

At the end of 1887, came the first of Alaska Governor A. P. Swineford's hostile reports. He not only accused Alaska Commercial of violations of the sealing law but charged oppression and robbery of the natives whom he called "enslaved Aleuts." Referring to the religious faith of some of the Company's stockholders, he revived the old Goldstone attitude of violent mistrust of contract operations.

By 1888, there began to be hints in Treasury reports of the coming end of the fur seal contract. There were suggestions for including Otter and Walrus islands in the sealing islands. There were two conservation measures proposed: a decrease in the take, though Tingle insisted the year before "it is certain, however, this vast number of animals so valuable to the Government, is still on the increase;" secondly, a patrol of Washington and British Columbia waters during migration to protect traveling seals.

After some negotiations between San Francisco and Washington, D.C., the U.S. man-of-war *Thetis* docked at St. Paul June 17, 1888, with a distinguished visitor, Alaska Governor Swineford. The year following his critical report of the Company's sealing and of its trading enterprises on the mainland, Swineford was making his first Pribiloff visit.

Every part of the islands, from rookeries to salt houses and churches, was inspected. It was as pleasing to Company Agent H. H. McIntyre, then, as it was to President Louis Sloss in San Francisco later, that the governor was loud in his praise. At the islands, Swineford extolled Company care and provision for the natives, as well as relations between lessees and the government.

It was hoped his visit would make amends for Swineford's violent report.

In his 1888 and last report as a Treasury agent, Tingle said, "With absolute protection the seals will increase so that a greater number could be taken each year, to keep pace with the increased demand, and the price cheapened to the people of the world, and particularly to those of moderate means in our own country, who would be glad to enjoy the comforts of the beautiful seal garment."

For the Board of Directors, 1888 presented perhaps the greatest difficulties to date. Another Congressional hearing took place in Washington just about the exact time Swineford himself was inspecting the seal islands. In June, as a result of Swineford's earlier charges before his inspection trip and of letters to newspapers by a retiring Treasury agent from St. George, William Gavitt, the congressional committee began another long investigation.

On the witness stand, Gavitt's charges resolved themselves into the fact that he found both fellow treasury agents and Company agents "hard to get along with." The letters Gavitt had written to the papers resulted in answers to other newspapers and to the Company in the form of letters from ship captains, Treasury agents, and former employees offering proof against Gavitt's allegations.

A complete investigation of Alaska Commercial's books, customs records, instructions to employees and testimony by officers refuted Swineford's and the former agent's charges.

Entirely exonerated on both sets of complaints, Alaska Commercial received praise from the Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries for its conduct of the lease.

Then came Swineford's 1888 report on the affairs of Alaska with a confusing outlook on Alaska Commercial. He praised the satisfactory condition of the seal islands: "in fact it is doing even more in the matter of providing for the wants and comfort of the natives than its contract requires."

He went on to repeat the previous year's charges, however, and declared that profits were \$500,000 to a million dollars a year, commenting "this particular monopoly is worse than a trust; it is not a combination of individuals or corporations, organized for the purpose of regulating production and keeping up prices; it is a great corporate monopoly, created by Congress itself and armed with a

monopolistic club in the shape of sole and exclusive possession of a most valuable industry, which it does not scruple to use to beat out, so to speak, the brains of any and all competition for that part of the fur trade not embraced in its lease and contract with the government.”

Again the Company was vindicated in another review by the House Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries.