

The Japonski Island Lagoon

The years during and subsequent to World War II have brought many changes to the Sitka landscape, but no part of it has changed quite as much as have Japonski Island and the Japonski Island Lagoon.

The Lagoon, as the name was commonly shortened by Sitkans, is not named on the adjoining section of a 1920 navigational chart. It was the area of water and tidal flats bounded on the north by Japonski Island and on the south and west by Harbor Island, Alice Island, Charcoal Island and many rocks and reefs, some of which are covered at high water.

The entrance to the Lagoon, except by rowboats at half tide or better, was from the east, between Japonski and Harbor Islands and nearly opposite the present Forest Service float on the Sitka waterfront. The Lagoon provided a winter moorage place for a few local vessels and was a boneyard for discarded boats, a playground for youngsters in rowboats and an access route to the smokehouses and summer camps of some of the residents of the Ranche, as the Native village was known in earlier years.

Undoubtedly the Russians, who occupied Sitka for 63 years and had an establishment on Japonski Island for a large part of that time, made some use of the Lagoon and had a name for it, but I have not been able to learn what the name was.

Today, after a great deal of earth moving, blasting, filling and dredging, much of the Lagoon is dry land and the remainder is Sealing Cove, a harbor with floats for small vessels. How it gained the name Sealing Cove is of some interest and will be discussed, but first we will take a look at the islands that partly enclosed the body of water known as the Lagoon.

Harbor Island is the smallest of the four named islands that surrounded the Lagoon but are now all connected together with land fills. The smaller three have thus largely lost their original identities and are considered part of Japonski Island, which is alternately called Mount Edgumbe. Away back in 1809 Ivan Vasiliev the first, of the Imperial Russian Navy, named this island Ostrov Gavanskoy. Vasiliev named dozens of geographic features in the Sitka area. Many of his names remain on the charts and maps today, but others have been translated. In 1882 the U.S. Coast & Geodetic Survey translated Ostrov Gavanskoy to Harbor Island.

The next item on the record of the island is on May 4, 1889, when Kanil-ti-kl and his wife Kle-tch-hooth each made their mark on a deed of the island to John Coleman and received \$30. Coleman had finished his enlistment in the Marine Corps at Sitka, had purchased Aleutski Island and was going into the poultry business there. It is not known why he purchased Harbor Island. It may be that the Natives instigated the sale. At any rate, a month later Coleman sold the Island to John Clement for the same price.

Clement, who had at least some Portuguese blood, had come from Gloucester, Mass., in the schooner OSCAR AND HATTIE, one of several schooners that had come to the Pacific to fish for halibut and engage in pelagic fur seal hunting. When the schooner called at Sitka, Clement found a former acquaintance, Captain Joshua N. Rowe, who owned a small schooner and had built a place on or near Kanga Island for salting halibut. He invited Clement to join him and they worked together for a year or more until Clement decided to go into business for himself and bought Harbor Island.

Clement erected a saltery building and perhaps a small dwelling on the island and joined in business with James Quast who had a small sailing vessel. After a year or so, Quast left and Clement moved to other business ventures. He married Nadeshda Herman, a sister of Zacharia Herman, and they had a daughter, Nadja, who eventually married "Slow Joe" Anselm and did her part toward increasing the population of Alaska. Clement, however, retained some claim to Harbor Island until June 1916.

In 1895, probably under some arrangement with Clement, Tony Jacobson put up a smokehouse, saltery and cooperage on Harbor Island. Nothing more is known of that. It is a characteristic of newspapers that the opening of a new business is news, but the closing of it is not.

On October 30, 1901, President Theodore Roosevelt signed an executive order reserving "Harbor Island and three islets southeast thereof for the use of the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service." The reason for the order is unknown. The Cutter RICHARD RUSH was stationed at Sitka at that time, but I have found no report of use of the island by any of the vessels of that service, or any plans to use it. Nor have I found an order rescinding the reserve, although there may have been one among the hundreds of executive orders since 1901.

Apparently Harbor Island was unoccupied in the summer of 1903 when the British sealing schooner arrived in Sitka with a case of smallpox aboard. The poor fellow was hustled over to the island and stowed away in what was reported as an unused smokehouse until he recovered. Once he was well, Dr. J. C. Koosher of the U.S. Public Health Service burned the building.

On June 6, 1916, John Clement sold his claim to Harbor Island to Mrs. Margaret Georgeson for \$125. She was the wife of Dr. C. C. Georgeson, who headed the Alaska Experimental Stations of the Department of Agriculture. I suspect that she had no use for the island but bought it because Clement needed the money. In July 1919 Mrs. Georgeson gave a deed to the island to the Sitka Wharf and Power Company for \$150. That company owned, among other properties, the wharf on the site now owned by Petro Marine.

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The Japonski Island Lagoon, Part 2

Harbor Island continued: President Theodore Roosevelt in 1901 asserted federal government ownership of the island by ordering it reserved for the use of the Revenue Cutter Service, which in time became part of the U.S. Coast Guard. A number of local residents, either in ignorance of the executive order or choosing to ignore it, bought and sold the island over the next several years. Then, 40 years after the Roosevelt mandate, an agency of the federal government bought the island from a private company for \$7,000.

In 1919, \$150 was paid for whatever title there was to Harbor Island, but no use was made of it. Then on November 24, 1925, by an instrument described as a deed and lease, the island was conveyed to the Baranof Bait Company. The company, a partnership of several men, brought the seiner SVETA ANA to Sitka to fish herring for bait, arriving here in February 1924. In the spring they sold their catches to the Booth Fisheries Company and later to its successor, the Sitka Cold Storage Company, for freezing. They also sold to any individual vessel of the halibut fleet that called at Sitka. During the summer and fall they maintained pounds at various locations, holding live herring for sale to any who wanted to buy.

In addition to the vessel SVETA ANA, Baranof Bait Company had seines, pound nets and other gear and needed a place to store and overhaul them. They purchased Harbor island and built a small wharf and warehouse on the town side of the island, not far from the present work float. There was a small house near the warehouse, but who built it and when has not been learned. It remained unoccupied, so far as is known, until 1931.

That year Fred Johnson and his wife, China Mary, moved into the house. They probably got it rent free in return for keeping an eye on the bait company warehouse. The Johnsons, who had been around Sitka for many years, had operated a fox farm on Jackknife Island, south of Goddard, for some years, then had moved closer to Sitka, to Long Island. They moved from Long Island to Harbor Island where they lived until April 1935 when Mary contracted pneumonia and was in the Pioneers' Home hospital for some time. They then moved to a small house on Baranof Street.

In May 1938 when the Navy Department began developing Japonski Island as an air station, it decided it also needed Harbor Island. The task of acquiring it was delegated to the U.S. Government Office of Procurement. The agency's first job was to get quit claim deeds to the island from Albert Akervik, Peter O. Knutsen and Elias O. Knutsen, all of whom had been partners in Baranof Bait Company at the time it acquired the island. Then on February 15, 1941, Ole Severin Larson and his wife, Constance, Peter Larson, Eddie Hope, Olaf Wick and Elias Hansen signed a deed to the government of "all of Harbor Island including rocks and islets accessible to it at low tide" and received in return \$7,000. Four months later at least a portion of that was used to purchase from Frances V. Redman a part of the E. W. Merrill homestead on Jamestown Bay, which she had inherited.

It is unclear what use the Navy intended for Harbor Island, but it did, by means of an extensive landfill, connected it to Japonski Island. Apparently it made little use of the island itself, which on city maps is still identified as Harbor Island.

At the end of the war the military transferred the entire area to two civilian federal agencies: the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Public Health Service. The Harbor Island area evidently went to the Public Health Service as in 1963 the Bureau of Indian Affairs asked that three-acre Harbor Island be turned over to it, to be used in connection with the Mt. Edgecumbe boarding school. Whatever those plans were, they did not materialize.

All transportation between Sitka and the island was by boat, and as the T.B. Sanitarium, the Orthopedic Hospital and the Mt. Edgecumbe Boarding School came into being, there was talk of the need for a bridge. Small ferries, known locally as "shore boats" -- undoubtedly a carry-over from Navy days -- ran on a regular schedule, but after regular jet service began at the Sitka Airport in 1967, there was increased call for a bridge.

One concept saw a bridge from the top of the hill above Katlian Street, with a support pillar on Harbor Rock and extending to the higher ground on Japonski Island. When a bridge was finally planned and built, however, in 1970-71, a site less disruptive of harbor traffic was decided on, with its western end at the south end of harbor Island. The bridge, which cost \$3,197,548, was dedicated on August 19, 1972. At the request of the Sitka Assembly it was named the O'Connell Bridge for a former mayor.

Harbor Island was at last being put to continuous use. Next, Alice and Charcoal Islands.

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Japonski Island Lagoon, Part 3

Alice & Charcoal Islands were separate and distinct islands, although very nearly joined at extremely low tides. Each was essentially a high hump of rock with a thin covering of soil that supported brush and scrubby trees. Charcoal Island, the more westerly of the two, was also the larger and higher. Alice Island, smaller and not as high, was separated from Harbor Island, to its east, by another channel usable only by small craft at half tide or better.

Thanks to World War II construction, which altered the entire landscape of that area, the two islands are now one, with a low, level surface. Much of the country rock that formed Alice Island now lies between the two original islands. And much of the hump of country rock that comprised much of Charcoal Island is today a part of the causeway that joins former islands west of the present airport.

Oddly, the Russian navigator Ivan Vasiliev the first, who named so many local geographic features, gave names to both Harbor and Charcoal Islands but not to Alice Island, which lies between them. It was named, according to the Dictionary of Alaska Place Names, "in 1880 by the U.S. Navy and published by the USC&GS in the 1883 Coast Pilot."

The U.S. Navy at Sitka in 1880 was the USS JAMESTOWN, whose crew made numerous surveys around Sitka Sound. But nobody bothered to record, in that 1883 Coast Pilot, who Alice was. Alice is not an uncommon name on the Alaska map, and it appears 12 times in Place Names. Two of those were reportedly the names of vessels and one, on a small creek above the Arctic Circle, was named for Alice Buchanan of Dumbarton, Scotland.

But Ivan Vasiliev did give a Russian name to the larger island in 1809, and the name was published on an 1826 map as Os(strov) Ugolnoy which the Coast & Geodetic Survey in 1882 translated to Charcoal Island. Why did Vasiliev give it that name? Did the Russians have a charcoal pit on the island? It is not unlikely. They used a great deal of charcoal, both domestically and in their blacksmithing and other work. Early sketches and photographs show many of the islands entirely denuded of trees. In the later years of the Russian colony the charcoal pits were up on the side of Mount Verstovia, but in its earliest years a near by island was perhaps the handiest place.

Written property records for Sitka date almost from the day of the official transfer to the United States, Oct. 18, 1867, and among them are claims and deeds to many of the islands near town. In most instances, the first conveyance was by a Native family, the deed signed by mark. But I have found no such documents for Alice and Charcoal Islands. No doubt there were Native claims to ownership, but the owners of those claims did not sell them as did the claimants to Harbor, Aleutski and other islands.

I am not able to precisely date my first visit to the Japonski Island Lagoon but it was probably sometime in the summer of 1918 when Chuck Peterson and I rowed there in a leaky skiff. It was pretty much an all-day expedition for a pair of seven-year-olds, but Chuck had been there before and was showing me around. One of the sights was the sinking Japanese sealing schooner KAISI MARU from which he had salvaged a musket, so rusty as to be useless, a year earlier.

On Alice Island there was a small, very weathered board-and-batten house in a heavy patch of salmonberry bushes. Its door was hanging by one hinge and the glass was broken out of the one window. I have never learned who had owned it. On the shingle near the house were some pieces of iron and some rotting wood, obviously the remnants of a vessel. I later learned that the schooner LEO had ended her days there. The LEO was formerly the U.S. Revenue Cutter RELIANCE, and as she was built of hardwood, it is likely that much of her hull had been consumed as firewood.

The 110-foot RELIANCE was launched at Baltimore, Md., in 1867 for the government. Flying the flag of the U.S. Revenue Marine Service, with its vertical stripes, the two-topsail schooner first arrived at Sitka on Sept. 7, 1869, and was stationed here off and on during the next several years. The main business of the Revenue Cutters in Alaska in those years was suppressing the traffic in liquor and breach-loading firearms, both of which were prohibited, and the RELIANCE did make at least one voyage to Bering Sea and the Arctic. Her record in law enforcement is dismal and in San Francisco on Jan. 1, 1875, the government sold her for \$16,000. That was \$13,000 less than it had cost to build her.

Sailing under the name LEO, the schooner was seized in Bering Sea in 1880 with illegal liquor and firearms aboard and was condemned and eventually again sold. In 1884 she was purchased by John G. Brady and Amos Whitford, doing business as the Sitka Trading Co., and thereafter Sitka was her home port. Her travels for that company took her from Puget Sound to Point Barrow during the next 14 years. She made at least two voyages in the pelagic fur sealing business and so could have provided the name Sealing Cove to her sometimes winter anchorage in the Japonski Island Lagoon long before the name came into use there.

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Japonski Island Lagoon, Part 4

Charcoal Island was the most westerly, and largest, of the three islands that formed the southern side of The Lagoon. Alice Island and Charcoal Island have since been joined with rock and earth fill and the two of them joined to Japonski Island with additional fill. Harbor Island was separately joined to Japonski Island, closing the original entrance to The Lagoon. The area between Harbor Island and Alice Island, originally very shallow, was dredged to create an entrance to what is now known as Sealing Cove.

Up until the beginning of World War II, Charcoal Island was inhabited for at least a part of each year. There was a shingle beach -- pebbles and gravel -- on the north side of the island, facing The Lagoon, and just above the high tide line of the beach were several smokehouses and small dwellings where some of the people from the Sitka village spent part of the spring and summer.

During herring spawning time the trees along the shores of both Charcoal and Alice islands were festooned with hemlock branches laden with herring eggs. Later in the season there were racks of drying salmon. It was also a center for gathering gull eggs from some of the outlying islands and rocks. Dugout canoes and, later, rowboats traveled between town and the summer camp, and from the camp to other islands

All of that began to change with the coming of the war clouds that preceded December 7, 1941. Those momentous

events, which among other things completely altered the landscape of the islands that surrounded and formed a small body of water:

The Japonski Island Lagoon was far larger at high tide than at the low tides which uncovered acres of tidal flats and rocks. There is little indication that the Russian American Company, which had its colonial headquarters at Sitka until 1867, made much use of the lagoon as an anchorage for its many vessels. Instead, the channel between Japonski Island and Baranof Island was the principal anchorage and was known as the inner harbor. It was, and is, fairly well protected from ocean swells, but it does have a current that changes, of course, with each change of the tide, and there is not swinging room for very many vessels at anchor.

So the Russians devised an elaborate moorage system for the channel. Two heavy iron chains were strung across the channel and were well anchored at each end. And they were heavy. Each link was described as 12 inches long, of wrought iron. One of the chains was made fast to a boulder at the south end of Japonski Island and crossed the channel to a big rock that is now covered by fill behind the Totem Square Building. The second chain crossed the channel some 600 feet to the north.

Three or four mooring buoys were chained to the heavy chains, and vessels made fast, bow and stern, to the mooring buoys. Most of the Russian vessels were schooners and brigs and relatively small. If the harbor was crowded, two or three vessels moored in line. Getting fast to one of the buoys would have taken some smart sail-handling, for which the Russians were not noted. But it is not known just when the mooring system was put in place and it may not have been until after an American named Moore built for the company a small harbor tug powered by steam. That would have facilitated getting sailing vessels into and out of port and helping them to moor or unmoor.

When Russia sold Alaska to the United States in 1867, the Russian American Company offered the mooring system to our government for \$10,000. I have not found that the offer was declined; it was just ignored. Probably it was felt that the Russians were not going to remove it and it would remain in use, but there are few mentions of it after that. There was a great deal of salvaging of old iron, copper, mill stones and other materials after the transfer and much of the chain may have been salvaged by someone.

The last mention I have found of the mooring chain was in 1923 when the Sitka Commercial Club sponsored Sitka's first public boat float. The Sitka Tribune reported that the outer end of the float was "secured with a part of the old Russian mooring chain."

Beginning even before the changing of the flag on Castle Hill, a fleet of small trading schooners began making Sitka their home port. They roamed through the waters of Southeastern Alaska and as far west as Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet, trading for furs. These included sea otter, land otter, mink, beaver and fox and the skins of bears, wolves and hair seals. In those early years under the American flag, fur seal skins were rarely mentioned at Sitka as, indeed, they had not been in Russian times. The only fur seal skins brought to Sitka were from the Pribilof Islands and had been taken on land. Pelagic seal hunting, the killing of seals in the open ocean, came later and a few Sitka vessels, as well as Sitka Tlingets in rowing boats, participated in it.

Pelagic fur seal hunting, for the Sitka fleet, took place in the spring and the Japonski Island Lagoon became the regular winter mooring place of some of the schooners. Several cradles were built here and there on the shore of the islands. A boat could be floated into one of them at high water. Then, between tides, its bottom could be repainted or, for some of them, its copper covering repaired.

The sealers generally carried Native hunters and the season ran from March or April until about the end of May. They then took aboard either nets or lines to fish for salmon or halibut.

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The Japonski Island Lagoon, Part 5

The Fur Seals of Bering Sea are the subject of few news stories and little conflict these days, but a hundred years ago and more they were the subject of great controversy. The North Pacific Ocean has two fur sea herds, one on each side of the ocean, and both are as migratory as some species of birds.

The eastern herd, which has spent the fall and winter in offshore waters, begins to congregate off the California coast in February and March, then travels in great herds along the coast, across the Gulf of Alaska and into Bering Sea. Their destination is the Pribilof Islands, their pupping and breeding ground or rookeries, as they are termed.

The western fur sea herd has much the same spring migration patters on the Asiatic side of the Pacific, but its destination is the Commander Islands on the western side of Bering Sea. During its years in Alaska, the Russian American Company controlled both groups of islands and thus had a near monopoly on the harvesting of fur seal pelts.

The only other regular harvesting of the seal pelts was a pelagic or open ocean one by the Natives of the Cape Flattery area of what is now Washington State, and by various tribes living on the west coast of Vancouver Island. As the seal herds passed northward in the spring these Native hunters put to sea in two-man dugout canoes. For catching their quarry they had developed what was called a seal spear but was actually a harpoon. It consisted of a slender pole up to 18 feet long with two

short pieces of crabapple wood lashed to the forward end to form a V with tips about 12 inches apart. No doubt of bone originally, the harpoon heads were of iron or steel in historic times, arrowhead shaped, with a socket to fit the ends of the and an eye for the harpoon line of braided rawhide. Once the harpoon heads were mounted on the prongs they were kept in place by a tight line with a turn around a small cleat affixed to the pole. A small block of wood at the end of the pole was shaped for the fingers of the harpooner.

Once a seal was struck, the harpoon line disengaged from the cleat, the pole floated free to be picked up later, the canoe was worked up to the wounded seal and it was dispatched with a club. The best hunting was when the seals were asleep, on their backs with the hind flippers curled up toward their noses. Guns were taboo on the sealing grounds; a gunshot would wake the seals for miles around.

A number of small trading schooners from Victoria went to the sealing grounds each spring to buy the pelts. The season was short. The main seal herd passed in two or three weeks. Sometime in the late 1870s one of the traders got an idea. He took aboard several of the canoes and their crews and followed the herd along the coast. A new industry was born, and it grew in a few years to a fleet of nearly 200 schooners, some of which came from Nova Scotia and Massachusetts. The larger vessels carried as many as 20 canoes, each with two men, and followed the seal herd clear to Bering Sea. Some of them crossed the Pacific and followed the Asiatic herd to their rookeries.

Sitka at that time was the home port of half a dozen schooners, the largest of which was the LEO, previously mentioned. It did not take long for the owners of these vessels to engage in the spring seal hunt, using local Natives and their canoes for the hunting. The Natives of this area did not have a long tradition of offshore seal hunting as did the Natives of the lower coast, but they undoubtedly did kill fur seals that strayed into Sitka Sound or other local waters.

Some of the Sitka vessels used Sitka hunters; others picked up their hunters at Yakutat, but from both places they used guns rather than harpoons. This was also true of some of the American vessels from San Francisco and other lower coast ports. The fact was that there were not enough skilled Native hunters to supply the demand. The log of the schooner SITKA, owned by the W. P. Mills Company of Sitka, reveals that one of its Yakutat hunters was still using a muzzle-loading musket. Handling that in a small canoe on a choppy sea must have been quite a feat.

So far as is known, the Sitka schooners engaged only in the spring hunt and did not go to Bering Sea. Their catches were usually 200 to 400 seal pelts for a month or so of hunting, and the pelts sold for from \$4 to \$6 apiece. Several vessels of the Sitka fleet spent their winters in the Japonski Island Lagoon, today known as Sealing Cove.

Fur seal hunting by Sitka vessels and other American vessels came to an abrupt end in 1898 when Congress passed a law prohibiting the use of any American flag vessel in that trade. The Act did not, however, apply to Native Indians, and it was then that Sitka Tlingets began to come into their own as fur seal hunters. They abandoned their dugout canoes and developed a long, light rowboat that became known as a Sitka Sealer. They were longer than 20 feet and were propelled by five oarsmen plus a steering oar. Guns were prohibited by law, but that didn't keep them from being used.

Most of the hunting was done from Biorka Island, where the sealers had their camps during April and May. May 30, Decoration Day, marked the end of the sealing season out of Sitka. The seal herd had been decimated by overhunting, and the price of the pelts climbed but also fluctuated. In 1902 it averaged around \$15 apiece but in 1905 was \$10.50. In 1906 more than 600 pelts were brought in. W. P. Mills and James Fitzgerald were the principal local buyers, but there were also buyers from Seattle and elsewhere. The price that year started at \$13 and went as high as \$21.

An active traveling buyer of Alaska furs for many years was Henry Moses, and he was usually on hand at the end of the sealing season. In 1907, despite some stiff competition, he managed to buy all 355 pelts of the Sitka catch at nearly \$23 apiece. That put \$8,123 in cash into the Sitka Native village.

Sealing was almost non-existent during the First World War but resumed again afterward and continued into the 1920s but with a dwindling catch. Mrs. George Peterson, who built the Sitka Bazaar, was the principal buyer in the last years of the hunt. And by then the Japanese sealing schooner KAISEI MARU, a long time resident of the Japonski Island Lagoon, was resting on the bottom.

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^cf00^cf50^fr The Japonski Island Lagoon, Part 6

Sealing schooners of two countries, Canada and the United States, were fairly common visitors to Sitka in the 1880s and 1890s. A third country, Japan, entered vessels in the pelagic sealing industry about 1893, but it was not until 1909 that Sitka got its first glimpse of a Japanese sealer. This was the KAISEI MARU and it turned out to be more than a glimpse. In one condition and another, the vessel became a resident of the Japonski Island Lagoon for more than 70 years.

The KAISEI MARU left the port of Ishiama early in March with a crew of 30 and took ten fur seals from the passing Asiatic herd that was heading for the Commander Islands. She then returned to port with a sick sailor and left the Japanese coast on March 20, bound for Bering Sea. A series of gales drove them eastward and they were completely out of fresh water by the time they sighted land. They were not sure where they were but it turned out to be Biorka Island and a number of Native sealing boats were in the area. They hailed one of the boats. The mate of the schooner could speak a little English and he asked where they could find fresh water and where they could find a Revenue Cutter, a man-of-war or a Customs officer. He received directions.

The water tanks of the KAISEI MARU were filled at a stream near the entrance to Redoubt Bay, but when the crew started to pull the anchor, the cable parted. The boats were out, grappling for the anchor when Win Goddard passed by, bound from the Hot Springs to Sitka. He continued to Sitka and reported to U.S. deputy Marshal Arthur Shoup that a Japanese schooner was hunting seals in Sitka Sound. He said boats were in the water and he heard gunfire.

After conferring with the Marshal in Juneau, who was his father, Shoup got 15 U.S. Marines from the local post, had a rapid fire gun mounted on the bow of a launch owned by U.S. Commissioner Edward deGroff, and headed for Redoubt Bay. The crew of the KAISEI MARU was still fishing for the anchor. There was no resistance and the schooner was towed to Sitka.

There were ten seal skins, in salt, in the vessel's hold. Two local men, who were not fur buyers or otherwise experienced in that field, peered in to the schooner's dark hold and said the skins looked fresh. All of the Japanese were arraigned before Judge deGroff who bound them over to the grand jury and set bail at \$300 apiece for the crew and \$1,000 for the skipper. As they could not furnish bail, they were herded into the big old log jail that stood on the site of the present City Hall, nearly doubling its already crowded population.

Sitka, in 1909, was not a friendly place for Japanese. This may have been partly because the crew of two Japanese schooners had been convicted at Valdez of raiding the Pribilof Islands rookeries. Most likely, however, it was because of Sitka's sizeable population of Russian descent. The Russo-Japanese war was only four years in the past. Russia had lost, and feeling still ran high in Sitka. There may have been threats of violence. There definitely was some verbal abuse, mostly by students who stood on Lincoln street and shouted insults, The prisoners were soon loaded aboard the Revenue Cutter RICHARD RUSH and taken to an even more crowded jail in Juneau.

The grand jury was not sworn in until August 19. It found a true bill in this case, one of many. The court docket was crowded and for reasons not explained, the sealing case was the last to be tried. It may be that the government had such a weak case it postponed it as long as possible.

Judge Edward Cushman, visiting from Valdez, heard the case which began on Tuesday morning, September 21. Two of Alaska's top lawyers, John F. Malony of Juneau and L. V. Ray of Seward, represented the Japanese. U. S. Attorney William A. Barnhill, appeared for the government. The court appointed a Japanese gardener, Frank Hermit, to interpret the captain's testimony and to translate parts of the ship's log.

Two Juneau fur buyers testified that the ten seal skins had been in salt for several months. The ship's log confirmed that ten skins had been taken near Japan in March. The Sitka Native who had spoken with the ship's mate testified that the mate had asked where they could find water, a Revenue Cutter or a Customs officer.

The case went to the jury at noon on Wednesday, the second day of the trial. A majority of the jurors were for acquittal on the first vote, but two others needed to be convinced. The verdict came at 9 o'clock that evening. Judge Cushman had some words for the prosecution and its weak case. He thought the Japanese should not even have been arraigned at Sitka.

The legal part of the case was ended, but a mystery remained. Instead of being sent back to Sitka to rejoin their vessel and sail her back to Japan, the skipper and his crew were turned over to Kazis Krauczunas, the U.S. Immigration Inspector for Alaska. He sent them to Seattle on a passenger ship, at government expense. From there they went to Japan by steamer, but who paid for that is not known. While enroute to Japan, the captain of the KAISAI MARU jumped overboard and was drowned.

Meanwhile, the schooner was at anchor in the channel at Sitka, near the Japonski Island shore. The government was responsible for her and kept a watchman aboard for more than a year. When it became obvious that the owner was not going to claim the vessel, she was towed into The Japonski Island Lagoon and anchored there. She remained there, gradually sinking lower and lower until she disappeared. The date when that occurred appears not to have been recorded. Why was she never reclaimed? There has never been an explanation.

On June 1, 1983, work started on a \$2.95 million boat harbor project in the Japonski Island Lagoon area. During the dredging for the harbor, the remains of the KAISEI MARU were found. This led to the naming of the new harbor, Sealing Cove. So the name originated with a Japanese vessel rather than the Sitka sealers.

In July 1989 a ten-man delegation came to Sitka from Shiogama, Japan, to retrieve KAISEI MARU relics which had been collected by Sitka residents. These included the ship's bell, sidelights, part of a skylight, porcelain dishes and a cooking pot. All of these were given to them and went back to Japan. And a pair of swords that had been left in Juneau, perhaps by the captain, was also returned to their homeland.

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Japonski Island Lagoon, Part 7

Japonski Island forms the north side of the original lagoon, was the largest of the island group around the lagoon, and give the lagoon its original name. No doubt the island had a Tlinget name in pre-Russian times, but that name is apparently lost.

The ``Dictionary of Alaska Place Names" has this about the origin of the name: ``Russian name meaning `Japanese

Island,' given in in 1809 by the navigator Ivan Vasiliev the first and published by Lt. Sarichiev in 1826 as ``O[strov] Yaponskoy." This name was given because there were some shipwrecked Japanese sailors living there at the time."

The sailors had been rescued by the Russians from their wrecked vessel on or near Klokachef Island, Salisbry Sound. They were returned to Japan in an American trading vessel, but which one has not been ascertained.

The other version of the origin of the name Japonski is from an earlier date. In June 1803 Nikolai Rezanov, whose name is prominent in Russian-Alaskan history, was made ambassador to Japan. He arrived at Nagasaki in the ship NADEZHDA on September 26,1804, but instead of being welcomed he was seized and held under house arrest until the following April. He determined to punish the Japanese for their inhospitable conduct.

After visiting Kamchatka, Sitka and California, Rezanov ordered two Russian Navy officers, commanding the company ships JUNO and AVOS, to attack the northern islands of Japan. Rezanov died while crossing Siberia bound for St. Petersburg and did not learn the result of the attack. One result later when Captain V. M. Golovnin, on a Russian exploring expedition, landed with some of his men on one of the Kurile Islands to obtain fresh water. They were taken prisoner by the Japanese and held for two years. Golovnin wrote, ``Rezanov wanted to capture Japanese to settle in America and to use them on company work; he designated for their settlement an island and named it Japonski Island."

Both versions are quite probably factually true.

In addition to forming the north side of the lagoon, Japonski Island, together with other islands around the lagoon, formed the western side of what was known as the Inner Harbor at Sitka, protecting it from the ocean swells. And while they did not put Japanese workers on the island, they did make other uses of it.

Some time before 1850 the Russian American Company established an observatory near the southeast tip of the island and astronomical, meteorological and magnetic observations were made there by a staff of at least two men. There is a note from January 1850 that ``the house of the observatory personnel on Japonski Island caught fire and could not be saved. Its occupants were unharmed but lost their personal property. The blaze apparently started where the iron stovepipe passed through the bark roof. The heating stove had been in heavy use in our recent cold temperatures."

Apparently the observatory itself was in a separate building and was not damaged. Reconstruction of the dwelling was completed the following September. And in November 1850 the observatory was extensively used by a foreign visitor. The British sloop-of-war ENTERPRISE, arrived from Bering Sea where she was part of a search for the lost Sir John Franklin. She spent ten days at Sitka while her skipper, Captain Richard Collinson, checked his instruments with those at the observatory.

Other foreign flag ships also made use of the Japonski Island Observatory in subsequent years, but it was closed some time prior to the sale of Alaska to the United States, apparently as an economy measure. The buildings, however, were standing at the time of the transfer. In the ``Inventory of Buildings at Sitka, October 1867," No. 122 is ``Timber building on Japonski Island, used as meteorological observatory." No. 123 is ``Dwelling on Japonski Island for observer." Both were transferred by the Russian American Company to the United States government.

The Russian American Company did have one other installation on the island, a coal depot. No. 124 on the inventory of buildings is ``Coal shed and wharf, on southern tip of Japonski Island, at entrance to the lagoon." This facility did not go to the U.S. government but to a private buyer.

After the Russian American Company got its first steam vessels in the 1830s, they used wood for fuel. Then in the 1850s the company developed a coal mine on the Kenai Peninsula and shipped coal to Sitka for the growing fleet of steam vessels. The coal was presumably stored at and dispensed from this depot. It continued in use for some years after the American flag was hoisted at Sitka, storing coal for vessels of the Revenue Marine Service and an occasional U.S. Navy visitor. The reports of the U.S. Collector of Customs at Sitka mention the hiring of a ``coal watchman for Japonski Island" from time to time but it is unclear whether his responsibility included the entire facility or just the coal stored there.

Many new things came to Sitka with the change of flags on October 18, 1867. One was the U.S. Army and its troops, left overs from the Civil War years, were not among the country's finest. Sitka also got a newspaper, The Alaska Times, and its editor, Thomas G. Murphy, was not an enthusiastic supporter of the Army, or at least of the part of the Army that came to Sitka. He was particularly incensed when a group of military prisoners were shipped to Sitka as workers, suppliers of wood and water. ``Alaska Becoming Another Botany Bay," his paper claimed. He asserted that the soldiers were debauching the Native women, committing robberies and were the main support of the nineteen saloons he said were operating. Murphy several times suggested that the Army establishment be moved to Japonski Island, but some twenty years would pass before the island became a military reserve.

To be continued

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Japonski Island Lagoon, Part 8

Japonski Island was described in an early geographic report as a mile long, but thanks to World War II landscaping it is now both longer and larger than it was before 1940. The separate islands -- Harbor, Alice and Charcoal -- are now melded with Japonski into one island which is generally referred to as Japonski but sometimes as Mt. Edgumbe from the name of

the boarding school that was established there after the war.

Among the visitors to the island after the American flag was raised at Sitka were Lady Jane Franklin and her niece, Sophia Cracroft. Miss Cracroft wrote on May 30, 1870, that they made the trip to the island by rowboat in about ten minutes. "We found a wharf of piles, the planks on top in a dilapidated condition. This island is used by the officers for keeping pigs, poultry, and so forth, and there is a garden belonging to the soldiers, under the care of two men who live on the island. There is also a building with marine stores, in which our boatman (by name Foley) lives and receives \$1 per day for taking charge of them. There is a large quantity of Nanaimo coal lying near the landing place and buildings. The garden is not large but well kept and looking flourishing. It is impossible to have a finer situation for raising produce of all kinds. It has a gentle slope to the South, with full exposure to all quarters but the North, where the ground rises behind the garden."

The coal that the two ladies saw "lying near the landing" may not have all been from Nanaimo, British Columbia. On the previous March 24 the bark ROBERT PORTER had arrived from Philadelphia with a full load of coal consigned to "the Navy Coal Agent." That undoubtedly was anthracite coal, preferred for steaming coal by Navy and other government vessels over the bituminous coal from Nanaimo. The hard coal was undoubtedly stored on Japonski Island.

The Army left Sitka in 1877 but Japonski Island continued in use by civilians for gardens and keeping livestock. One of the gardeners for many years was Michael Travers. The Alaskan, Sitka's weekly newspaper, reported in September 1888 that Travers reported successful results from his garden and that he had grown, that season, four tons of hay and potatoes as well as cabbage, turnips, lettuce and radishes. The only fertilizer he used in two seasons out of five was seaweed placed in furrows and covered with earth. In another issue the paper reported that Travers had four acres under cultivation.

In the years before refrigeration became common in the ships serving Alaska ports, beef and pork were received in Sitka in one of two ways: salted, in casks, and on the hoof. Cattle received on the mail steamer were commonly placed on one of the islands until it was time for butchering; hogs were more commonly penned somewhere in town. Japonski, Aleutski and Kutkan Islands were the ones most used for keeping cattle. Some Sitka-owned domestic cattle were also placed on Japonski Island. In 1886 The Alaskan reported that John Brady had sent his cows and bull to Japonski Island.

Japonski Island gained a new status on June 21, 1890, when President Benjamin Harrison signed his only Executive Order. In addition to reservations elsewhere in Alaska, it created several in Sitka and vicinity: for a wharf, a custom house, a marine or military barracks, a parade ground and public common, for school purposes, for public buildings, for a Governor's house and for a military and naval cemetery and for a public park; at Jamestown Bay a watering place for U.S. Navy and mercantile vessels; and all of Japonski Island for military and naval purposes.

The order was not a surprise to residents of Sitka. President Harrison had asked Governor Lyman Knapp to make recommendations for local reservations, and he had appointed Lt. Commander Oscar W. Farenholt and two civilians to assist him with the draft. Most of the reservations created little immediate change, but on Japonski Island some new construction began within a year. The first thing built there was a powder magazine and shell house, although why these were needed has not been made clear. They were completed by the first of November, 1891.

After that there were no reports of activity on Japonski Island until May, 1894, when the American full-rigged ship AMERICA arrived from the East Coast with coal and, using lighters, discharged it on the island. Apparently the coal was stored in the open air. The wharf mentioned by Sophia Cracroft in 1870 had undoubtedly disappeared and it would be another six years before the Navy would build one.

In November 1899 it was announced that the Navy would build a \$5,000 wharf at the government coaling station on the island. George E. James of Juneau was low bidder on the contract to build a 60 by 20 foot wharf with an approach 70 feet long and 12 feet wide. Eighty-six creosoted piling were used in the structure and the work was in charge of Edward Webster. He was prominent in Juneau affairs and was the founder of the Juneau Telephone Company.

It was next decided that the coal should be stored under cover and in the next four years two large bunkers were built. These were identical and one of them, the second one built and the one farthest from the dock, still stands. It is on the north side of and close to Airport Road, just inland from the present Coast Guard dock.

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Japonski Island Lagoon, Part 9

Japonski Island became a U.S. Navy reserve in 1891 and the first Navy construction there was a powder magazine and shell house, as mentioned last week. I have never discovered where it was located. During the 1920s one of our schoolmates lived on the island and several of us visited there frequently. We knew where the coal bunkers were, and the dwellings, the wireless station building, the power house and the recreation building, but I can't remember seeing any indication of the powder magazine or shell house. Our especial interest was the recreation building in which there was a pool table on which we poked at the balls, enthusiastically but with considerable lack of skill.

The next Navy installation on the island was a coaling station, and this made much more sense. A Navy ship was stationed at Sitka from 1879 until 1897 and occasionally after that, and Revenue Cutters, Lighthouse Tenders, the Fish

Commission steamer and vessels of the Bering Sea Patrol, as well as Navy ships, used the facility from time to time.

It was the pelagic fur seal hunting business that brought about the annual Bering Sea Patrol, In 1886 and 1887, and several times after that, American Revenue Cutters seized British sealing schooners in Bering Sea although the sealers were well outside the conventional three mile limit. Predictably, a controversy arose. Ever since the beginning of the Republic, the United States had proclaimed and championed the freedom of the seas and it was a major issue in the War of 1812.

But when it come to Bering Sea, the United States reversed course and proclaimed that the whole of the American part of this vast sea was a closed sea, subject only to United States laws and regulations. That this caused controversy is putting it mildly, and it resulted in a sixty-mile no-sealing zone around the Pribilof Islands, to be enforced by vessels of both nations.

The annual Bering Sea Patrol consisted of three or four U. S. Navy ships and an approximately equal number of Royal Navy ships. All of the U.S. ships stopped at Sitka on their way north each spring and took coal at Japonski Island. Some of them came here again southbound. Some of the British ships called here in the spring, but most of them carried enough coal to get them to Dutch Harbor, where another coaling depot had been established. On at least two occasions in the 1890s British ships were in the harbor at Sitka on May 26, the Queen's Birthday. They dressed ship, fired salutes and paraded on Lincoln Street to celebrate the anniversary.

In addition to the British warships of the Bering Sea Patrol, at least two foreign flag vessels came to Sitka, bringing coal to Japonski Island. The first of these was the British full-rigged ship DUNEARN which arrived on February 18, 220 days from Barry Docks, Cardiff, Wales. Welch anthracite coal was the best steaming coal in the world, and the Navy demanded the best.

Captain Hackland of the DUNEARN was interviewed by Sitka's newspaper, The Alaskan, and he also gave an hour-long talk to the pupils at the public school, describing the long voyage. They had encountered freezing weather weather had strong head winds off Cape Horn. After several of the crew had suffered frostbite, the ship was turned around and sailed across the South Atlantic, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean before reaching Sitka. They made only one stop, at the Auckland Islands, where they picked up fresh fruit. They passed close by Pitcairn Island, home of the BOUNTY mutineers, but did not stop. From Sitka the DUNEARN would go to Portland, Oregon, to load a cargo for East London, South Africa, Captain Hackland told the school children.

The Alaskan reported that unloading the coal was progressing rapidly, with all of the machinery at the coal depot working well. The paper also had this report on an incident of the unloading:

"A certain amount of coal is spilled over the sides of the coal cars as they are being loaded and one enterprising local resident scooped up a small sack of this spillage and took it home. He soon learned the difference between hard coal from Wales and the soft coal from British Columbia. When he fired up his kitchen range with the purloined coal, it got red hot, not only on top but all around so that he was fearful his house might be set afire. That did not happen but after the fire had burned itself out he discovered that the grate in his stove was badly warped by the heat and will have to be replaced. He dumped the remainder of the coal onto the beach."

A second load of Welch coal was delivered to the Japonski Island coaling station by the German full-rigged ship PERU in May, 1905. She was described as "a beautiful vessel, painted white from waterline to truck." She appeared between Biorka Island and St. Lazaria on the 18th and hove to there to await a pilot. John Clement did that job and was accompanied by Peter Trierschild as interpreter. The ship sailed in through the Western Channel and dropped anchor off the north end of Japonski Island. After the sails were furled, the Revenue Cutter RICHARD RUSH went alongside and towed her to the coal wharf.

The PERU, Captain Scherlogh, hailed from Bremen, had taken her crew aboard at Liverpool and loaded 3,200 tons of coal at Cardiff, Wales. She had made the voyage to Sitka in 150 days. Although only 2,500 tons of the coal was consigned to the Navy, evidently the entire cargo was discharged here as two Sitka young men, Robert Witz, Jr., and Herbert Richardson, secured a contract to supply the ship with 1,200 tons of rock ballast. When the PERU was ready to sail for Puget Sound on July 14, the little mail steamer GEORGIA towed her out beyond Cape Edgecumbe.

In 1906 the DUNEARN was back with another load of Cardiff coal, but no details of her voyage were reported by The Alaskan.

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Japonski Island Lagoon, Part 10

The Navy Coaling Station on Japonski Island was completed in 1904 with the building of the second big bunker. It had a wharf with creosoted piling and in water deep enough for any ship that could get into the channel. A tower on the wharf was capable of both receiving and dispatching coal and an elevated tramway from the tower to the bunkers. The tramway had iron rails and small dump cars. In addition to the the bunkers, each capable of holding 2,500 tons or more of coal, there was a dwelling for the small Navy crew stationed there.

Then the Navy switched from coal to oil, as did most steamboats, both government and private. The Revenue Cutter UNALGA is believed to have been the last government vessel to burn coal. She was stationed at Juneau but occasionally visited Sitka, and up until about 1916 tied up at the Navy dock and her crew loaded some of what was left of the coal. They

used wheelbarrows for the job as the tramway had been torn down.

And occasionally a recently arrived Sitka householder, unfamiliar with the thermal qualities of anthracite coal, was reported to have helped himself to some of it but did not repeat and sometimes had to buy a new stove.

There is a remaining mystery from the years of the coal depot. That is John Brown's grave at the north end of the island. I have been asked more than once who John Brown was and why he was buried there, but am unable to answer the question. The marble headstone says he died in April 1901 at the age of 30. A scanning of *The Alaskan*, Sitka's weekly newspaper, provides no information and from that I surmise that he was not a Sitka resident. If he was a Navy man, stationed on the island or aboard one of the ships that called here, he would almost certainly have been buried in the Soldiers and Sailors Cemetery, as the Sitka National Cemetery was then known. George James, a Juneau contractor, had a crew of men in Sitka in 1901, building the first coal bunker and also building the observatory, on Observatory Street, for the Coast & Geodetic Survey. I have not examined either of the Juneau newspapers that were being published in 1901 to see whether they had information about Brown. If any reader has information about John Brown I would appreciate hearing it.

The coal depot was obsolete and the station might have been abandoned had the Navy not come up with a new idea. It did so in 1907. *The Alaskan* reported on June 25 that a wireless communications station would be built on the island. It would be one of five such Navy wireless stations in Alaska. They would be built at Point Whitt near Cordova, at Kodiak, Dutch Harbor and on St. Paul Island in the Pribilof Islands.

Several new buildings were erected on Japonski: dwellings, a wireless house, a power house and a recreation building as well as three masts for the antenna, tall and well guyed. The work went rapidly and the first message was sent from the Sitka station on October 4, 1907.

That was four years after Sitka got its first telegraphic communication. It was by a submarine cable to Juneau which was connected with Skagway by another cable. A landline connected Skagway with Atlin and the land line between Dawson, Y.T., and Ashcroft, B.C. The length of the line and the wild country it traversed caused many interruptions of that service. But on August 28, 1904, Sitka was connected directly with Seattle by another submarine cable. With the opening of the Navy station on Japonski, the military had returned to Sitka in some force: sixteen to eighteen Army Signal Corps men at the station on the Sitka side of the channel, eight or nine Navy men on Japonski. On January 8, 1908, the Navy station set a distance record when its signals were picked up at Point Loma, California.

The Navy station contributed two long time residents to Sitka's civilian population and each of them married a girl named Peterson, although not sisters, and each of them later became a fox farmer. William Cook came to the island in 1913 as CPO in charge of the station. A couple of years later he married Miss Iola Peterson, a sister of L.T. Peterson. On April 9, 1919, Cook was operating the station when something went wrong and he received severe electrical burns around the head. The USS VICKBURG happened to be in Juneau with several doctors aboard because of the influenza epidemic. Cook was rushed to the ship by the sub-chaser 309. After treatment there and in Navy hospitals he received a medical discharge and returned to Sitka. He and his wife and daughter spent a winter as watchman at Port Althrop where he became interested in fox farming, and for some years he operated a fox farm on the Siginaka Islands north of Sitka. In 1925 the family moved to Sitka so the daughter, Billie Jean, could attend school. Cook worked as an electrician and opened Sitka's first radio shop. He served as a member of the City Council and on the Public Utilities Board.

The second Japonski Island radioman to settle in Sitka was Guy Edgar Banvard who became known in Sitka as "Bannie." A native of Sacramento, California, he arrived on Japonski in 1914 at the age of 22 and on July 6, 1918, married Katherine Peterson, the daughter of John and Hilma Peterson. Banvard achieved the rank of Chief and in 1823 received a discharge from the Navy. He and Kate moved to the Taigud Islands south of Sitka to operate a fox farm, the Congo Fur Company, in partnership with her father. They had a small gasboat and Bannie did some trolling during the summers. They remained on the islands until 1934. By then the fur business had gone sour as a result of the Great Depression and the Banvards moved back to town.

Bannie looked after the extensive property interests of the Petersons and sometimes helped in their store. He died unexpectedly in their home on September 14, 1944, and is buried in the National Cemetery.
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Japonski Island Lagoon, Part 11

The supply ship for the Japonski Island Naval Radio Station for many years was the BUFFALO, a vessel of 2,500 tons or more. She was there for several days on each visit and usually there was an open house on board during the stay. A lot of us youngsters went to the open house, not because of an interest in the ship or its crew but because of the ship's mascot. This was a medium sized black bear, and to entertain the visitors the sailors put on a boxing match with the bear. As I remember it, the bear was fairly adept with gloves while standing on its hind legs. We were told that occasionally a careless sailor hit the bear on the end of its nose, whereupon the bear terminated the match with one swat and the unlucky sailor picked himself up off the deck. To my disappointment, that never happened while I was watching.

In later years the BUFFALO was replaced by a much smaller vessel, the SWALLOW, a World War I mine-sweeper. It

didn't hold open house or have a bear.

In 1920 the Navy began upgrading its Alaska wireless stations. At Sitka the work included several new buildings and replacing the old 10-kilowatt transmitter with one of 30 kw. A larger auxiliary power plant was also installed although by then there was a cable across the channel and the station was using electricity from Sawmill Creek.

The most spectacular part of the new construction was a pair of 300-foot, three-legged steel antenna towers. A steel erecting firm, Garrick & Garrick, built the towers late in the fall of 1921. The men worked each day until it was quite dark and the red hot rivets being tossed up to to be hammered into place could be plainly seen from town.

The towers, once completed, were a magnet for daredevil climbers and others who just wanted the view. The late J. H. Gilpatrick at least twice lugged a big Graflex camera to the top to get some spectacular views of Sitka. Later on, with the coming of airplanes, red lights were installed on the towers. These could be seen far at sea and for many years provided a landmark for mariners. The towers came down in 1941 as work progressed on the Navy Air Station.

Navy personnel used an open motor launch getting to and from the Sitka side of the channel. It was the "shore boat" and this term was picked up and used for the boats in similar civilian service after the war.

The DOROTHY ALEXANDER, the smallest of the four ALEXANDER ships of the Pacific Steamship Company, began tour ship service to Southeast Alaska in June 1926, and moored at the Navy wharf, presumably because the water was too shallow at the Wharf & Power Company dock where most of the ships tied up. The DOROTHY'S passengers were lightered to the Sitka side. After that first year, however, the DOROTHY anchored off The Crescent.

The stock market crash of 1929, followed by the beginning of the Great Depression and its budget-cutting in Washington, spelled the end of several Navy wireless stations in Alaska, including the one on Japonski Island. The last Navy people left the island early in 1931. The Chris Jackson family lived at the station for some time as caretakers. They owned a cow and in a magazine article about Sitka, the late Eiler Hansen noted that Japonsky had "been transformed from a Navy station to a one cow dairy farm." After the Jacksons left the island it was essentially deserted until 1937.

The transformation of Japonski Island and of Charcoal, Alice and Harbor Islands to the south of it, can be said to have begun on May 18, 1937. On that day Lieutenant Robert Silher, USN, arrived to begin the work of establishing a base for Navy patrol planes. Lt. Silhler was an engineer and was accompanied by his wife. The work was done by force account and many Sitka men found jobs there that spring.

Other Navy activity began soon and would continue for the next eight years. The USS PENSACOLA tied up at the Navy dock on July 9 for a three day stay before going on to Cordova. She was followed by the USS LANGLEY, an aircraft carrier, on July 18. This was the first carrier to come to Sitka and was anchored in the outer harbor and was joined by the destroyers DALLAS, LONG and WASMUTH.

Then, on November 24 the six planes of Patrol Squadron VP-17 and the tender LAPWING, Captain Richard Ruble, arrived to take station. The planes were to make weather observations. They were relieved on December 4 by three planes of Patrol Squadron V-19, with the three other planes of the squadron to arrive the following day. They remained until February 2, 1938, after five planes of Squadron VP-18 had arrived from Sand Point, Washington, the previous day. The sixth plane of the squadron was lost at Goose Island, British Columbia, on January 29, but its crew was rescued by other planes of the squadron.

On February 19 the USS SWALLOW, a familiar sight at Sitka in the 1920s when she was a tender for the Navy wireless station, was wrecked on Kanaga Island in the Aleutians, a total loss. Her crew of 48 was rescued.

Commencing on March 1, 1938, the Japonski Island station was officially designated "Fleet Air Base, Sitka." To be continued

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Japonski Island Lagoon, Part 12

Japonski Island, a Navy reserve since 1890, was designated Fleet Air Base, Sitka, on March 1, 1938. Construction of housing and facilities for servicing squadrons of patrol planes had been going on for several months, but the real transformation of the island and the adjacent lagoon and islands was still to come.

Planning had been going on in Washington for some time and on May 16, 1939, a \$2,884,000 project was announced.

Included in the package were seaplane ramp, hangar and parking space; administration building; barracks; cold storage and commissary; quarters for seven married officers, 10 married enlisted men and 50 bachelor officers; separate recreation facilities for officers and enlisted men; a dispensary with 15 beds; renovation of an old coal shed for storage; fuel oil storage; power plant building and equipment; a heat distribution system; electrical distribution system; sewage disposal system; water supply and fire protection systems; roads and walks; four underground magazines; radio and direction finder building; bombsight workshop and storage; torpedo workshop and storage; utility shop building; and a station maintenance building.

Other additions were made later, including the garbage incinerator, the remnants of which still stand near the runway at the north end of the island.

One thing was sure: the greater part of Japonski Island would no longer be the pristine wilderness it had been for untold

time, but in 1939 it is doubtful that anyone foretold it as a medical and educational center.

At the end of August 1939 the Navy let a contract to build the Sitka and Kodiak Naval Air Stations. Signing a joint contract were Seims, Spokane Company of Spokane, Washington; Johnson, Drake, Riper, Inc., of Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Puget Sound Bridge and Dredging Company of Seattle, Wash. The consortium was known as Seims, Drake, Puget Sound and was often referred to simply as Seims, Drake.

Early in 1940 work was begun by the contractors on a gravel plant at the mouth of Indian River and before long gravel trucks were rolling through town on their way to the Conway Dock, off Katlian Street, where the gravel was transferred to barges for hauling to the island.

The Japonski construction was a real boon to Sitka's economy which had been stagnant for several years. Several families moved from Port Alexander and other towns, and more came from "down below," the common phraseology for the 48 states. An evidence of the brightening local economy was the opening of Sitka's first bank in the fall of 1939.

By March 1940 an estimated 240 men were at work on the construction job. Housing was in short supply in Sitka and to provide living quarters for some of their workers, the contractors purchased the ship CITY OF VICTORIA and moored her at the island dock. This was not the famed VICTORIA, long associated with Nome, but a smaller vessel that had mostly been used on the route between Seattle and Victoria and Vancouver, B.C. The ship was evidently out of commission when she was purchased by the contractors, as she came north at the end of a towline. A storm was encountered in Chatham Strait, the towline parted and the CITY OF VICTORIA was in some danger of being driven ashore before the tow was re-established.

In December 1940 it was announced that work was starting on a new \$437,000 housing project on the base. It included 62 duplex houses and one single dwelling, and it appears that this was in addition to the original contract

At the beginning of the project Alice Island and Charcoal Island were mostly high humps of tree-covered rock, and there was a similar hump on the west side of Japonski Island. All of these were blasted away to provide more level ground for building and to provide rock for the causeway that was to connect the several islands west of Japonski. (The Causeway project was reported in this department in four parts, June 8 to June 29, 2000).

The blasting to pieces of those humps of solid country rock entailed more than only monetary cost. Just before noon on August 14, 1941, a premature blast buried seven men under an estimated 700 tons of rock from the face of the quarry which was 30 feet high and 120 feet long. Later that year there was a fire in a dynamite storage shed, resulting in a tremendous explosion. There were evidently no civilians in the area but an officer and four enlisted men from the Army post, Fort Ray, and one Marine from the Naval Air Station were killed.

By that time the Army had become very much a part of the military establishment at Sitka. On May 30, 1941, Decoration Day, there was just one Army man stationed at Sitka. He belonged to the Signal Corps and operated the radio communications station which was located in the Custom House-Post Office building. On the following day 200 more Army men arrived, in two units. One was Company E of the Fourth U.S. Artillery. The other was Battery F of the 250th Coast Artillery, with a medical detachment and a quartermaster group.

The Army eventually set up a post on Charcoal Island and this became Fort Ray, named for Lieut. Patrick Henry Ray, USA. 1842-1911. He was a man with a good deal of experience in Alaska. He had been with the International Polar Expedition of 1882-83, had been at Point Barrow with that expedition and had written some of the narratives of the official report. He returned to Alaska in 1897 and was in charge of regulation food supplies during the gold rush. His reports of those events have also appeared in print.

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Japonski Island Lagoon, Part 13

Japonski Island was reserved in 1890 for the Navy, but the other islands Harbor, Alice and Charcoal which with Japonski surrounded the lagoon, were not included in the reserve. Harbor Island had been reserved for the use of the Revenue Cutter Service, now the Coast Guard, by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1901. Neither entity made use of it, the island was bought and sold by private parties, and during the construction period of World War II it was joined to Japonski Island by a fill. In 1972 the western end of the O'Connell Bridge landed on the southern end of what had been Harbor Island, and the main road to Japonski travels its length.

Alice and Charcoal islands were not part of any government reserve but there were some Indian claims to them. Nevertheless, the military moved in, leveled the islands by blasting away their tops, joined them with fill, and started building. Fort Ray was established on Charcoal Island but the status of Alice Island during the war is unclear. One report

mentions a Navy hospital there.

In addition to Fort Ray, the Army had other installations around Sitka. Camp Reilly was, I am told, on the site of the present Keet Gooshi Heen Elementary School, and was a base for Coast Artillery Units. There was another camp near Indian River but I have not learned its name or whether it had one.

Army units stationed at Sitka during the war, according to Lyman Woodman's three-volume history of the Army in Alaska, were:

Company K, 4th Infantry.

Battery E, 4th Artillery.

Company C, 151st Engineer Combat Regiment.

10th Ordinance Service Company.

Company C, 198th Infantry.

204th Hospital Staff.

Anti-tank Company, 201st Infantry.

351st Quartermaster Corps

Battery G, 48th Coast Artillery (Harbor Defense).

Headquarters and Batteries B, D, F, G, H, Coast Artillery, (Anti-Aircraft).

Composite Battallion, 63rd Coast Artillery, Anti-Aircraft.

Batteries D, E, H, 205th Coast Artillery (Anti-Aircraft).

Battery D, 420th Coast Artillery (Anti-Aircraft).

Headquarters Battery and Batteries A, B, C, D, Coast Artillery.

3rd Battallion Band.

These Army units probably were not all here at the same time, but there is no indication in the Woodman history when each of them arrived and when it left. One thing is certain, a lot of U. S. troops had more than a passing glimpse of Sitka.

Fort Ray, during its relatively short existence, appears to have been a lively community. Sitka's first radio broadcast station went on the air from the fort at 7 p.m. on Sunday, August 16, 1942. "The station was made possible," a news release said, "by the military and the people of Sitka," which indicates that merchants and other business people were contributors. Lieut. House was the station manager and Corporal Walt Welch was his assistant. In November 1942, the station's call letters were changed to WVCK.

And the following year 23 enlisted men at Fort Ray, no doubt using material furnished by the Army, put up the Harbor Defense Recreation Building. It opened on December 20, in time for Christmas programs and celebrations. Dances, movies, boxing matches and other such events were held there during the remainder of the time the fort was in operation.

After the war ended, the City of Sitka was able to buy the station's equipment, which was promptly resold to James Brightman and Walt Welch. They moved it to a small building on Maksoutoff Street and went on the air on March 23, 1947, with the call letters KBW and broadcasting from 10 a.m. until 10 p.m. Welch and Brightman did not find enough financial support, however, to continue operating and went off the air early in 1949.

While all of that was going on with the Army, there was also a great deal of activity at the Fleet Air Base on Japonski Island, but little of it got into the newspapers. The buildings and other facilities listed last week were completed by the contractor including 62 duplex and one single dwellings, and many barracks.

News of all military operations was restricted during the war, but the National Archives facility at Anchorage holds many boxes of documents relating to the war in Alaska. In time someone may mine that treasure trove of information and write a history of the military installations of Sitka Sound.

The bombing of Dutch Harbor and the occupation of Attu and Kiska in June 1942 brought the war closer to Sitka, but the recapture of Attu in May 1943 and the Japanese abandonment of Kiska the following August turned the focus southwestward. Military personnel began to leave Sitka for other theaters. The surrender of Germany on May 7, 1945, followed by that of Japan on August 14 stimulated the outflow.

The future of Japonski then became a concern of Sitka's civilian population. Would the Navy continue to maintain a base there? The island had been a Navy station, although a small one, since the 1890s, and there was some hope that seniority would be a factor in maintaining the facility. It would mean much to the economy of Sitka.

To be continued

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Japonski Island Lagoon, Part 14

Japonski Island, on the north side of the Lagoon, was designated Fleet Air Base, Sitka, on March 1, 1938. As World War II began to wind down in 1945, many Sitkans hoped that it would remain some kind of Navy base when the war ended. That hope began to fade when, following the surrender of Japan, it was announced that Kodiak, some 600 miles almost due west of Sitka, would be the main Navy base in Alaska. The hopes died completely when on April 12, 1946, the U. S. Bureau of Indian Affairs announced that it would establish a vocational boarding school on the island, to be operated by the Alaska Native Service, the Alaska branch of the BIA. A medical center would also be opened in one of the former Navy buildings.

The entire operation was titled the Mount Edgecumbe Project.

The name caused some nomenclature confusion and Mount Edgecumbe has gradually supplanted Japonski as the name of the area.

The project included both remodeling of existing structures and new construction, including some housing, and that took the best part of a year. The first pupils arrived in January, 1947, and the school officially opened on February 22, although classes did not begin until the following September 15. Max Penrod transferred from Juneau to be principal of the Mount Edgecumbe School. There were 600 pupils enrolled by the opening day. Of these, about 100 came from the Eklutna boarding school near Palmer, and others were from Wrangell Institute, a few miles south of Wrangell. Both those schools were closed.

Fred Geeslin, from the Juneau office of the Alaska Native Service, visited Sitka in May 1947 to determine whether there were buildings and other facilities suitable for moving the entire Native Service headquarters to the island from Juneau, but that move was not made. He evidently was impressed by Sitka and the island, however, as in December 1947 he became Superintendent of the entire Mount Edgecumbe project. Dr. M. Van Zandt arrived a little later as Chief Medical Officer. Already on the job as orthopedic surgeon was Dr. Philip H. Moore who would have a long career on the island and in Sitka.

The Mount Edgecumbe post office opened on the island on September 2, 1947, with Mrs. Ruth L. Nelson as postmaster. Others who serviced the office in that capacity were Alfred L. Cockrell, Jr., and Donald L. Ballou. On November 30, 1959, the office became a branch of the Sitka post office.

On May 25, 1948, ground was broken for what was described as a concrete, five-story, 200 bed tuberculosis sanitorium, to be built at a cost of \$2 million. Much of the gravel for the concrete in the building came from off the Crescent, the area now occupied by Crescent boat harbor and thus decreased the amount of dredging that had to be done for that facility. After the building opened in the spring of 1951 it also became the orthopedic hospital, and on February 22, 1952, a School of Practical Nursing was opened there. In the next nine years 171 women and men had graduated from the school.

From transporting people between the island and Sitka, small ferry boats were used. The Navy, when it populated the island, called them shore boats and that name was retained. They were a prominent feature of island life until the O'Connell Bridge was opened in 1972.

The next step in the utilization of Japonski Island was an airfield. Sitka had had passenger air service since the early 1930s, first with small pontoon planes, later with the Grumman Goose and the PBY. But by the late 1950s a field that would take the growing traffic by jet planes was perceived as a real necessity. The problem was that Sitka did not have enough flat ground for such a field. Nor was there a suitable area close by.

In June 1960 it was suggested that the broad expanse of muskeg behind the Goddard Hot Springs would be suitable for a field. The site was checked by the Federal Aviation Administration which agreed that a field could be built there, but pointed to its drawbacks. Access from Sitka by land would require a road to the head of Silver Bay, across to the head of Redoubt Lake, along the steep lake shore for nine miles, and another mile or two to the field, a total approaching 30 miles. It would be a difficult road to build and even more difficult to keep open in winter.

The attention then turned to Japonski Island. In March 1961 state Sen. Howard Bradshaw secured an appropriation of \$350,000 to the State Public Works Department for site survey and acquisition. Surveys were made and funds were first secured for a 4,000-foot runway, then for one of 5,600 feet. A contract was let to Morrison-Knutson in October 1964. Some material for the runway was secured by blasting rock from Japonski Island, but a good deal of gravel was hauled by barge from Aleutkina Bay. The first small plane landed on the field on May 11, 1965; the first commercial plane on January 6, 1966. This was followed by the first jet on March 29, 1967. Funds for a further extension of the runway were allotted by the FAA in 1972 and the first Boeing 737 landed on March 18, 1981.

The field was subsequently named the Sitka Rocky Gutierrez Airport in honor of Fermin "Rocky" Gutierrez, former Sitka City Manager and Mayor.

To be continued

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Japonski Island Lagoon, Part 15

Alaska's Centennial, the anniversary of its purchase from Russia, was celebrated in 1967. At the time the American flag was raised on Castle Hill, Japonski Island had a Russian astronomical observatory and not much else except unused land.

A hundred years later Japonski Island and the other three islands that had been joined to it and that enclosed The Lagoon, had the Mount Edgecumbe School with some 600 pupils; the Mount Edgecumbe Medical Center with a large hospital and staff; a Coast Guard wharf, the station of a buoy tender; an operating airport with associated facilities including the U.S. Weather Service; the Mount Edgecumbe Elementary School on Alice Island; and a large number of dwellings occupied by employees of various government departments.

But alteration of the landscape of the four-island complex and additions to its facilities, and operational changes, did not stop with the Alaska Centennial.

In August 1972 the U.S. Coast Guard announced that it would seek an air station on Japonski. Construction of a \$12.8

million station was started three years later. In April 1977 three helicopters arrived to activate the station and it was commissioned on October 17, 1977.

The 600-pupil Mount Edgumbe School, operated by the Alaska Native Service branch of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, closed its doors on June 30, 1983. After negotiations and renovation of the facilities, it reopened on September 23, 1985, as Mount Edgumbe High School with 178 students and operated by the State of Alaska.

Added to the educational facilities on the island is the Sitka Campus of the University of Alaska. This institution was approved in 1961 by the Board of Regents of the University as the Sitka Community College. It opened in the fall of 1962 in an abandoned school building on Katlian Street and in 1976 moved to a new building on Sawmill Creek where it remained for a dozen years before moving to the island.

A construction project of 1971-72 had considerable effect on the Japonski Island community, did not disturb its landscape but made it much more accessible, The O'Connell bridge, named for a former mayor, was dedicated on August 19, 1972. It did away with the "shore boats" that had ferried people and goods across the channel since early Navy days.

The most recent major earth-moving project was the conversion of The Lagoon, surrounded by the four islands, to a boat harbor. Moorage for small boats, principally fishing boats, had been a growing problem since the early 1920s when the trolling fleet began to move to local fishing grounds. The first public facility was the City Float. It was a project of the Sitka Commercial Club and while the city contributed some funds, most of the work was done by volunteers. Several fishermen brought in float logs and lumber was contributed by the sawmill. Peter Trierschild dredged up what was described as "the old government mooring chains" from the harbor, for mooring the float. It was hooked to the wharf of the Booth Fisheries cold storage plant which stood just north of present Totem Square. It was a mooring but far from being a secure boat harbor.

Over the years, as the local fleet continued to grow, there were petitions to Congress, hearings by the U.S. Engineers and local meetings, all toward getting a boat harbor. Jamestown Bay was proposed as a site but, over some vigorous protests from residents and an institutions along that part of Lincoln Street, Crescent Harbor was built. It was dedicated on February 19, 1966,

During at least one of the boat harbor hearings, Adolph Thomsen observed that the local area best protected from prevailing southeasterly winds was just south of Griffith Island. The next harbor was built there in 1973 and named for Thomsen.

It was a great increase in pleasure boats that fueled a demand for additional harborage, Despite the fact that a few boats had for years used the Japonski Island Lagoon as an anchorage, particularly in winter, at none of the many harbor hearings was it suggested that it be dredged for a boat harbor. When the idea finally surfaced, the Assembly is August 1980 recommended the site for a boat harbor. Construction began three year later.

The original entrance to The Lagoon, between Japonski and Harbor islands, had been closed by fill during World War II construction. By dredging and blasting a new entrance was created on the south side of the basin. When dredging of the basin brought to light the remains of the Japanese sealing schooner KAISE MARU, seized in 1909 on a charge of illegal seal hunting, it was decided to name the new harbor Sealing Cove.

Japonski Island and Harbor Island were made government reserves 112 and 101 years ago, respectively, by executive order of the President, and they apparently are still entirely government property. Alice and Charcoal Islands were never in reserve status, although the military used them during World War II. As part of the major remodeling of the landscape during that period, the two islands were joined. That created an area of about 30 acres which was joined to Japonski Island. After the war ended, Alice Island was the site of a TB sanatorium until July 1950 when the 118 patients were moved to the new hospital on Japonski Island. In 1964 the federal government built an eight-classroom school on Alice Island to replace a World War II barracks that had served as a school. In January 1982 the school building with 2.4 acres of land was deeded to the Sitka School District.

In 1979 Shee Atika, Inc., Sitka's Native corporation, applied to the federal government for title to the Alice-Charcoal property and the application was endorsed by the Sitka Assembly. On July 24, 1981, it was announced that Alice and Charcoal Islands would be transferred from federal ownership to the Shee Atika Corporation.

Soon after the transfer was completed the City of Sitka made arrangements for the construction of a waste water treatment plant on the western shore of Charcoal Island. The plant, which cost in excess of \$7.7 million, was completed in the summer of 1983.

Recently Shee Atika agreed to sell to the State of Alaska a portion of Charcoal Island for airport expansion. This tract contains a World War II ammunition bunker that had been turned into a mausoleum for tuberculosis victims who had died at the Mt. Edgumbe hospital. The mausoleum was established after efforts to establish a cemetery on the available ground on Japonski. After a heavy rain it was discovered that the caskets floated to the surface. "It was a matter of weighing them down with rocks, essentially leaving them under water, or the more humanitarian course of using the bunker as a mausoleum," Fred Geeslin, a former superintendent on the island, told me. The mausoleum was closed in the year 2000 and the bodies were returned to their villages for burial.

The most recent development on Charcoal Island is the construction of five town houses which will be offered for sale by the Shee Atika Corporation. But that will undoubtedly be the last construction or development on this four-island addition to Greater Sitka.