

Alaska, the Last Frontier

Information compiled by Sharon Guthrie, Betty Kamikawa and Sharon Takahashi for presentation at Annual Conference, October 8, 2003.

Alaska in a Nutshell

-2003-

Alaska, nicknamed the Last Frontier, became the 49th state on January 3, 1959. Its capital is Juneau and it was purchased from Russia in 1867 for \$7.2 million. It was organized as a U.S. territory in 1912. Alaska's state motto is "North to the Future."

The name Alaska has an Aleut origin. It means "great country" or "great continent." The Aleuts lived on the Aleutian islands, a chain that extends westward from a large peninsula in southwestern Alaska. The first large island is Unimak Island. From where they were positioned, their peninsula led to a much larger "mainland."

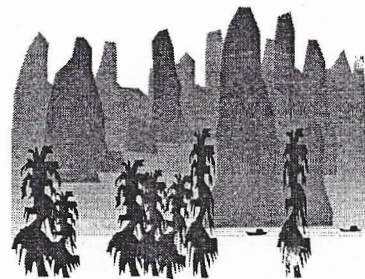
According to time scientist and surveyor William Healey Dall, "This name, now applied to the whole of our new territory, is a corruption, very far removed from the original word...called by the natives Al-ak-shak or Al-ay-ek-sa. From Alayeksa, the name became Alaksa, Alashka, Aliaska, and finally Alaska. We have, then Alaska for the territory, Aliaska for the peninsula."

Its land area measures 570,374 square miles, or about 365 million acres. Alaska is 1/5th the size of the combined lower 48 states and 500 miles away from the contiguous 48. Its coastline measures 6,640 miles, but its total shoreline is about 34,000 miles long. Its western tip is only 51 miles from Russia's Siberian Coast.

The northern quarter of Alaska lies in the Arctic Circle. It is frozen, treeless tundra; the southeastern region contains lush rain forests. Many parts of Alaska are still wild and barely populated and accessible by float planes.

Alaska's climate can vary widely. The Panhandle and the coastal plain along the Gulf of Alaska have moderate temperatures and heavy precipitation. High mountains protect these from cold northerly winds, and ocean currents warm the shores. Winds off the Pacific Ocean lose their moisture as they collide with the mountains, drenching the area with rain. The average annual precipitation in this region is about 94 inches, although some areas receive twice that amount. The average annual temperature is 41°F. The Copper River, Cook Inlet, and Bristol Bay areas have colder winters and less rainfall. Summer and winter temperatures in the interior are more extreme. Average annual precipitation there is about 15 inches.

The 2000 census lists its population as 626,932, with a median age of 30.1 years. Only the states of Wyoming and Vermont have smaller populations. The largest city by population is Anchorage (260,283). The 2001 median income was \$30,064, ranking it 15th in the nation.

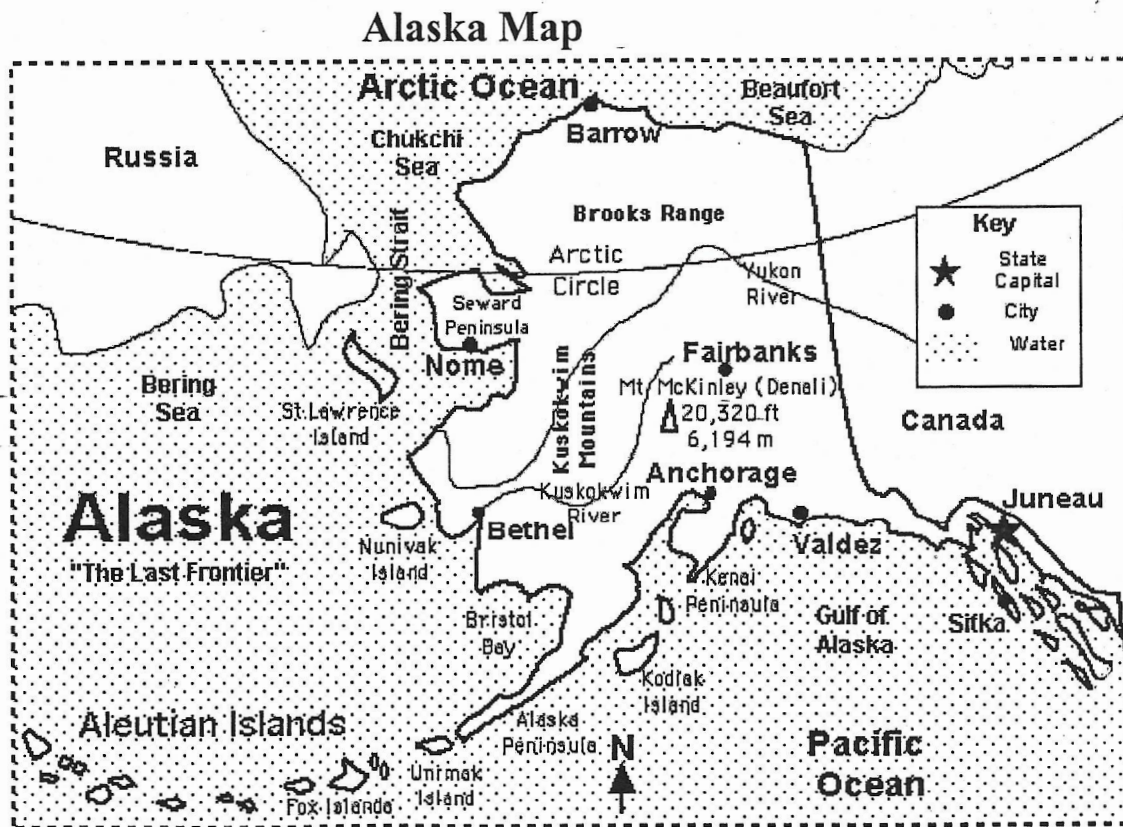


Natural Resources

Forests cover about one-third of Alaska. The coastal forests, in the Panhandle and along the Gulf of Alaska, are dense, towering stands of western hemlock, Sitka spruce and red and yellow cedar. The interior forests contain mostly white spruce, birch, aspen, poplar, and willow.

The Last Frontier supports an astounding variety of wildlife. Close to the more populated southeast region, black tailed deer, mountain goats, moose, black bears and Kodiak brown bears can be found. As one travels north, moose, grizzly bears and Dall sheep make their appearance. Caribou increase in numbers in the north, and the far north is home to the polar bears. The most important commercial fish are salmon, cod, herring, halibut, crab, shrimp, clams and scallops.

Alaska's economy braced itself on fur, fish and gold, but today it relies on petroleum and natural gas. One fourth of all the petroleum produced in the United States comes from Alaska. More than 1.8 million barrels of crude are extracted from Alaska's oil fields every day. The state also produces about 860 million cubic feet of natural gas a day. Zinc is Alaska's most valuable mineral product.



Highlights in Alaska's History

- BC Inupiat society: Myth and Reality
- 1741 Peter, the Great of Russia commissioned a Danish sea captain, Vitus Bering to explore the Northwest coast of Alaska. July 16, Bering sights Mt. St. Elias on Alaskan mainland and goes ashore. December 8 Bering dies of scurvy and is buried on Bering Island. This feat is credited with the "official" discovery by Russia and the first reliable information on the land.
- 1778 Captain James Cook of England explores the Arctic Ocean.
- 1784 First white settlement in Alaska on Kodiak Island is established.
- 1799 Czar Paul claims Alaska as a Russian possession.
- 1835 United States and England obtain trading privileges in Alaska.
- 1867 The Swedish Evangelical, Moravian, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Congregational, and Catholic Churches established schools throughout Alaska.
- 1867 Alaska is sold by Russia to the United States. October 18th is celebrated as Alaska Day.
- 1878 The salmon-canning industry was started.
- 1880 Gold was discovered near Juneau.
- 1896 Gold is discovered along the Klondike river and Bonanza Creek in Yukon Territory. This marked the beginning of the Klondike gold rush.
- 1901 Drilling of first oil wells.
- 1902 Gold is discovered near Fairbanks.
- 1906 An act authorizing the Secretary of the Interior to allot homesteads to the natives of Alaska is passed.
- 1912 Alaska becomes a Territory with its own legislature.
- 1913 The Alaska legislature gives women the right to vote.
- 1925 The Serum Dog Sled Run to Nome is performed. This is the beginning of the Iditarod race of today.
- 1942 Work begins on the 1,523 mile Alaska Military Highway from Dawson Creek, Canada to Fairbanks.
- 1946 Alaska votes to apply for statehood.
- 1956 The constitution of the State of Alaska was agreed upon.
- 1959 Alaska becomes our 49th state.
- 1967 The first Iditarod trail Sled Dog Race is formally run.
- 1970 Construction of the Alaskan Oil Pipeline is begun.
- 1971 The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) was established.
- 1980 The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act becomes law creating over 80 million acres of additional parks, preserves and monuments in Alaska.
- 1989 Exxon Valdez Oil Spill
- 1991 Amendments to the ANCSA take effect.

Alaska's Native People

Alaska's 98,000 native people make up 16% of the state's population. Of those, the majority are Eskimo, Indian and Aleut. In 1741 when the Russians came in contact with the Natives in Alaska, they estimated the native population at 100,000. The Eskimo, Indian and Aleuts were hunting and gathering people who did not practice agriculture.

Indian People

In southeast Alaska, the Haida and Tlingit Indians had abundant herring, salmon, deer and other foods to allow them to settle in permanent villages and develop a culture rich in art. The Haida excel at totem carving and are highly skilled in working with wood, bone, shell, stone and silver. The Tlingit (Klink-it) commercially dominated the Interior Canadian Indians, trading eulachon oil, copper pieces and Chilkat blankets for various furs and beaded clothing.

The Athabascans lived in the Interior. They migrated from one camp to another to take advantage of the seasonal bounty of fish, waterfowl and other game. They lived on caribou, moose and fish.

The Tsimshian Indians moved from British Columbia to Annette Island in SE Alaska, led by Rev. William Duncan, an Anglican. The Tsimshian today are primarily fishermen.

Eskimo

Eskimo people have traditionally lived in villages along the harsh Bering Sea and Arctic Ocean coastlines. They also live on King Island, St. Lawrence Island, Little Diomed Island and Nunivak Island. The inland Eskimos of southwestern Alaska settled along the lower reaches of Alaska's two largest rivers, the Yukon and Kuskokwim. Two major groups of Eskimos are Yup'ik (SW Alaska) and Inupiat (N Alaska).

The Eskimo diet consisted of traditional foods such as berries, salmon, waterfowl, ptarmigan, caribou, whales, walruses and seals. Winter dwellings were partially underground and covered with sod.

Aleut

The Aleuts have traditionally lived on the Alaskan Peninsula and along the Aleutian Chain. When the Russians first made contact, almost every island was inhabited. Contact with whites decimated the population. The Aleuts lived in permanent villages, taking advantage of sea life and land mammals. Their original dwellings were large, communal structures, accommodating as many as 40 families. They gradually adopted the Russian style log cabin. Today, many are commercial fishermen.

Alutiiq

The Alutiiq have been grouped with the Aleuts but they have a unique identity. They lived on Kodiak Island, some coastal areas of the Kenai Peninsula and Prince William Sound. From the first Russian attack on Kodiak in 1784, this Native group was most altered by contact with the Europeans.

FAQs (Frequently asked questions) about Alaska

Is it Mt McKinley or Denali?

This is the highest mountain in North America, the South Peak measuring 20,320 feet and the North Peak 19,470 feet. It was named for William McKinley in 1896. McKinley was the Republican candidate for President.

An earlier name had been Denali, an Athabascan word meaning "the high one." In 1975, the state of Alaska renamed the mountain Denali, recognized by the Alaska Geographic Names Board. However, the federal Board of Geographic Names has not taken any action, and legislation has been introduced to retain McKinley.

About those glaciers...and other Alaskan peculiarities...

How many glaciers are there in Alaska?

Glaciers cover approximately 29,000 square miles or 5% of Alaska. There are an estimated 100,000 glaciers in Alaska, ranging from tiny cirque glaciers to huge valley glaciers.

Glaciers are formed over a number of years when more snow falls than melts. There are five types of glaciers: alpine, valley, piedmont, ice fields and ice caps. Alpine glaciers are found high on the slopes of mountains and plateaus. Valley glaciers are an overflowing of ice from mountain or plateau basins. Piedmont glaciers result when one or more glaciers join to form a fan shaped ice mass at the foot of a mountain range. Ice fields develop when large valley glaciers interconnect, leaving only the highest peaks and ridges to rise above the ice surface. Ice caps are smaller glaciers perched on plateaus.

When a portion of a glacier breaks away from the larger body, this is called "calving."

Why do glaciers look very blue?

Glacier ice absorbs all the colors of the spectrum except blue, which is reflected back.

What is the longest glacier in Alaska?

It is the Bering (which includes Bagley Icefield) and measures more than 100 miles.

Which is the largest glacier?

It is the Bering Glacier complex, about 2,250 square miles in size.

What is permafrost?

Permafrost is ground that remains frozen for two or more years. Permafrost can be found to depths of 2,000 feet. Permafrost affects many buildings and natural bodies. It influences construction in the Arctic because building on it may cause the ground to thaw and if the ground is ice-rich, structures will sink.

How long is an Alaskan day?

At summer solstice, June 20 or 21, a day in Anchorage can be 19.21 hours, Fairbanks, 21.49 hours, Juneau, 18.18 hours, Barrow, 84 days continuous.

At winter solstice, Dec. 21 or 22, a day in Anchorage can be 5.28 hours, Fairbanks, 3.42 hours, Juneau 6.21 hours, and Barrow, no daylight from November 18 through January 24.

About that funny money just for living there...

What is the Alaska dividend?

In 1976, state voters approved a constitutional amendment to establish the Alaska Permanent Fund. By this amendment, a percentage of all mineral lease rentals, royalties, royalty sales proceeds, federal mineral revenue-sharing payments and bonuses are placed in a permanent fund. Income from the fund is available for appropriation by the legislature. Through several changes by the legislature and U.S. Supreme Court, a plan evolved in 1982, and each Alaska applicant who has been a resident for six months prior to March 31, qualifies for an initial \$1,000 dividend. The actual amount is calculated by adding together the fund's net income for the last five years, multiplying that number by 21%, and dividing that number in half. In 2001, each qualified Alaskan received \$1,850.28, second highest ever.

For more information, contact:
Anchorage Convention and Visitors Bureau
524 West Fourth Avenue
Anchorage, AK 99501-2212
Phone (907) 276-4118, FAX (907)276-5559
Email: info@anchorage.net or www.anchorage.net

Resources:

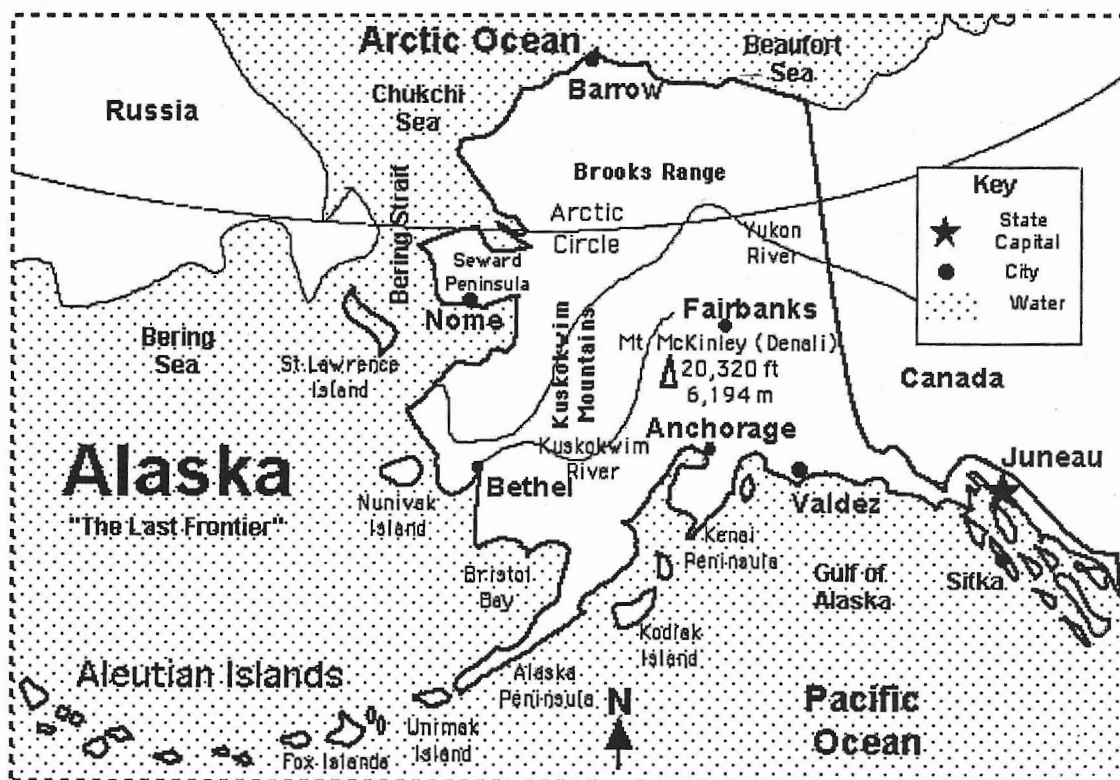
"Alaska," The New Book of Knowledge. New York, Grolier's Publishing, 2002.

Silberfeld, Heath Lynn. The Alaska Almanac: Facts about Alaska. Anchorage, Alaska Northwest Books, 2002.

Alaska Map and Quick Quiz

This map and quiz is available at the website www.enchantedlearning.com, a very good internet teaching/learning resource for all ages.

☺ Using the map below, fill in the blanks to questions 1-10.



1. What is the capital of Alaska? _____
2. What country borders Alaska on the east? _____
3. What ocean borders Alaska on the north? _____
4. What ocean borders Alaska on the south? _____
5. What country is just west of Alaska, across the Bering Strait? _____
6. What is the name of the tallest mountain in Alaska? _____
7. What is the name of the river that flows from Canada, across Alaska, and into the Bering Sea? _____
8. Which Alaskan city is farthest north? _____
9. The Iditarod dog sled race runs from Anchorage to a city on the southern coast of the Seward Peninsula. What is this city? _____
10. What is the name of the mountain range that runs across Northern Alaska? _____

☞ Please listen very carefully as instructions are given to complete the next activity.

Teaching Guide for Alaska, the Last Frontier

The objectives of this lesson are to

1. Familiarize our members with the 49th state
2. Develop an understanding of Alaska's unique history, people and economy
3. Encourage attending the 2005 NAFCE Conference in Anchorage, Alaska.

Materials in the packet:

An Alaskan folk tale

(This can be used at the beginning to peak interest.)

An Alaskan map/quiz with answers

A Roving in Time script

(This is a great way to foster creativity... There are other ways to make history come alive and appeal to each person. We picked a politician, a pioneer and a typical Alaskan. Others we considered were the Iditarod winner, an environmental activist, or a Exxon executive after the spill.

Alaska in a Nutshell packet (includes facts, figures, geography, natural resources, history, native population info, and frequently asked questions about Alaska

Evaluation

This is a necessary item for programs, now and in the future. We want to know if we achieved our objectives, or where we fell short.

Other Resources

Video from Anchorage Convention and Visitors Bureau

Alaska magazines

Activities map

Websites: www.theus50.com www.lupinfo.com www.alaskainfo.com

Mr. Raven Outwits Mr. Red Fox

An Alaskan Igloo tale from an oral history project

Raven and the Red Fox had become bitter enemies because of their jealousy. The raven was recognized as the wisest of all birds and the fox was known to be the most cunning of all animals. They lived their days scheming to "best" the other without much success. Though they hated each other, they managed to live co-exist amicably.

Raven thought of a way to rid himself of his enemy and be further revered by his friends. He visited Fox's igloo and invited him up the hill to play games.

Fox was quick to accept. "Sure I'll play slide-down-the-hill with you." So they climbed a steep hill nearby. This was indeed a steep hill, so steep that the deep pond at the bottom could not be seen. Both Raven and Red Fox knew this pond existed but neither saw fit to mention it.

Crafty Red Fox invited Raven to go first, taunting him by saying, "I want to see how well you slide."

Raven took the position and away he went. He slid so fast that he couldn't stop, but just as he was about to plunge into the pond, he spread his wings and glided across to safety. "Okay, Red Fox, let's see how well you can slide."

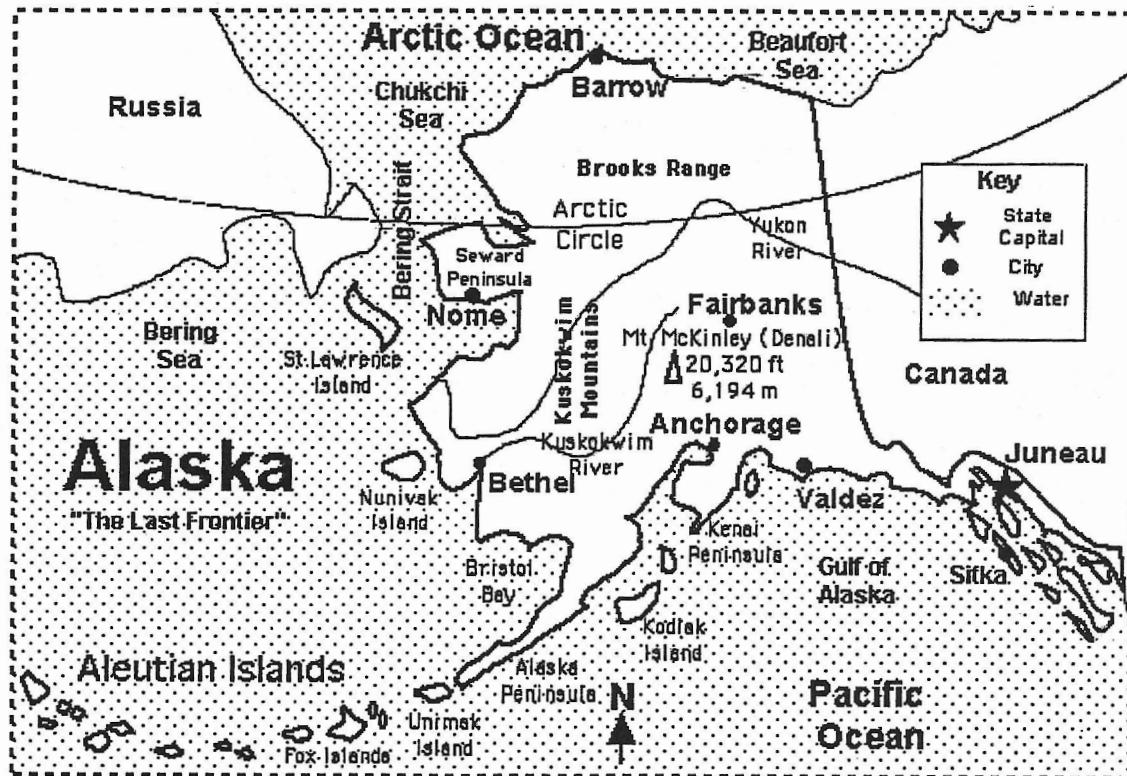
Red Fox wouldn't go, saying he was afraid to fall in the water. Raven taunted him on. "Most assuredly, you can jump as well as I can." Now the ability to jump was something Red Fox knew he could do very well. So, off he went, very fast and when he got to the edge, he jumped as far as he could and landed in the middle of the pond.

He called for help as he was sinking but Raven only laughed, and kept laughing long after Red Fox had drowned.

Alaska Map and Quick Quiz

This map and quiz is available at the website www.enchantedlearning.com, a very good internet teaching/learning resource for all ages.

☺ Using the map below, fill in the blanks to questions 1-10.



1. What is the capital of Alaska? Juneau
2. What country borders Alaska on the east? Canada
3. What ocean borders Alaska on the north? Arctic
4. What ocean borders Alaska on the south? Pacific
5. What country is just west of Alaska, across the Bering Strait? Russia
6. What is the name of the tallest mountain in Alaska? Denali or Mt. McKinley
7. What is the name of the river that flows from Canada, across Alaska, and into the Bering Sea? Yukon
8. Which Alaskan city is farthest north? Barrow
9. The Iditarod dog sled race runs from Anchorage to a city on the southern coast of the Seward Peninsula. What is this city? Nome
10. What is the name of the mountain range that runs across Northern Alaska? Brooks

☞ Please listen very carefully as instructions are given to complete the next activity.

Roving Reporter Script for Teaching Alaska History

Good morning. This is Sharon Takahashi, live on the floor of the FCE Annual Meeting in Pendleton, Oregon. My fellow reporter, Sharon Guthrie and I are taking you in our time machine to explore Alaska, our 49th state. Let's go to Sharon Guthrie now, who is in Washington, D.C. with President Andrew Johnson.

Reporter: This is Sharon Guthrie, your FCE Roving in Time Reporter. Today is October 19, 1867. I'm here this morning in the Oval Office with President Andrew Johnson. How are you this morning, Mr. President?

President J: Just fine, Sharon.

R: Thank you for agreeing to this interview. Americans across our nation are wondering about our purchase of Alaska from the Russians. Many are calling it Seward's Folly after our Secretary of the Interior. Many Americans believe Alaska is a huge piece of snow and ice. They question the wisdom of this purchase. Comment, Mr. President?

P: Sharon, Alaska is much more than snow and ice. It is a spectacularly beautiful piece of land rich in many resources such as gold and other minerals, soil, endless forests, and fish and game. But our primary reason for the purchase is Alaska's vast resources of fur. We believe Alaska's fur trade is vital to our leadership in the world. I predict that years from now the people of the United States will welcome and appreciate the purchase of Alaska.

R: If Alaska is so valuable, why would the Russians agree to sell it to us?

P: The Russians claimed Alaska is 1799. Maintaining their colonies there has become expensive and difficult. Alaska has become a significant economic drain on Russia. Alaska and their involvement in the Crimean War has stretched their resources thin.

R: Thanks you, Mr. President, for sharing your valuable time with us. I know you have a busy afternoon ahead. This information should help our people understand our purchase of Alaska. I hope you are right about Alaska's value for America. Now, back to Sharon Takahashi in Pendleton, Oregon.

Sharon T. Our reporter, Sharon Guthrie is steering the Time Machine forward and we can hear it coming to another stop. Sharon, where are you parked now and what year is it?

R: It is a beautiful August Afternoon here in the Yukon, probably right around 70 degrees. The date is August 18, 1897. We are on site of the gold rush. The area we are standing in is filled with cloth tents and one room log cabins. It's truly bustling with activity here in Forty Mile. I'm with the "Bride of the Klondike," Ethel Berry. How did you get that name, Mrs. Berry?

Ethel: Please call me Ethel. We are very informal here in Alaska. I got that name because my husband and I were married in the fall of 1895. My honeymoon trip was over Chilkoot Pass with a dog team.

R: That must have been quite an experience. You have been here at Forty Mile ever since?

Ethel: Yes, I've been living here alone since the winter of 1896, housekeeping Klondike-style. When I got here the house had no door, windows or floor, and I had to stand around outside until a hole was cut for me to get in. We had all the camp-made furniture we needed: a bed and stove—a long, little sheet-iron affair, with two holes on top and a drum to bake in. The water we used was all snow or ice, and had to be thawed. It has been an adventure.

R: You've been here alone for a year? Where has your husband been all this time?

Ethel: He's been off working the creeks. But he had no luck. Now, we have heard of the discovery at Bonanza Creek and we are heading over there tomorrow. I just know we will hit it big now.*

R: Thank you, Ethel, for sharing your experiences with us. I wish you luck. And now, let's zip our Time Machine back toward Sharon Takahashi in Pendleton.

Sharon T: Thanks for those interesting stops, Sharon. Let's see if I can maneuver this time machine to -oops, a jerky stop. It looks like March 30, 2001. Let's catch that woman running with her children. Can I ask your name, please, and what's your hurry?

Subject: Yes, I'm Mary Haida, and these are my children. Jake's 10, Harry's 8, Martin's 4 and Mandy's 7 months. We've got to file our paperwork for the "dividend" by tomorrow. We're in a real hurry. My husband's out in the oil field right now.

R: What's the "dividend" you mentioned?

Mary: In 1976, Alaskans approved a constitutional amendment to establish the Alaska Permanent Fund. A percentage of all mineral lease rentals, royalties, royalty sales proceeds, federal mineral revenue-sharing payments and bonuses are placed in a permanent fund. In 1982, they made a big change. Each Alaska applicant who has lived here six months prior to March 31 qualified for a \$1,000 dividend. The actual amount is calculated by adding together the fund's net income for the last five years, multiplying that number by 21%, and dividing that number in half. It could be more, but my family will get at least \$6,000. So, I can't talk anymore. I've got to go.

R: Thanks for stopping, Mary. We won't delay you. Let's coast the time machine to October 15, 2001 to check on the dividend dispersal. Mary's at the post office—what's the news on the dividend, Mary?

Mary: Each of us got \$1,850.28, that's \$11,101.68 for my family. It was a good year for oil here.

R: It sure makes this reporter wish she were an Alaskan resident. Let's get back to the present and see if we can share more insights about Alaska. I know we have a room full of people who are very curious about Alaska today.

*Ethel Berry and her husband, Clarence, did strike it big on claim #5 Eldorado. They were able to produce \$140,000 in one season. They saved their money and returned to the states. When they arrived in Seattle, 23 year old Ethel was wearing men's clothing. Her bedroll was so heavy she couldn't lift it. Inside the bedroll was nearly \$1 million in gold. Ethel Berry was rich!