

A GERMAN HANDBOOK ON ALASKA

ALASKA. By FRITZ BARTZ. *Stuttgart: K. F. Koehler, 1949. 9½ x 6½ inches; 384 pages; illustrations, diagrams, sketch-maps, and folding maps. DM. 28.*

This excellent book is one of a series of *Geographischer Handbücher*, published under the editorship of Hermann Lautensach. The author, professor at the University of Kiel, has spent a total of about nine months in Alaska, during the years 1936 to 1938, when he was studying at several universities on the west coast. His travels took him over most of the more accessible part of Alaska, and he has evidently familiarized himself with most of the pertinent literature, including much published since the war (the latest dates from the summer of 1947) as shown by a list of 214 references.

As the title of the series implies, this book is a handbook in the German sense, that is, a well-organized compendium of existing information on all phases of Alaskan geography, in the broadest sense. It does not pretend to make an original contribution to existing knowledge, but it is the best single summary in this wide field known to the reviewer.

The first part of the book deals with the nature of the land and includes short chapters on the surface forms (according to the Penck classification), the climate, the ice age and the present glacierization, the flora, and the animal life.

In the description of the surface forms, the principal mountain systems are discussed in detail, and the minor physiographic subdivisions by a paragraph each.

The climate is briefly reviewed, with emphasis on the influence of the Pacific, limited to a narrow border by the mountain ranges, and the importance of the relatively cool Bering Sea and the cold Arctic Ocean. The author compares climatic conditions in Alaska with the more favourable climate of Scandinavia, where the warm waters of the Gulf Stream are able to reach a much higher latitude than the waters of the Pacific on the west coast of Alaska, and where the narrowness of the land mass makes it more open to the influence of the ocean.

The section on the ice age and present glacierization discusses the present and past distribution of glaciers, the problem of the "muck" in unglaciated areas, which include most of the interior, and permafrost.

The flora is described for each of the principal ecological divisions: the Pacific coastal forest, the interior forest, the tundra, and the grasslands of the southwest, and the degree of correspondence between the climatic and ecological divisions is evaluated.

The second major part of the book is devoted to the aborigines of Alaska before their contact with the whites. A chapter is given to the archaeological record and its significance, including a mention of the discovery of Yuma and Folsom artifacts. The distribution, differentiation, and origins of the three principal culture types: Eskimo, Athapaskan, and "Northwest Coast" are described, and the effect of the environment on these cultures is discussed.

The third major part deals with the opening up of Alaska by the whites. The Russian efforts at exploration and economic development were primarily directed towards the exploitation of the fur trade. The author ascribes the failure of Russian attempts at further development of Alaska to the distance from the mother country and to the character of the settlers. Some types of manufactures, such as bell-founding, ship-building, and flour-milling which were undertaken early by the Russians, were later discontinued. Russian treatment of the Aleuts is not glossed over.

The history of American rule in Alaska is divided, politically, into the period of Army rule (largely misrule, according to the author), and the period of territorial

government. Economically, it is divided into the time before and after the discovery of gold in the Klondike. The chapter is largely devoted to the history of the geographical spread and increasing complexity of the two principal industries, gold mining and fishing. Some mention is made of exploration and discovery, the conservation movement, and the influence of Alaskan literature on the attitude towards Alaska in the outside world.

The fourth major part of the book is devoted to present-day economic life. It opens with a short chapter in which Alaska's economic position is described as that of a subarctic colonial land. Alaska is still relatively undeveloped, but because of the high degree of technical advancement and comparatively high living standards in certain limited areas, it differs from more typical colonial lands. It has always served primarily as a source of a small number of relatively valuable raw materials. The economy of Alaska, in normal times, is essentially dependent on mining and fishing. The balance of trade has always been in favour of Alaska by about 2 to 1, but the greater part of the profits has remained in the States. The difficulty of securing a steady, sound development without monopoly and without too intensive exploitation has, in the view of the author, been responsible for the continuation of conservation policies.

The remainder of this long part considers the individual aspects of the Alaskan economy, prefaced by a short discussion of one of its most outstanding features: the pronouncedly seasonal character of employment, the only important exception being lode mining.

The fifth major part deals with population and settlements. The author discusses the size and density of the present population, and its very uneven distribution, largely along the main waterways and the railroad. The proportion of natives to whites, their respective distribution and interrelationship is considered. Of the native groups the Aleuts have been affected most markedly, both in numbers and mode of existence, by contact with white civilization, the Indians in the south-east rather less, and the Eskimo least of all. The cultural contacts have increased as the number of the natives decreased, the decrease being due to a higher death rate than among the whites.

The white population is concentrated in relatively few places. Before the Second World War one half were in the panhandle; only 5 to 10 per cent were in the area from the Yukon to the Arctic Ocean. About one-fourth are foreign born, mostly Scandinavians and Finns, and many of the native-born are persons of similar ancestry, born in the Pacific Coast states. There are relatively few women and children. The disproportion between the sexes leads, the author believes, to overvaluation of white women, with unfortunate social consequences. The population is not sedentary, but constantly on the move, and there is a large seasonal migration.

In the author's opinion, low density of population, great distances within the land, isolation from the outside world, and the high living standard in the States discourage people from taking their families to the northland. He believes that strong colonization of districts suitable for agriculture will probably occur only when people can be brought directly from Europe, perhaps from the poorer parts of Scandinavia. He concludes that in Alaska the frontier period has been unduly prolonged. But he considers that it is a "stagnating frontier" because the interior is a mining frontier, not a farming frontier, and because the pioneers of Alaska are predominantly older people without children. These concepts are unlikely to find favour in Alaska, where status as a pioneer is dependent not on permanence of settlement but on distance from settlements and hardships endured.

A short chapter is devoted to the changes in Alaska resulting from the impact of the Second World War. The construction activities early in the war produced a boom in many areas, some of which were hitherto almost empty, particularly in

the Aleutians. Since the war, the boom has continued but its geographical distribution has changed with changing concepts of strategy. The author however almost completely neglects the serious effect of war and inflation on the gold mining industry.

The future development of Alaska depends on sufficient permanent settlers; the seasonal economy must be changed, since Alaska's economic life is caught in a vicious circle: small population—high transportation costs—high living costs—high production costs—small population.

The book as a whole shows signs of careful editing; typographical errors are very few and geographical names are given in their official, rather than in Germanized, spellings. Some of the maps are blurred, and the half-tone illustrations are generally dull. The sentence construction is sufficiently clear to render the text only moderately difficult for a person with an adequate command of the pertinent vocabulary. The paragraphs are not indented, but many key words are italicized and there is an index.

In a book of this scope some errors are inevitable. A few of the more misleading are listed below.

p. 15. The Near Islands are not the only Aleutian Islands without recent volcanoes; nor is it possible to describe two parallel rows of volcanoes anywhere in the chain; the southern islands of the chain, while largely of volcanic rock, do not bear recognizable cones. Aniakchak had a very great eruption in 1931.

p. 16. Kodiak Island is not entirely of strongly metamorphosed rock; it includes rocks ranging from granodiorite to almost undisturbed Tertiary sediments.

p. 95. The main current in Bering Strait flows northward, not southward, most of the year.

p. 142. The promulgation of the Monroe Doctrine was not, of course, by "President Adams", though J. Q. Adams, when Secretary of State during Monroe's presidency, was influential in the formulation of this doctrine.

The map (Figure 19) which purports to show the principal mining districts, omits one major lode gold mining area on Unga Island, shows one near Flat of negligible importance, and omits any indication of the Latouche copper mine.

p. 230. The ownership of gold dredges is not confined exclusively to large companies. In the most efficient operations, the length of the season is nearer eight or nine months than the six or seven months mentioned.

p. 232. One sentence unfortunately gives the impression that gold placers occur in most Alaskan streams.

p. 241. The figures in the table are correct if commas are substituted for decimal points.

p. 243. Chatanika River water is distributed by gravity, not by pumping. Some of the placer mining operations near the heads of valleys in the Circle district do not have a sufficient water supply. "Old beach gravels" have not been extensively worked near Solomon.

p. 247. Copper was produced as a by-product from the Alaska Nabesna mine, not the Alaska Juneau.

p. 249. Production of coal for local consumption appears to be profitable enough.

p. 253. More recent work has shown that oil in northern Alaska is derived from Upper Cretaceous or younger rocks.

p. 254. The areas on the Alaskan Peninsula and near Yakataga, withdrawn from entry under the oil leasing acts during the war, were restored to entry on 14 August 1946, by Public Land Order 323.

p. 333. Circle is not on the Arctic Circle.

p. 335. The Aleut inhabitants of Attu did not return to that island after the war, but settled at Atka. The church on Amchitka was destroyed by military operations.

The map facing p. 342 lacks indication of the relative size of towns.

p. 344. Juneau does possess a capitol building.

p. 349. The first ship to Nome from Seattle generally arrives about June 10, sometimes later. It usually stops at Unalaska.

p. 352. The "Seward Peninsula Railroad" ran for many years as a public tramroad.

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