

# How Much Did Alaska Cost?



PREPARING FOR THE HEATED TERM.  
King Andy and his man Billy lay in a great stock of Russian ice in order to cool down the Congressional majority.

While Alaska is widely known as the largest state in the United States of America today it was once a part of Russia. For approximately one hundred years, from the mid 18th century onwards, Alaska was a Russian colony, but after a handsome price was negotiated in 1867, it became a US territory and eventually became the 49th state of the United States.

At around the time that the rest of America was being colonized by English settlers the Russian navy was discovering Alaska. While indigenous people had been present for many centuries, the first time that Alaska was viewed by foreign eyes came when Vitus Bering set sail aboard the vessel St. Peter. The expedition brought back sea otter pelts, which were greatly sought after, but more importantly the first contact with Alaska had been made.

Over the course of the next few years, Russia and Spain led several expeditions into Alaska, and for a time there was some disputes over the claims to Alaska. In time, it officially became part of Russia and was known as New Archangel.

Alaska itself was only a few miles from mainland Russia, but it was underused and largely uncharted. Overall, Alaska was sparse, vast, and barren – Russia saw it as unprofitable and did not fully colonize the region.

In the mid 19th century, Russia was experiencing financial problems as a nation and it had held an increasing fear that they would lose the territory of Alaska in a future conflict. In particular, they were fearful that Alaska would be lost to the British, who Russia had battled in the Crimean War and who controlled the neighboring colony of British Columbia.

When the Tsar (King) of Russia made the decision to sell Alaska, both Great Britain and the United States were approached, but the British showed no interest in the proposition whatsoever. The Tsar then concentrated on the Americans and offered to sell it during President James Buchanan's administration, but negotiations stalled with the start of the American Civil War.

During the presidency of Abraham Lincoln, Secretary of State William Seward made it clear that he was interested in acquiring Alaska. Alaska was so large that the addition of the land would increase the size of the U.S. by nearly 20 percent. In addition to its size, Seward saw Alaska's location as a stepping stone for future trade and relations with Asia. After the Civil War finally ended, it was not easy for Seward to convince the Senate that Alaska would be an important addition to the United States. The focus of most of the Senators was directed towards the South and how they were going to handle Reconstruction.

Alaska was subsequently purchased for \$7.2 million in 1867- conservative estimates have claimed that this figure would be over one hundred and fifty times higher in today's modern market. The deal was officially known as the Alaska purchase, but many referred to it as "Seward's Folly." Initially, many American's were unhappy with the deal and the Secretary of State was laughed at for his willingness to spend so much money on a frozen wasteland. Other names like "Seward's Icebox" and "Andrew Johnson's Polar Bear Garden" soon followed to describe the deal.

Ultimately, buying Alaska proved to be a very good move. Major discoveries of gold were made there in the 1880s and 1890s. These discoveries brought attention and people to Alaska. In 1946, Alaskans' approved statehood and adopted a constitution in 1955. On January 3, 1959, President Eisenhower announced Alaska's entrance into the Union as the 49th state. Today, petroleum transported across the state through a pipeline is Alaska's richest mineral resource. Timber is also a valuable resource that is shipped to the continental United States for the construction industry.

- 1) What explorer in the Russian navy discovered Alaska?
- 2) Initially, what was the most sought after resource of Alaska?
- 3) What two countries explored Alaska leading to some disputes over claims on the region?
- 4) What was Alaska called when it was part of Russia?
- 5) Why did Alaska remain largely uncharted and unpopulated when it was only a few miles from the Russian mainland?
- 6) A - What country did Russia worry about taking Alaska? B- What colony did that country still hold in North America?
- 7) What were the two main reasons Russia sought to sell Alaska? (2 points)
- 8) Why did the United States initially call off negotiations with Russia?
- 9) The United States was approximately 3,120,000 square miles at that time. The addition of Alaska would increase the nation's size by 20 percent. How many square miles would that have been? (Do the Math)
- 10) Approximately, how much would Alaska cost in today's market based upon the information in the reading? (Do the Math)
- 11) Why did Seward want to purchase Alaska?
- 12) What names were used by individuals to describe the purchase of Alaska who were not in favor of the deal?
- 13) A) How many years was it between Alaska being purchased and it becoming the 49<sup>th</sup> States?  
B) Who was President when it became the 49<sup>th</sup> states?
- 14) What discoveries have proven that the purchase of Alaska was a good decision?