties of the Delegate from Alaska whose rights you have always treated as of minor importance, while you have always magnified those of your own position and assumed to extend them to cover those of a representative in Congress. It is often difficult to tell from your acts whether you or the Delegate is the representative from Alaska.*[26]

Wickersham lectured Richardson at length on the differences between their respective duties and prerogatives. What particularly bothered the delegate was the fact that Richardson always spent the winters in Washington and was on good terms with many members of Congress and the executive branch. Wickersham furthermore was convinced that Richardson had always lobbied "in opposition to his [the delegate's] efforts to procure better legislation for Alaska, and both in Alaska and Washington you have threatened, abused, cursed, and otherwise harassed and impeded him in the performance of his duty."[27]

Wickersham once again recounted a long list of grievances, real or imagined, which he harbored against Richardson, including meddling in Alaskan local politics, favoritism toward the Northern Commercial Company and various other large economic interests, and incompetency in conducting the work of building roads and trails, bridges, and ferries. In conclusion, Wickersham reminded Richardson that it was the delegate's right and duty to protect the interests of Alaskans

> *from your viciously incompetent mismanagement of the road fund, and if you think you can prevent it by threats and profanity you are greatly mistaken. If you could be taught to appreciate your position...to give more attention to the building of roads...and less to politics, to use less liquor and more temperate language...to let your road work out by bids to contractors and draw your checks on a government depository, to compel your foremen to work more and play poker and pangini less—then you might get to the point where the people would have some confidence in you and less disgust at your failure.*[28]

Doubtless Wickersham disliked Richardson so intensely because he saw in him a competitor for power and influence, and he did not forgive him for having championed President Taft's scheme for a military government for the territory. In addition, the colonel had a power base in Alaska through his control of a sizable payroll. The delegate, rightly or wrongly, was convinced that Richardson used his territorial powers to hurt him politically. The colonel was convinced that Wickersham was out to wreck his military career. By 1916 the two men had been feuding for a long time.

Early in 1916, Richardson again requested a supplemental appropriation of $500,000 for 1917 in order to finish the Valdez-Chitina-Fairbanks military road and continue work on the Ruby-Long Creek road. The two antagonists appeared before the House Committee on Military Affairs on April 11, 1916, and requested the extra money. Wickersham argued that it was high time for the board to finish its work in Alaska, while Richardson maintained that the army, which had done much of the pioneer work in opening American frontiers, was doing the same thing in Alaska. "What has been accomplished in Alaska," the colonel stated, "is creditable to the Army and can only be appreciated fully by those familiar with the conditions prior to 1898 or who can picture the present condition

26. Wickersham to Richardson, July 29, 1915, file Richardson, Wilds P., General Correspondence, Adjutant General's Office, R. G. 94, N.A.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*

if the Army work did not exist."[29] Committee members listened attentively but did not make any promises.

A year later, Wickersham had changed his mind about the requested supplemental appropriation and noted that he had been "working up an assault on the appropriation carried in the Military Appropriation Bill of $500,000 for the Alaska Board of Road Commissions [sic]...."[30]

He did not want to go on record as opposing the money, so he asked a colleague from Ohio to make the point of order against the item. "I intend to put every obstacle in the way of the Board and hope finally to drive it out of existence. I feel fully justified in doing it for it seems the only way to protect the 'Alaska Fund' and prevent the Board from wasting it also."[31]

The next day his colleague, as agreed upon, raised the point of order, claiming that the money was not authorized by any previous law. The Speaker of the House sustained the objection, "and out went the $500,000 appropriation for the support of Colonel Richardson's wagon road work in Alaska."[32]

Wickersham recalled sitting "quietly in my seat and heard the fight without saying a word. The *Congressional Record* of this date contains the record of the beginning of the end of the Alaska Board of Road Commissioners—a proper end."[33]

On February 25 the delegate noted that Richardson had been busy telegraphing friends in Alaska, telling them that "I killed his appropriation and I am getting telegrams urging appropriation."[34]

Wickersham contacted his Alaskan friends and told them to look at the *Congressional Record* which proved that he had not objected to the appropriation. Privately, he remarked that "it is necessary to the freedom and development of Alaska that this appropriation be fully and finally beaten, so we may be rid of Richardson and his domination, and I intend to see that it is done be the consequences good or bad to me."[35]

Much to the delegate's chagrin, however, the Senate restored the $500,000. Richardson won the fiscal battle.

The Board of Road Commissioners Continues its Work

In 1915 a devastating fire swept through Valdez and partially consumed the town. It also burned the headquarters building of the board, destroying the office equipment and all files. The organization recovered quickly, however, and moved to new quarters in Juneau and resumed its work.

Not surprisingly, the board continued to receive more requests for trail and road construction than it could possibly accomplish with its limited budget. For example, in May 1916 Harry H. Brown, a warden of the Alaska Fisheries Service of the U. S. Bureau of Fisheries, appealed to the board to put up trail

29. U.S. Congress, House, 64 C., 1 S., *Roads and Trails in Alaska*, Extracts from Hearings before the Committee on Military Affairs on the Bill Making Appropriations for the Support of the Army for the Fiscal Year 1917, Statements of James Wickersham and Colonel W. P. Richardson (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1916), pp. 3-16.

30. James Wickersham Diary, February 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 1917, University of Alaska Archives, Fairbanks, Alaska.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*

markings for winter travel on the Alaska Peninsula and in the Bristol Bay region. Not a single marking defined any trail in western Alaska, a wilderness region where travelers went for many miles without encountering either non-Native or Native dwellings. And although travelers usually knew the general direction in which they wanted to go, they often lost the indistinct trail and wandered around for days before finding it again. Brown recounted the experiences of several government employees during the past winter. Mrs. Corrine Call, the school teacher at Dillingham, and Mrs. H. J. Paulsen, the wife of the U. S. Deputy Marshal in the town, together with three Eskimo girls and two Eskimo guides had departed for Koggiung during the Christmas season. More than a week later the party arrived at Billy Hurley's trading post far up on the Nushagak River. The guides had lost their way. There were many similar occurrences, Brown continued, all supporting his plea for marked trails.[36]

Western Alaska possessed a difficult geography, Brown stated. The vast tundra was intersected by creeks, ravines, and rivers, and was dotted with myriad small lakes, all resembling one another. One had to be an expert pathfinder to make a trip without losing time and adding miles to the journey. In the summer, everyone traveled by boat since the tundra became impassable. In the winter, conditions were reversed. All water bodies froze solidly, and the frozen tundra now supported the weight of travelers and dog teams. Brown then suggested that competent trail guides determine their course, and that all wilderness trails be marked with stakes not more than one quarter mile apart. These stakes should stand at least 8 feet above the tundra and be painted a brilliant color, making them brightly visible in a snowy landscape. At curves or angles in the trail, or at points where barriers restricted a traveler's vision, the stakes should have pointers enabling individuals on the trail to place the approximate location of the succeeding stakes instantly. Such a program of marking would be relatively inexpensive, Brown thought, and make winter travel "vastly more comfortable and safe," increase the number of travelers, and make "the monotony and isolation of this region during winter...more endurable."[37]

A few months later the board responded to the request by releasing proposals for bids to stake completely the approximately 60-mile-long main trail from Dillingham to Koggiung. Colonel Richardson followed Brown's proposal for trail staking in most particulars, but he directed that the markers have a red flag or streamer conspicuously displayed on top instead of painting them. Richardson pointed out, however, that limited board funds allowed only the staking of heavily traveled main trails. And since it was too expensive to send a board foreman to oversee the work, he asked that Dillingham appoint an individual "who will volunteer without compensation to oversee the work and...see the same is substantially and well done."[38] The commission let the contract and the Dillingham to Koggiung trail was staked.

In 1916, the board dispatched John Zug, an assistant engineer, to examine a trail from the head of Iliamna Bay to Iliamna village. Zug reported that a 12-mile-long road was needed to make the Iliamna Lake region accessible from Iliamna Bay, saving travelers the long trip by way of Dutch Harbor. He estimated that the contemplated low-standard wagon road could be built for $8,000 by following the existing trail. The board decided to spend the money for the project, and at the end of July 1917, a board foreman, Mr. Cooper, together with seven laborers, a cook, and about three and a half tons of supplies and tools, arrived at AC Point, Iliamna Bay. From there, the outfit had to be transferred to the head of the bay, a distance of about 2 miles, in two small skiffs. It was a laborious process, since the men could only make one round trip on each tide because of the extensive mud flats at the

36. Brown to Bureau of Fisheries, May 20, 1916, Alaska Road Commission, box 65637, R. G. 30, Federal Records Center, Seattle, Washington.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Richardson to Brown, August 17, 1916, Alaska Road Commission, box 65637, R. G. 30, Federal Records Center, Seattle, Washington.

head of the bay; it took six tides to move the supplies and tools. From there the men had to carry the outfit for another 2 miles on their backs to the first campsite. At the end of the 1917 season, the crew had constructed 9.5 miles of road from Iliamna Bay, leaving another 1.5 miles to reach the village. W. G. Fenton, the new foreman who had replaced Cooper in August, observed that the best route to reach Iliamna Lake crossed the river at the village and from there wound through low, rolling hills providing a solid roadbed, while the harbor at Pile Bay provided an ideal anchorage for small craft. Another 2 miles of road needed to be constructed to reach Iliamna River at a point accessible to launches coming from Bristol Bay, and another 5 miles to reach Pile Bay on Iliamna Lake. With insufficient funds, the board decided to finish only the remaining 2 miles to Iliamna River, particularly since two larger and three smaller bridges had to be constructed with the remaining funds.[39]

While the outlying districts asked for trail staking and road construction, the railroad construction boom revived mining activities along the route. Early in 1917, W. A. Monroe, a citizen of Spokane, Washington, and the spokesman for a group of surveyors, enlisted the help of C. C. Dill, a member of the House of Representatives, in his quest to have the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska first build a trail and then a wagon road from Talkeetna on the government railroad to the group's mineral claims on Iron Creek, a distance of approximately 40 miles. Monroe was satisfied that the group's five locations—the Copper Queen, the Copper King, East View, and the Springer and Talkeetna groups—would produce handsomely once properly developed and would supply important tonnage to the railroad. Representative Dill conferred with Richardson about the request, but was told only that the board would consider it. Richardson warned, however, that "the demands upon the Board are far in excess of what... [it] is able to accomplish with the funds available and new projects are coming up continually which have to take their turn for consideration."[40]

A few days later, 72 miners, prospectors, and citizens of the Talkeetna mining district petitioned Richardson to build the wagon road to Iron Creek to help open up the valuable copper deposits. Richardson promised to consider the request. He told congressmen from Washington that the board intended to make substantial improvements in the Matanuska district, but reminded them that this depended on the Military Appropriation Bill to come before the extra session of Congress.[41] In essence, Richardson told the Washington House delegation that the board would happily satisfy constituents' requests—but this depended on help with the appropriation bill.

Richardson knew that railroad construction had brought an influx of job seekers as well as prospectors and miners into the Matanuska and Susitna valleys. As early as 1916, therefore, he had directed assistant engineer John Zug to examine conditions in the areas adjacent to the new government railroad. After his reconnaissance of the Iliamna area, Zug spent the summer in the Matanuska and Susitna valleys battling mosquitoes, enduring wind and rain as well as enjoying warm, bright, and sunny days. After three months he submitted his report. He found only three districts sufficiently developed to "produce any considerable immediate traffic and demand for roads." The first was the Willow Creek mining district, served by the Knik-Willow Creek road, the second the Cache Creek mining district, and the third the farming region of the Matanuska Valley. Existing roads and trails partially

39. Zug to Richardson, August 9, 1916, P. Cooper to the Commission, August 16, 1917, Fenton to Commission, November 24, 1917, Fenton to A. Eide, Superintendent, A.R.C., February 17, 1918, Alaska Road Commission, Box 65479, R. G. 30, Federal Records Center, Seattle, Washington.

40. Monroe to Dill, January 9, 1917, Richardson to Dill, January 19, 1917, Citizens to Richardson, January 17, 1917, Richardson to Congressman Albert Johnson, March 17, 1917, Alaska Road Commission, box 65479, R. G. 30, Federal Records Center, Seattle, Washington.

41. *Ibid.*

served all of them, but considerable improvement was required to permit heavy traffic and lower freight rates. A portion of Zug's report follows:

3. *The Willow Creek Mining District is now served by the Knik-Willow Creek Road (Route 35). This road has been cut down by long usage so that the general level is in many places below that of the adjacent ground and in wet weather the holes become filled with mud and water. In dry weather it is possible to haul good sized loads over it at a cost of $60 per ton. Improvement of the road will probably reduce this rate to $20 per ton and perhaps $15. The main line of the railway crosses the road at mile 14½ and most of the freight will probably be hauled from this point as soon as the road is in operation. The road requires widening out, ditching, and surfacing. The material from the ditches will probably be sufficient to fill the low spots and gravel for surfacing is accessible at convenient points all along the line. The traffic over the road is heavy and constant throughout the summer. Definite information as to the quantity of it has not yet been received. The expense of putting this road in first class condition will probably average at least $1000 per mile. In addition an extension of about four miles is desired on the upper end and it will probably be necessary to rebuild the bridge over the Little Susitna. The total amount required will be about $25,000.*

4. *The Cache Creek Mining District is not directly tributary to the railroad at present except at Anchorage. All travel and traffic into it goes by water to McDougall on the Yentna River, thence across country by trail to the Kahiltna River and thence by a very rough pack trail in summer and in winter via the Kahiltna River to the mouth of Cache Creek and thence up the Creek. The improvement of summer travel conditions is covered by my report of July 19, 1916. Subsequent development of this district may require the construction of another road some time in the future to obtain more direct communication with the railroad either at Talkeetna or some point further north.*

5. *The farming district of the Matanuska valley lies between the branch line of the railway extending to the coal fields and the Willow Creek Road,* ...[an] *area consisting of about 62 square miles. The soil is extremely fertile. Beyond these limits it is not so good. Most of the available and accessible land is occupied and considerable clearing has been done and improvements made. There are two general routes of travel through the district. One road extends in a general northwesterly direction from Matanuska to Wasilla Creek and thence northward to an old trail from Knik to Moose Creek. The other follows the valley of Wasilla Creek from a point on the main line of the railroad 4 miles west of Matanuska to an intersection with* [another] *road.... Considerable clearing, grubbing and grading has already been done by the settlers on those roads. The general location of these roads is good and they serve the most improved portion of the valley. In addition to these roads wagon roads have been constructed by the* [Alaska] *Engineering Commission from Matanuska to the Willow Creek road and from Matanuska to Moose Creek approximately paralleling respectively the main line and the branch line of the railroad. An additional road is neeeded from Farmington four miles north of Matanuska through the center of township 18 to intercept the Willow Creek road at some convenient point north of mile 25. It is believed these roads will adequately serve the greater portion of the farming area of the Matanuska valley. They will aggregate about 24 miles in length and cost approximately $1000 per mile. In addition the road from Farmington should be extended East across the railroad to Palmer's Canyon and a bridge built across the Matanuska river at this point. This will require about two miles of road and a bridge probably 450 feet long with a span of 75 to 100 feet across the channel. This will cost about $8,000 additional.*

6. *The Enginering Commission has constructed about 60 miles of road at an aggregate cost of $45,000. These roads parallel the railroad line in a general way, though in places they leave the line for considerable distances. They are only ordinary narrow, cleared and grubbed roadway, without any elaborate construction. Considerable grading has been done where required and there are occasional stretches of corduroy. The roads are finished to a sufficient degree to serve their purpose in advancing the construction of the railway but not being ditched or surfaced will deteriorate rapidly and cost considerable for maintenance. They will probably keep them in sufficient repair for ordinary use until the end of the present season when they will probably not require them any longer for their own use. The maintenance of these roads in their present state will cost probably $100 to $150 per mile. The cost of their improvement will depend upon the character of roads the Board decides to maintain in this region. Except on the Willow Creek road it is not believed the traffic will be heavy enough to require surfacing. In most places in this district, gravel is close to the surface and the character of the soil is such that it drains readily. A statement of the cost of roads constructed by the Engineering Commission to June 30, 1916, is herewith.*

7. *It is believed an appropriation of $75,000 will be sufficient to provide for the present needs of the district. Development has not proceeded much in advance of the railroad either on the main line or the branch line. One coal vein has been opened at Moose Creek and is producing regularly. The bunkers are connected with the railroad by a siding and the siding is reached by a tram line from the mine. It is expected the railroad will be so located as to serve the heart of the coal field but no doubt wagon roads will be needed at some later stage of development. It is probable that roads will also be needed along the main line as construction is advanced and it might be advisable to increase the above estimate to provide for this contingency.*[42]

While Zug had given a fairly optimistic estimate of farming possibilities, Oliver A. Hall, the design engineer for the board, visited the valley a year later and presented a more sober assessment. About 30 "farms" were surveyed and opened for settlement in an area that began in Anchorage and included the land between the Knik-Willow Creek wagon road and the railroad. Of the approximately 90,000 acres of homestead land, no more than 200 acres were cleared and under cultivation in the Matanuska Valley, with perhaps another 100 acres adjacent to Anchorage and Old Knik. All else was covered with heavy growth of spruce and birch trees, and heavy undergrowth and moss covered the ground. It required heavy work to clear and remove the moss and all the stumps before the soil could be plowed.

Hall related that the farms were homesteads of 320 acres, filed under the old Homestead Law of 1862 which had been extended to Alaska in 1898. Some of these had been relinquished and relocated in units of 160 acres each under a new amendment enacted by Congress in 1916. He estimated that each farm contained an average of about 4 acres of cleared and cultivated land. Land clearing cost anywhere from $60 to $200 per acre, with burning the cheapest method. But since it rained a great deal, little burning had been accomplished. Most of the farmers were old prospectors and miners, and when Hall talked with a number of them they told him that they would gladly sell to the first buyer—so they could go back to prospecting or mining. If offered enough money, some indicated a desire to go "outside"—that is, anywhere outside Alaska—and buy farms there.

Hall pointed out that the area had a short growing season, from about the middle of May to the end of August. During the last three years, peas planted in several gardens in the

42. Zug to Richardson, September 6, 1916, Alaska Road Commission, box 65479, R. G. 30, Federal Records Center, Seattle, Washington.

area had frozen while in blossom, and potatoes never ripened and had to be harvested while the vines were still green and then cured in root cellars. Wild grass grew to a height of 4 to 5 feet, but because of the wet weather it was difficult to dry; it also seemed to be less nutritious than hay imported from the States. Residents claimed that it took about four times as much native hay as the imported product to feed stock. Furthermore, after each cutting wild grass grew back shorter and shorter. Some individuals experimented with wheat, oats, and barley, and even though these grains would not ripen, they made good feed for horses and cows.

The area possessed deep, black rich loam, averaging in depth from 6 to 8 feet at Palmer and tapering off to about 18 to 24 inches 10 miles to the North. Hall concluded that "were this land located in a more favorable climate it could be made into profitable farms." He admitted that it might be possible, "after a course of thorough experimentation," to raise certain crops to maturity. But that lay in the far future.[43]

The War Department's Review Work of Richardson and the Board

While the Board of Road Commissioners attempted to respond to the many requests for road and trail construction, the War Department assigned Major General T. H. Bliss to review the work of the organization thoroughly and analyze the controversies between Delegate Wickersham and Colonel Richardson. In his 1917 report, Bliss summarized Richardson's military career, noting that he began his Alaska service in 1897. Because of his extensive northern experience and capable performance he became the logical choice for the appointment as senior member of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska in 1905. Throughout his service, superior officers had always praised him for his leadership abilities and resourcefulness. All went well apparently as the board "plodded along with its work;" neither the board nor its members incurred any enmity or criticism until 1910.

In January 1910 Wickersham charged Richardson with lobbying Congress for several pieces of legislation, among them the legislative council measure, which the delegate opposed. From that time onward, problems between Wickersham and Richardson mounted. In response, the War Department had undertaken several investigations and always completely exonerated Richardson. At no time were Wickersham's attacks on the colonel sustained by the record. Bliss believed, however, that these attacks on the board and Richardson would continue, due in part to Alaska's geography and its demography. The territory's population was widely scattered over a huge area; many people lived in the most inaccessible places, and their economic successes or failures depended upon gaining access to navigable streams or harbors on the seacoast. For this they needed roads and trails, and the construction of these "was about as difficult as can be conceived of."[44]

The board never had an adequate budget to satisfy all requests fully; in fact, it did not meet the demands of many at all. It should have been clear from the very beginning that "bitter struggle and rivalry would result from these conditions," and yet Bliss found that Alaskans nearly universally praised the work of the board. Even so, Major General Bliss believed that the War Department would have to anticipate continuing attacks on the board. He recommended, therefore, transferring its responsibilities to the Department of the

43. Hall to Richardson, August 10, 1917, Alaska Road Commission, box 65479, R. G. 30, Federal Records Center, Seattle, Washington.

44. T. H. Bliss to Secretary of War, February 6, 1917, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s to 1917, AGO Doc. File, various files pertaining to Alaska, R. G. 94, N.A.

Interior, a civilian agency already engaged in building the Alaska Railroad.[45]

Richardson, although he concurred with the transfer plan, appealed to the Secretary of War to be allowed to complete Alaska's major road network, "contingent, of course upon any developments which may make my services more valuable elsewhere."[46]

Several factors were involved in Richardson's appeal. He felt that his personal reputation was at stake, although he tried to believe "that this is secondary to my sense of duty to the work and to the wishes of the Department." He had served nearly twenty years in Alaska, embracing "years that have necessarily deprived me of opportunity in other fields which perhaps might have offered more promise of honor and regard than did the work in Alaska."[47]

Richardson also pointed out that his suggestion to the territorial legislature to create a road organization capable of assuming the functions of the board had been well received. The colonel thought that it might be more appropriate for the territory than the Department of the Interior to take over the duties of the board. Furthermore, once such an organization existed it might become the recipient of federal funds which the Department of Agriculture dispensed to states and territories for the construction of post roads.[48]

Indeed, in 1917 the third territorial legislature once again dealt with road matters. It appropriated $20,000 for shelter cabins, to be expended under the general supervision of the governor of Alaska by the road commissioners, who were to receive 5 percent of this shelter fund for their services. It also created a territorial Board of Road Commissioners and instructed it to submit estimates for the construction of essential road work. Within each road district it created a divisional board, consisting of an elected chairman (receiving an annual salary of $2,000) and two other members to be appointed by the territorial board (receiving expenses when working). Each divisional board was required to submit an annual report to the territorial board. The legislature also appropriated $400,000 for the biennium, to be divided equally among the four road districts.[49] The work of the territorial legislature in the transportation field indicated that it would soon develop some sort of relationship with the federal Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska. While the War Department pondered the plan to transfer the Board of Road Commissioners to the Department of the Interior, the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce protested that the board intended to spend the greater portion of its funds on the Valdez-Fairbanks road "necessity for which no longer exists" once the railroad was completed. The chamber boasted about 300 flourishing farms comprising some 90,000 acres which were isolated from markets because of the lack of wagon roads. Although there were actually fewer "farms," and these probably were only surveyed homesteads, the citizens had asked the board to expend $170,000 for the season's work. They were granted only a pitiful $25,000. The chamber suggested that the board arrange with the Department of the Interior to build wagon roads under the direction of the Alaska Engineering Commission. The chamber, in truly booster fashion, demanded that immediate action be taken to restore equity and fairness.

The Valdez Chamber of Commerce disagreed with the opinions of the Anchorage Chamber and pointed out that the Valdez-Fairbanks road did not parallel the government railroad. In fact, it was the only road to the interior through American territory.

Richardson was caught once again in a controversy. He pointed out that the board had no responsibiity in law to build feeder

45. *Ibid.*

46. Richardson to Secretary of War, February 21, 1917, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s to 1917, AGO Doc. File, various files pertaining to Alaska, R. G. 94, N.A.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*

49. Session Laws of Alaska, 1917, Chap. 17, April 30; Chap. 36, May 3; Chap. 35, May 3, 1917.

roads for the railroad. Furthermore, the Department of the Interior greatly publicized its railroad project and minimized the labors of the board. Worse, many residents held the board "responsible for any failure of the railroad to immediately fulfill the extravagant expectations concerning it, by charging that our Board refused or neglected to build the necessary wagon road feeders."[50]

A beleagured Richardson finally requested to be transferred to Washington as soon as he had completed the annual report. In short, Richardson said, "I find myself playing a 'losing game' personally and for the Department, and I see no way of overcoming it."[51]

Richardson Resigns

Soon thereafter, the War Department promoted Richardson to the rank of brigadier general. Wickersham was displeased, but then delighted when the new general resigned as president of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska on December 29, 1917, and left the territory shortly thereafter to assume command of the 78th Infantry Brigade, 39th Division, then at Camp Beauregard, Louisiana. Richardson served with distinction in France and next commanded American forces at Murmansk, Siberia. He returned to the United States in October 1919, and with the mustering out of the army he was returned to his permanent rank of colonel. He retired on October 31, 1920. For his capable leadership in Siberia, the War Department awarded him the Distinguished Service Medal in April 1922. He died in May 1929 at the age of 68 at Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington, D.C.[52]

Wickersham retired from the delegateship in 1920 but re-entered politics in 1930 and served another term as delegate for Alaska. Anthony J. Dimond defeated him in the 1932 Democratic landslide. Wickersham died in Juneau at the age of 82 in October 1939. Perhaps he had reconsidered in the years since 1917, for in his book *Old Yukon*, published in 1938, Wickersham paid tribute to his old antagonist, stating that "the Richardson Highway, from Valdez to Fairbanks, is a fitting monument to the first great road-builder in Alaska, General Wilds P. Richardson."[53]

50. Anchorage Chamber of Commerce to Secretary of War, June 9, 1917, Valdez Chamber of Commerce to Secretary of War, July 6, 1917, Richardson to Brigadier General H. P. McCain, August 10, 1917, Central Decimal Files, States and Territories, Alaska 602-611, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1917, R. G. 407, N.A.

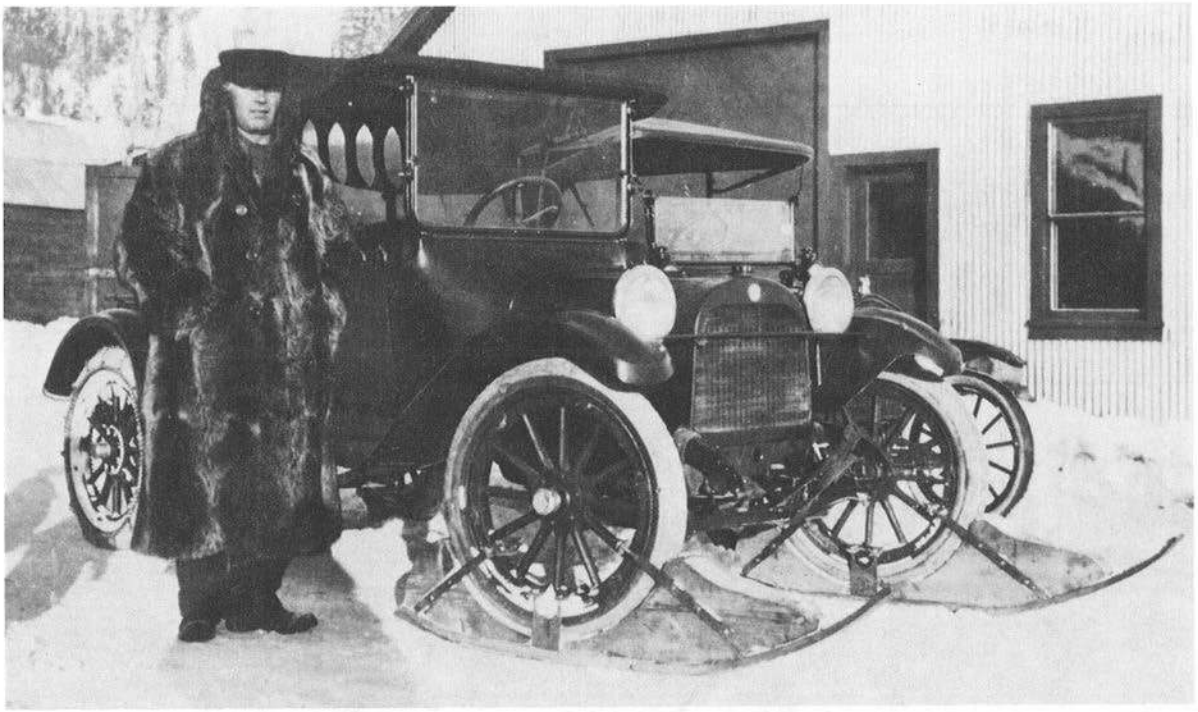
51. *Ibid.*

52. Dumas Malone, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. 15 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 576.

53. James Wickersham, *Old Yukon: Tales-Trails-and Trials* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Law Book Co., 1938), p. 474.

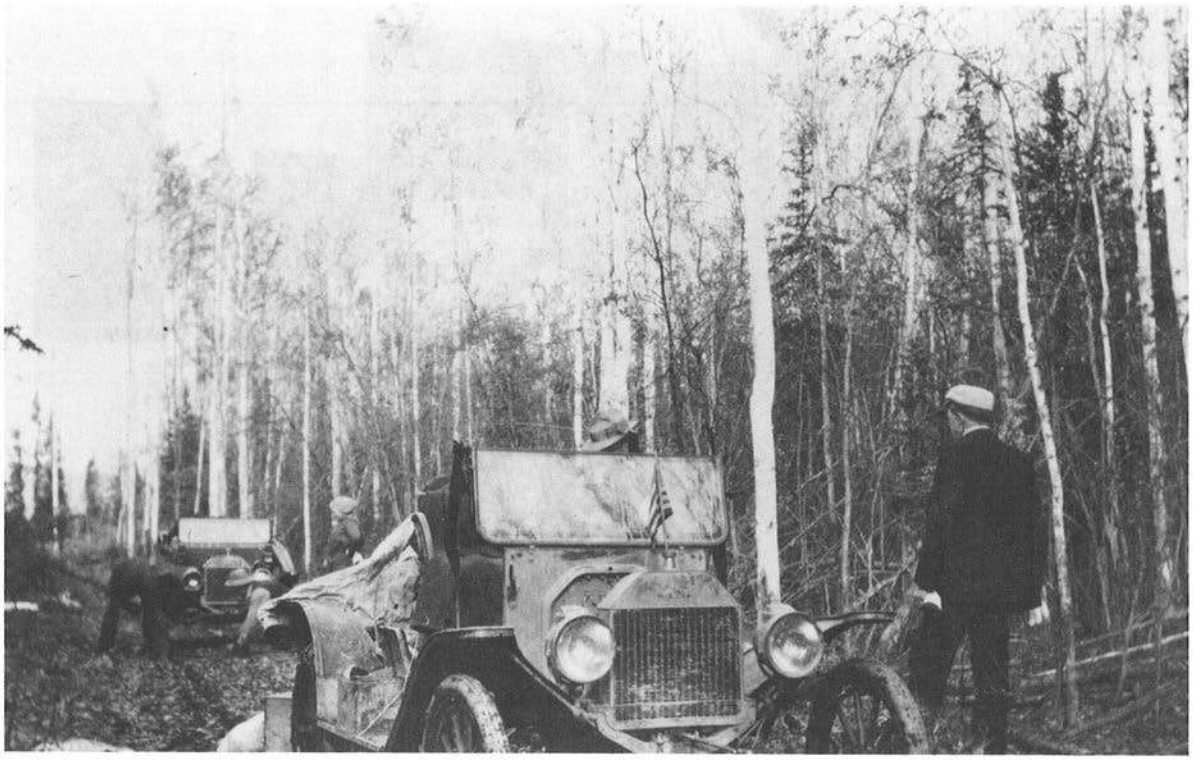
Car, man, and dogs on tramway in the Nome area, July 1912. John Zug Collection, UAF.

"Snow motor" with large revolving cylinders for propulsion, Valdez, November 27, 1929. Ray Huddleston Collection, UAF.



A car with sled runners on front wheels and chains on rear, probably at Valdez, early 1900s. John Zug Collection, UAF.

Inspection party on the Richardson trail, September 1914. John Zug, center; Bobby Sheldon, second from left; two other members of the group are Feller and McGuinn.
John Zug Collection, UAF.



Inspection party, Richardson Highway, September 22, 1914. Bobby Sheldon on the right. John Zug Collection, UAF.

Small truck on the Nabesna Road, late 1920s. Ray Huddleston Collection, UAF.

Government car on the Richardson Highway. Ray Huddleston Collection, UAF.

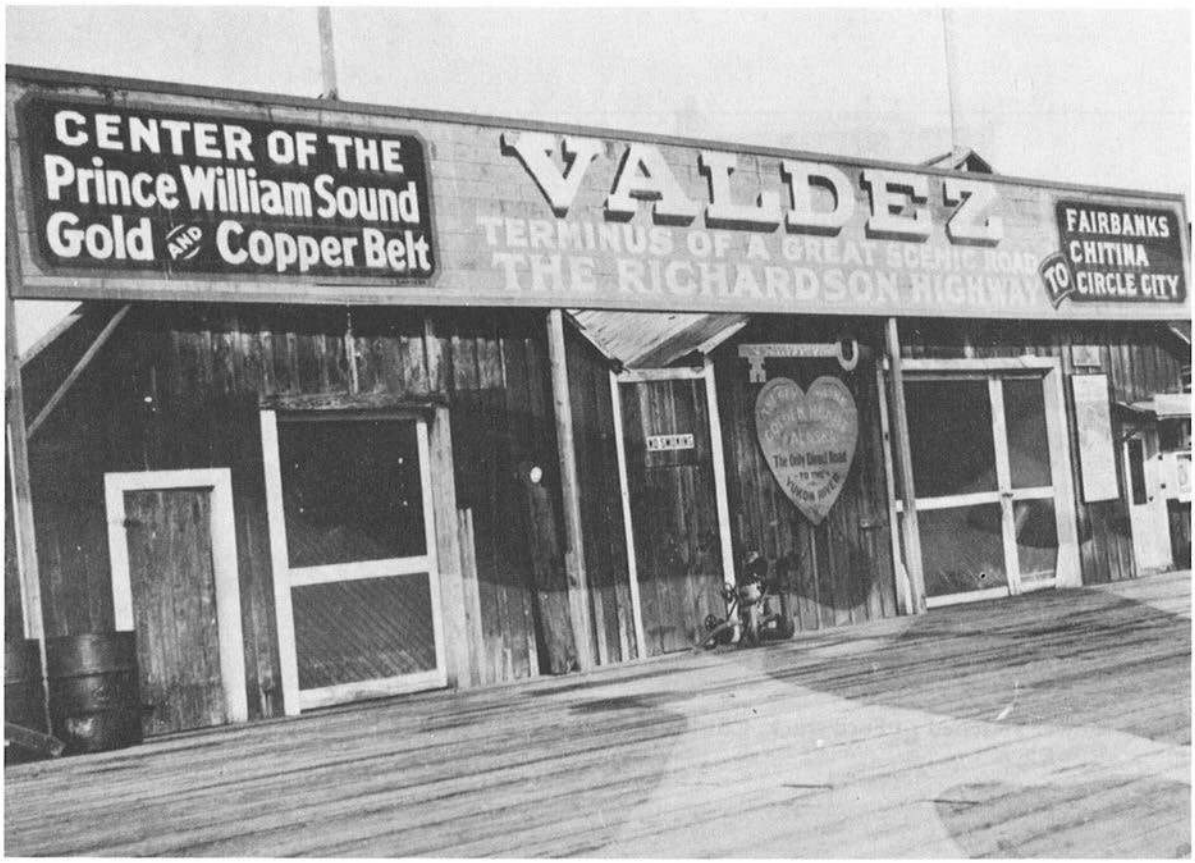
Twelve-foot grader at work on the Gulkana-Chisana Road, mile 49, 1931. Ray Huddleston Collection, UAF.

Capt Glen E. Edgerton was the engineer officer from January 1911 to September 11, 1915. The Edgerton Cutoff from the Richardson Highway to Chitina was named for him. National Archives of the United States.

Wagons, formerly used with horses, being pulled by a caterpillar. The transition to motor power occurred in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Ray Huddleston Collection, UAF.

Rawls Mower attached to Ford truck, Chitina district, July 1933. Ray Huddleston Collection, UAF.

Road sign outside of Valdez on Richardson Highway, 1929. Ray Huddleston Collection, UAF.



Golden Belt Line tour headquarters, Valdez, about 1930. Walter Phillips.

5 From Wagons to Automobiles: The War Years

The resignation of General Wilds P. Richardson on December 29,1917, closed the pioneering period of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska. Richardson, president of the organization from its inception in 1905, had supervised the road and trail work with remarkable persistence and dedication. His administration did not go uncriticized—most notably by the Alaska delegate to Congress, James Wickersham, whose continued fulminations have already been detailed—but his direction achieved outstanding results and established the pattern for road developments for the following decades.

America's participation in World War I severed Richardson's connections with Alaska and disrupted the progress of road construction in the vast territory. While Richardson dealt with new challenges in France and Siberia, his successor as board president, Major William H. Waugh, had to carry on in Alaska with sharply cut appropriations. Alaska's needs could not compete with the war.

While the war period of 1917-1920 was characterized by a lack of funding (appropriations were $100,000 for each of the last two years of the war as opposed to the $500,000 Richardson had received for each of the last two years of his tenure), other events signaled momentous changes and developments for the future. Advances continued despite the war. The numbers of automobiles using Alaskan roads increased dramatically, and created pressures for suitable highways. Simultaneously, there were great leaps forward in the development of mechanized equipment for road work. Taken together, the two developments mark the war period as one of great significance in its foreshadowing of events, despite the low ebb of funding for the era that separated the pioneer period from modern times.

Although World War I did not touch Alaska greatly, those years were transitional ones for the territory in many respects. Regular automobile and truck traffic loomed just over the horizon. Soon it would be possible to travel in comfort in one's automobile or by hired motor vehicles all the way from Valdez to Circle on the Yukon River.

Road systems developed between 1918 and 1924 met some of the expectations of Alaska's residents. Certainly the automobiles increased in numbers. Yet progress seemed painfully slow in expanding the sparse network of roads suitable for wagons, much less for mechanized vehicles. Most of the thin ribbons marked as summer or winter trails on the maps did not blossom into roads through the work of the Board of Road Commissioners in those years. In fact, if maps had accurately reflected the changing conditions, they would have shown the obliteration of many trails and the impassability of large sections of the roads. International events and the ravages of nature were the chief setbacks to the territory's road program.

In 1917, after the United States joined the European war, the U.S. Army's highest priorities did not include the maintenance of Alaska's transportation system. Several years passed before appropriations were restored to pre-war levels.

A history of Alaska's roads, however, cannot be limited to considerations of the technology of the building and maintenance

of surfaces, culverts, and bridges. Roads are as much an index of social change as they are of technological progress. Of all the changes in patterns of national life that occurred in the early decades of the twentieth century, none has been more dramatic and far-reaching in its results than the success of the automobile. Henry Ford's first automatic assembly lines started up in January of 1914, thereby determining the future of road transportation. Years before, when autos were still being made individually, Thomas Alva Edison announced that "the horse was doomed," but when Ford coupled his assembly methods with a $5 daily wage for his workers, he initiated a sweeping social revolution.[1]

Against this background of transportation advances, it is interesting to review the perceptions of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska as the automobile revolution moved north at an ever-accelerating rate. Early mentions of the automobiles in the annual reports have a foreboding ring. At first glance it appears as if board members felt themselves burdened enough with the formidable logistics of the territory's expanse and had reason to dread an innovation that threatened to add further to their heavy workload. Actually, the writers were paying lip service to duties to provide military routes. They also, however, had a responsibility to connect mining centers to the major rivers. Their reports cautiously denied any responsibility for the new social phenomenon: "The use of automobiles had not been encouraged by the board, but the number of such vehicles in Alaska is growing rapidly from year to year."[2]

The cautious disclaimer of any intent to foster automobile use in 1918 had been made in earlier reports and was to be repeated, but the members were not really ignorant of events nor resistant to a clearly determined course of history. While the board conceded that automobile use "has greatly increased the cost and difficulty of maintaining the roads," they also realized "the value of quick transportation is recognized."[3]

Obviously the conscientious board understood its responsibilities: "It is hoped that sufficient funds may eventually be appropriated to permit the Board to undertake a general prospect for the sufficiency of all the most important roads."[4]

By 1918 automobile stage coaches regularly used the Valdez-Fairbanks road and the Willow Creek-Chitina branch during the summer months. Gravel surfacing and improvements in grading over the previous two years made the wagon road suitable for stage vehicles, but the board did not claim to have produced a road suitable for use by private automobile drivers. "Much improvement in the way of surfacing will have to be done before these and similar roads throughout the territory can be claimed as automobile roads," the board admitted.[5]

Road and trail statistics were fairly impressive. A total of 1,006 miles of wagon roads, 673 miles of sled roads, and 2,346 miles of trails had been constructed, "giving access to practically every developed portion of Alaska."[6] Of course, much of the wagon road mileage had not been surfaced. But approximately 300 miles had at least been surfaced with gravel.

Another demand for increasing transportation facilities during the war period was not yet urgent in 1918, but its presence cast a long shadow. The construction of the Alaska Railroad from Seward to Fairbanks was well under way. Conceivably, the railroad's use

1. Lloyd Marvin, *Not So Long Ago* (New York: Random House, 1949), pp. 222, 342.

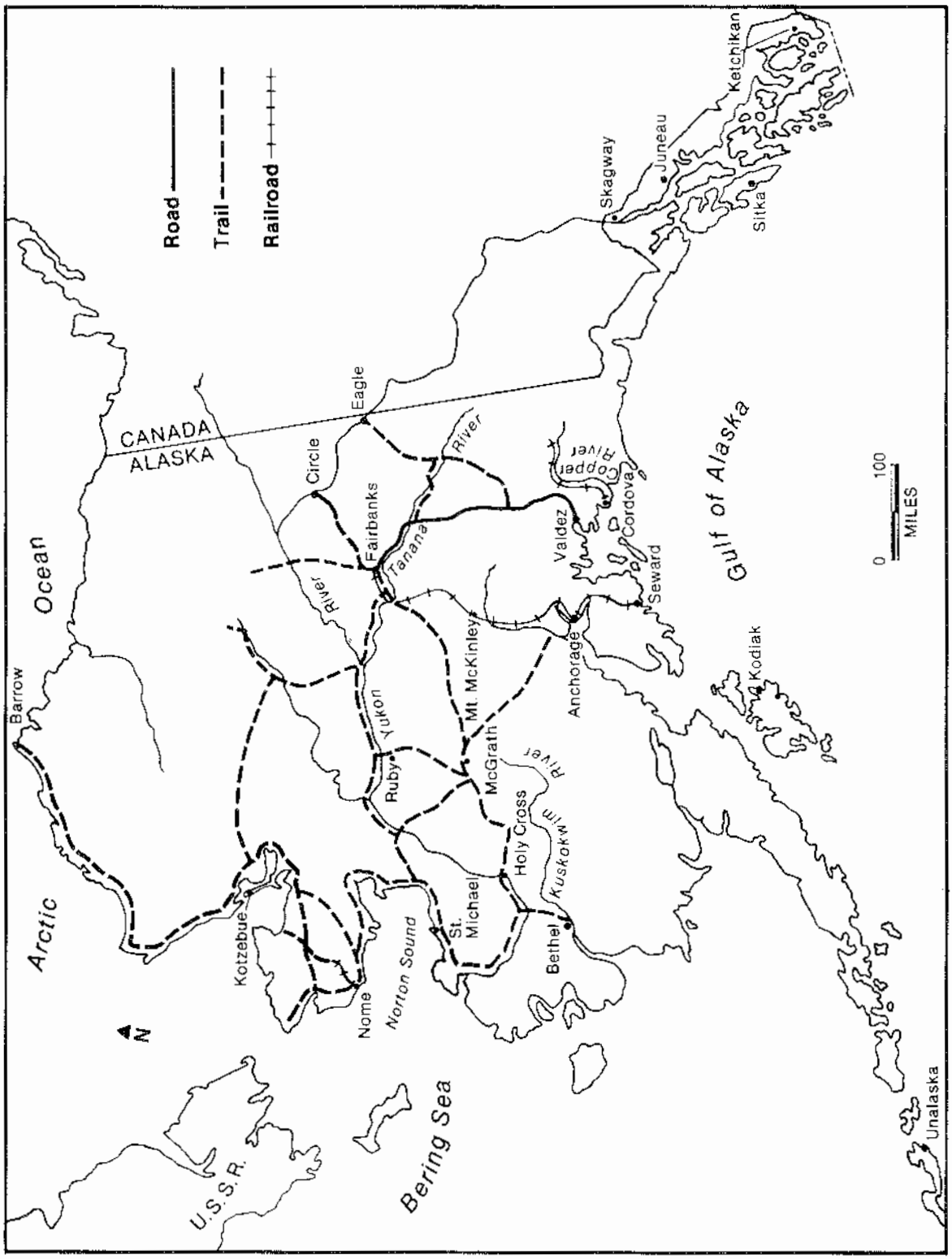
2. Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska, *Annual Report of the Alaska Road Commission, Fiscal Year 1918*, p. 1990. Herafter cited as *Annual Report of the Board of Road Commissioners* and year.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*



Roads and trails constructed and maintained by the Alaska Road Commission, mid-1920s.

could reduce the traffic burden on the road, but it would also create demands for more roads elsewhere. Every community near the railroad route considered that the board was obligated to provide a feeder wagon road to the railroad. Such feeder roads made economic sense, as the board acknowledged, but after making an equitable allotment of budgeted funds to communities adjacent to the railroad, much remained to be done. "It is believed," the board reported in 1918, "that the construction of the feeders constitutes a separate problem on which special provision should be made by appropriation or otherwise."[7]

Clearly the board was not simply passing the buck to Congress or other agencies in pointing out this problem. While Congress might be reluctant to provide a substantial increase in the road appropriation when railroad construction required heavy funding, the need for feeder roads was a logical result of the railroad. Thus, in the short run, at least, the railroad promised to create more difficulties for the board and its slender budget than it alleviated.

Brighter prospects of the 1918 report were included in the "machinery and equipment" section. Machinery purchased in 1918 included: two 12- to 25-horsepower tractors, one 8-foot road grader, three 6-foot road graders, four 3-way road drags and four heavy auto trucks.[8]

In the previous season, employees of the board had tested two old tractors of the track-layer type on a hundred-mile stretch near Fairbanks and demonstrated the adaptability of these machines for pulling graders and drags. Improvements in the Valdez-Fairbanks road fostered the potential value of tractors. By 1919 the engineers determined that 10 percent of the road could be maintained with the aid of tractor power. The evidence was irrefutable and echoed Thomas Edison's forecast for the doom of horses. "At present each tractor is doing the work of eight horses, at a daily operating cost equal to the cost of feeding three horses."[9]

The test showed conclusively that tractors had numerous operating advantages over horses—which only worked nine months a year but ate all year long. Additionally, tractors required fewer men for operation; fewer men required fewer supplies. And a tractor's wide wheels performed like a roller in forming a hard and compact roadway. In 1919 the board planned to double its machinery inventory.[10] Clearly, mechanization had arrived in Alaska.

One problem characteristic of the period was a scarcity of labor. In 1918 some work sections were understaffed by 20 to 30 percent in comparison to the pre-war period. The availability of Native labor was beneficial. In 1918, the board employed some 40 Natives on the Valdez-Fairbanks road alone, and this hiring practice continued over the entire history of the Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska. As a cash benefit to the Native village economies, the seasonal hiring of Natives was comparable to the later employment of village labor by the Bureau of Land Management as forest fire fighters.

From a study of the board's annual reports, a historian could summarize the superficial history of road and trail construction from 1918, but only in a shallow fashion. The established form of the document and the balance demanded by its purpose dictated a pattern of reporting. Reporters had to show pride in their actual accomplishments without diminishing the urgency of future needs. No overt deception was practiced in achieving such a balance. Roads and trails were never truly finished; maintenance demands followed hard on the completion of any new construction. And in good years or bad, more money was always welcome, indeed needed.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 1989.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 3842.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

But the historical record shows what the annual published report does not reveal. Extensive correspondence, masses of field diaries, and reconnaissance reports are rich in the detailed underpinnings of the laconic annual summaries. Such records speak of frustrations, triumphs, and much grueling drudgery by the road personnel.

Consider the tragic story of Richard Feltham, a trader of McDougall who took a pack train of supplies into the Cache Creek mining district (Susitna) where 30 small mining camps awaited provisioning. The trail was not good. Feltham had discovered that in May 1917, when he lost his way and wandered for 12 hours after losing sight of the trail signs. He had to return to McDougall without delivering his goods.[11]

Yet in June of that year he tried again. After several days, men went to search for him. "In the neighborhood of the old Hungryman Camp evidences of the [man's efforts] to find the way were pitiful to see," wrote one rescuer, "Blazes on the trees running through the swamps in different directions showed plainly the vain efforts made to find a most obscure trail that would lead to Cache Creek. Finally, through the faithfulness of his pack horse, that was found standing in the trail with the saddle turned under him, attention was attracted to the man rolled in his blanket, about 50 feet off the trail. Stimulants aroused in him a recognition of his rescuers...but the effect was but temporary, and he died within a few hours."[12]

Tragedies can have meaning. To the miners of Cache Creek, the trader died because of the government's callousness and ingratitude. "The death of Dick Feltham," wrote one miner, "is grim evidence of the crying need of roads and trails in our district." Over 200 men "are striving to develop a country rich in natural resources but greatly handicapped by the lack of roads." How can legislators and other responsible officials "stand back and permit a continuation of such a condition that calls for the occasional sacrifice of a life given in an effort to develop a country?"[13]

For 12 years the miners had worked in the area. Now they cried in anguish: "We don't ask for boulevards and parks, but we want help in the construction of a plain, every-day dirt road that will guarantee to get us home to safety... and won't leave us to perish as it did poor Dick Feltham."[14]

Cache Creek miners had petitioned the Board of Road Commissioners in March 1917, two months before Feltham's death. They had also petitioned the territorial legislature, asking their representatives to memorialize the Board of Road Commissioners. Eventually the miners got their road.[15]

Other records reveal less dramatic episodes of road work. There is, for example, the work of John H. Joslin, the supervisor for the Circle road work during the summer of 1918. He established his first base camp at Birch Creek ferry in June. With four men, he repaired the road from Circle to 3 miles below Miller House. "The work cost nearly double what I expected for several reasons, one of which was...the poor quality of men available." The war affected local manpower: "I found it nearly impossible to get or keep the most indifferent labor, and this is true of all interior Alaska I believe."[16]

Besides reporting to his supervisor on his ditch clearing and other work, Joslin made recommendations for regrading certain stretches and relocating others. And for want of anyone else on the spot more expert or impartial than he was, Joslin also gave advice on

11. Statement of Chas. R. Harris, R. G. 30, ARC, Federal Records Center, Seattle, Washington.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. John H. Joslin to Captain John Zug, October 25, 1914, R. G. 30, ARC, Federal Records Center, Seattle, Washington.

the district's long-range prospects: "Dredging and hydraulic operations...from all appearances will continue for many years, giving employment to about 200 people."[17]

The Cache Creek and Circle documents illustrate the prevailing attitude toward roads and trails. Local residents were optimistic, certain that a great economic future was the destiny of their region. Personnel of the Board of Road Commissioners had to beware of unsupported hopefulness, yet were dependent upon the information derived locally. The situation shows the uncertainty of the entire road and trail planning process, particularly in the mining regions of Alaska.

Even in normal times, the prediction of a mining region's longevity was hazardous, and no one anticipated the impact of the war on gold mining, the chief industry of the interior. Early in the war, mining activities diminished because of the scarcity of labor. But the increased prices of equipment and rising pay scales were even more detrimental than the labor shortage. By the war's end, mining had become unprofitable on any but the richest claims. The result was a sharp drop in production and a dwindling of population that continued until the 1930s.

Alaskans were not immediately aware that the war had altered economic and demographic conditions so severely. If mining and other industries were declining, there were a number of ways to spark a revival. Of these ways, the improvement of transportation headed the list. It was easy and sometimes reasonable for Alaskans to equate trail and road improvements with their economic survival. Indeed, in some regions, like the Chandalar district north of the Arctic Circle, beyond the reach of roads, good trails, or easily navigable rivers, a promising mining industry languished for lack of transportation. Even basic food provisioning was difficult for miners along the southern slope of the Brooks Range, but despite the area's remoteness, approximately 200 men stampeded to the region in 1906. Some placer gold was produced, but a rosy, long-range future was predicted for quartz mining. This, however, required more machinery, particularly a stamp mill to crush the quartz. Miners were given a trail of sorts in 1910, and they invested in a giant Allis-Chalmers four-stamp mill which they shipped via the Yukon River to Beaver. From Beaver the distance to the mines was 115 miles, a long haul for a 28-ton machine.[18]

Sporadic attempts over the next 20 years to get the huge mill to the mines failed. Such equipment required a decent wagon road. Parts of the machinery were dismantled and reached their destination. Heavier parts were left along the trail. The mill was never placed in operation, and the quartz prospects of the region were not realized despite the investment of $200,000 by William Sulzer, the mine's chief backer.

A reduction in freight rates was the chief argument for improved trails and roads. Accurate determinations of such savings were not easily gained, but it was reasonable to assume that all road improvements reduced freight rates. For many years the board's annual reports featured figures gathered in 1913 which "indicated that the direct savings in cost of transportation of freight during that year due to the construction of roads by the board was $2,144,117."[19]

However, this savings, reports affirmed, did not tell the whole story: "It is doubtful...if anything like that amount of freight would have been transported without the roads, and the indirect loss which would be occasioned by the restriction on output and development if the roads did not exist cannot easily be estimated."[20]

By 1919, the automobile revolution had occurred. Motorized vehicles carried mail on 318 miles of the Richardson Road (as the Valdez-Fairbanks road was named that year in honor of the board's first president) from

17. *Ibid.*

18. William Sulzer Papers, University of Alaska Archives, Fairbanks, Alaska; William R. Hunt, *North of 53°: The Wild Days of the Alaska-Yukon Mining Frontier 1870-1914* (New York: MacMillian Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), pp. 233-239.

19. *Annual Report of the Board of Road Commissioners, Fiscal Year 1919*, p. 2099.

20. *Ibid.*

Chitina to Fairbanks. Other horse-drawn traffic diminished fast: "Approximately ninety percent of the traffic on the main wagon roads is handled by motor, which has greatly increased the cost of maintenance."[21]

That the very triumph of the automobile and the road's capacity to handle it carried a stinger in its tail was ironic, but understandable. Greatly increased costs of road maintenance were the natural result of the technological changes in transportation which had occurred.

The board had not exaggerated the quality of Alaska's roads, conceding that their roads "would not be considered good wagon roads in most sections of the country."[22]

Plainly, automobile drivers were using the roads despite their inadequacy because the vehicles saved a significant one-third of the cost of horse-drawn traffic per ton-mile. Low-standard wagon roads might be hard on automobiles, but the cost of feeding one horse for a day had reached a prohibitively high rate of $5.00. And the efficiency of animals remained what it had always been.

The board's mechanization progress lagged behind that of the public and the freighters for a time. It only acquired one new tractor, a Truxton car unit, and two new road scrapers in 1919. Continued reliance on older equipment and horses was necessary because of limited funds. Appropriations for 1919 had been slashed. Road repairs cost three times what they might have, because tractors could not be purchased to replace horses. A report on dragging summed up the efficiency of tractors:

> *In previous years it has been impossible to properly drag the many miles of road which are included in the section of each crew. When dragging was attempted, the roadhouse bills at $6 per day per man amounted to such a sum that it often became such an expensive operation that proper dragging was not practicable.*
>
> *The three 12 to 25 horsepower tractors and three-way drags have proven a great success, one trip over the road being equivalent to as many as four trips of the old type horse-drawn drag.*
>
> *The road between Fairbanks and Tenderfoot (75 miles) was maintained with two of these outfits last summer, and they were also used on road-grader work. Late in the summer a few trips were made by another tractor-drag unit operating between Tonsina and Willow Creek, 25 miles. This summer one of these units has been engaged all the time on dragging, one between Tonsina and Sourdough, 70 miles, and the other between Fairbanks and Salchaket, 35 miles. The third outfit has done very little dragging but is working very successfully south of McCarty, grading new road.*
>
> *Attached to the maintenance unit is a trailer of sufficient size to carry supplies of all kinds, a tent, a small cook stove, provisions, and the bedding of the two operators who are thus enabled to pitch camp at the end of the day's run without incurring prohibitive roadhouse bills.*
>
> *The average cost of the operation of these outfits was $1.36 per mile dragged, and $12.87 per day of eight hours. During last summer an average of nine miles were made per day, but this spring the average is being raised one mile. The average number of miles obtained from a gallon of distillate and gas is 0.77 miles, while the lubricating oil used averaged 98 miles per gallon.*[23]

The Board of Road Commissioners for Alaska bought equipment as it could in subsequent years, and enjoyed a windfall in surplus army equipment in 1920, including six 2-ton trucks, six 1-ton trucks, and six tractors.

Nature set certain obstacles to cost-effective road maintenance. For all its scenic attraction then and now, the first 18 miles of the Richardson Road out of Valdez consumed a large chunk of the budget year after year,

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, p. 3871.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 3872-73.