

CONTROLLER BAY CONTROVERSY

A. H. EDDY, A WELL KNOWN MARSHFIELD CITIZEN, RELATES SOME INTERESTING INSIDE FACTS CONCERNING ALASKA AFFAIR.

Editor Coos Bay Times:

So much discussion has been had in regard to the Controller Bay region in Alaska, would it not be proper at this time for the public to know something of the real truth about that body of water, and the surrounding country.

As I was one of the first white men to visit that region, excepting trappers and hunters, since Alaska became noted as a country of such vast natural resources, perhaps I may be able to tell the public some few things that are not generally known. I enclose for your inspection a copy of the very first, and so far as I know now, the only map of that region that was in existence previous to 1903. The data for this map was obtained by me during the years 1896 and 1897, and was partially prepared by me in the year 1897, but made more perfect by corrections in the year 1903. Since then I have noticed that various companies and individuals operating there have copied this map. While I do not claim that it is absolutely correct, it is as near perfect as a layman could get up. I am not a civil engineer, and have depended largely upon the compass and the ship's log for distances, and directions. But for all practical purposes it is correct.

To begin my story I wish to make a few statements that I do not think any person who has ever been in Controller Bay will question. Referring to the map you will see that the so-called bay is not, in fact, a bay at all, being merely an open roadstead, or large cove partially protected on the south and east by two or three small islands, to-wit: Big Yayak and Wingham, or Little Yayak island, forming the southern rim, Keenuk island and Octellee Spit, forming the northern and eastern hem, while the whole western and northwestern part is exposed to the open. The only possible chance for a harbor at all in any part of Controller bay lays about one and one-half miles distant north of Big Yayak island, and about the same distance east from Wingham island. Vessels drawing more than 12 or 14 feet of water cannot enter there, except at extreme high tide. And even if they could would not be safe for ten minutes from any storm coming from any quarter of the globe. Having spent the greater part of seven years there from 1897 to 1903 I think I am somewhat acquainted with the weather conditions in that part of Alaska, and to my certain knowledge during that whole time no ocean going vessel ever attempted to enter, anchor or leave that bay during a storm, or could they do so. The main land is some fifteen miles distant from this anchorage, and there is no channel deep enough or wide enough for any seagoing vessel to get closer to the main land than this anchorage, except at a point some four miles distant directly south from the Martin islands. The depth of water from the main land to the distance of at least eight miles from shore is less than twenty feet, with a rock bottom. It may not be generally known, but it is a fact nevertheless that the Guggenheims spent over one million dollars in the vain delusion that they could make Katala bay a small indenture from Controller bay the terminus for their railroad into the Copper River. They then discovered that they could not get a harbor there, so abandoned all of their work there and moved to Cordova bay over in Prince William's Sound. At one time it was believed that a small harbor, containing probably from thirty to forty acres, might be made by extending a jetty between the Martin islands and from the inner Martin island to the main land. (You will note that these islands lay just east of the mouth of the Copper river on the northwest side of Controller Bay.) But after one winter's experience the promoters of that wild scheme were obliged to abandon it. So much for Controller Bay. Now as to the land, and the coal and oil fields and the famous order of its withdrawal.

All of that portion of the shore line lying east of the mouth of the Copper river extending clear to the mouth of the Chilcat, or as it is now called Bering river, was located as oil land. During the year 1896, 1897 and 1898, more than two millions of dollars had been expended upon it by various companies and corporations in development work previous to the order of withdrawal. At

least three commercial oil wells were drilled and capped, and more than a dozen were drilled to the oil sand but not brought in before 1903. The only reason that oil was not shipped from Controller Bay years ago was because there was no harbor in which vessels could lay and receive cargo. If Controller Bay was a suitable harbor for ships, there would be probably at this time a hundred or more oil wells in successful operation. Mr. Ryan or no other man or corporation cannot now, nor has there ever been a time since 1897 when he could get control of the water front along that bay, except that it might be possible that locations could be made on Octellee spit, or along the shore line east of the mouth of Bering river. I cannot see how the withdrawal from entry since 1903 of any of that country could in any way affect the title to that part which was located previous to 1903, providing, of course, the proper assessments have been made, and the law relating to mining location complied with. As I have said above, a great amount of money was expended previous to that time in development work. The actual area of that country consists of less than one mile in width extending from Miles glacier to Cape Sucklan, and there is not enough timber in the whole region to begin to supply the wants of the people for log houses, let alone anything else. Nearly all of this timber is short, scrubby hemlock and spruce fit only for fuel. The Bering River coal fields lay to the northeast of Controller bay, a distance from tide water about ten miles. It was first visited by white men, myself included, except by trappers and hunters, in the year 1896, and I had the pleasure of digging and having assayed the first coal from that region. I also at that time visited, explored partially and collected from seapages, or small lakes of petroleum, the first oil and also had it analyzed. I have at the present time many photographs taken by me in the year 1897 showing the exposed coal measures, and the vast bodies of oil that were running into the sea. In the year 1897, a number of men, myself included, located the first oil claims and the first coal claims in that country. According to my note book, made at that time, the following are the names of some of the parties who were with me, each of whom located a claim. Mr. R. C. Johnston of Los Gatos, California, Mr. T. J. Hamilton of Seattle, Washington, Mr. C. Barbour of Milpitas, California, Mr. Thomas White of Michigan, Mr. William Carlos of Bellingham, Washington, Mr. R. Temple of Boston, Mass., Mr. Doverspike of Nebraska, Mr. B. McCarty of New York, and several others whose names I have forgotten. And I think that I speak the truth when I say that no company or corporation other than our own individual selves were interested with us at that time. We made our locations under the terms of the mining laws of the United States, and we thought, and so far as I am concerned, still believe that we had a perfect legal right to do so. None of us have yet obtained title to that property. Although we have expended many thousands of dollars more than the land laws say that we must expend in order to get title, and now I understand it is proposed by some men to take it away from us. For my part I cannot see any justice in this. Many of us have spent from seven to ten years of our lives up there. We have undergone all manner of hardships, and many like myself have spent their all in developing that property under the belief that at some time during our natural lives we could obtain title to it. But it seems that we were mistaken. According to the theory of some of the eastern and western conservationists we are thieves, and should be sent to the penitentiary. And although fifteen years have gone by, we are still wondering where we are at. Just recently ex-President Roosevelt, who says he believes in

the square deal, advocates a government control of that field. That may be his way of thinking, but I should like to have him put in the same position that we are, just for a little while. I am perfectly acquainted with the Cunningham claims, know when and how he located them. I was there at the time. Went to Alaska on the same ship with him. One of the original locators, Mr. Carlos, guided Mr. Cunningham into the Bering river coal field. His locations were made legitimately at least in accordance to law, but whether or not he has since complied with the law in doing the development work on those claims, I do not know. But I do know that so far as the original locators are concerned, we have complied with the law. None of us were lawyers; none of us were associated directly or indirectly with any company or corporation. We were all comparatively poor men, and we have not sold our property to the Guggenheims, yet we are classed in the same boat with them. While I believe that all valuable natural resources now owned by the government should be kept from the clutches of corporations, I do not believe that private property should be confiscated. There is no more need for a timber reserve in the western part of Alaska than there would be for one in the desert of Sahara. What timber there is there is of small value, except for fuel, and if it was all made into lumber it would not affect the price of that product ten cents per thousand. From shipboard one would think that that whole country was covered with a dense growth of timber, but when examined at close range it is soon seen that very little merchantable timber exists there. At least none that would be called merchantable in Oregon or Washington. And what there is should be given freely to the hardy men and women who are striving to carve a living out of that inhospitable region. It is good enough to make log buildings. Some of it large enough for saw logs, nothing more. What is conservation, anyhow?

In conclusion let me state the following facts. Controller Bay cannot by any stretch of the imagination be made a harbor, except by an expenditure of money that would not warrant the attempt. Mr. Ryan has not got control of, nor can he get control of, by any means, at this time or at any future period the monopoly of the waterfront around Controller Bay. Seventy-five per cent of the waterfront surrounding that bay has been private property for twelve years and over. A town of twenty-five hundred people, to-wit Katala, located on Katala bay, own their own homes and business properties there. Many of them have been there for fifteen years. The most of them for six years and over. Wharves, docks and other private property is owned there. An old Russian town in which each Indian and Russian owns his own home, is located on that bay, to-wit Kayak on Wingham island. Two trading companies, the Alaska Commercial and the North American Trading company own real estate there. An Indian village, Chilcat, is located on that bay. Another Indian village, Katala Village, not the city of Katala, laying some five miles southeast, is located on that bay. The Alaska Development company, the very first company operating in the oil field, own wharves, docks, trading posts and considerable real estate at the mouth of Chilcat river. I could name many other pieces of private property along the shores of that bay. I cannot for the life of me see how the throwing open to entry of any part of the shore line of that bay could give Mr. Ryan, the Guggenheims, or any other corporation, the waterfront. The whole story of the Ryan grab is as pure fabrication, gotten up, no doubt, for the purpose of putting Taft and the present administration in a hole. I am a democrat. I am not for Taft; never was for Taft, but I am against a liar, and anyone who would try to make capital out of a liar. And in one respect may be like ex-President Roosevelt, I believe in the square deal, and if the people of Alaska have ever had a square deal either by this or any past administration, I have failed to notice it. Put Taft in a hole if you wish, but do it honestly, and above board.

(Signed) A. H. EDDY.

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