

## CASSIUS M. CLAY'S MISSION TO RUSSIA:

1861-1862; 1863-1869

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"Great events are in the future in connection with China, Japan, and India. Nature has placed us in a position of mastery of the situation. *It will be our fault if we come not up to our possible destiny.*"  
—Clay to Seward, 17 September, 1868

Lincoln's chief objective in the Civil War was to preserve the Union — with or without slavery. His grand strategy in foreign policy was to prevent the intervention of foreign countries on behalf of the Confederacy, and at the same time to cultivate any countries which might be sympathetic to the Union. Lincoln selected two Americans to two key diplomatic posts to help carry out this over-all strategy: Charles Francis Adams for the Court of St. James, and Cassius Marcellus Clay for the Court of the Tsars.

England, naturally, was the main pivotal point. Adams accomplished, with distinction, an almost impossible mission: to keep England from recognizing "de jure" the Confederacy. Adams was a shrewd, hard-working, able diplomat who succeeded eminently in his mission.

Since Russia, at the time, appeared to be the only "friend" on the diplomatic front then, President Lincoln saw this autocratic country as a positive reference point — a second pivotal point: one that had to be "secured" to achieve success in his grand strategy of non-interference of foreign nations, especially of England, plus the positive countervailing force of a friendly Russia. He selected Clay to carry out this mission in Russia. Possibly because of his flamboyant character, possibly because of his violent temper, possibly because of his weakness for women in general, possibly because of narrow-mindedness on the part of many historians, even contemporary ones, Clay has been treated most shabbily. He has never been accorded the deserved gratitude of Americans for being an able diplomat; for executing his mission to Russia with integrity and distinction; and, most importantly, for successfully carrying out the diplomatic objective

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assigned to him by President Lincoln: that is, "... to keep the Tsar, if possible, on the Union side."

In addition, it may be said that Clay's effective diplomacy even played a part in the purchase of Russian-America, minuscule as the part may have been.

During and after the Civil War years, Clay actively campaigned for American involvement in the Far East by advocating the securing of bases in Asia, and forming political and commercial ties with Eastern Asia and the adjacent islands, not only to counter-balance rapidly expanding Russia in the Far East, but also to counter-balance England and France in the same area. This aspect of Clay's mission has been almost completely ignored until James Rood Robertson brought it to light in his book, *A Kentuckian at the Court of the Tsars*, Berea College, Kentucky, published in 1935. Then, Albert Parry, writing an article in the *Russian Review* in the Spring of 1943, entitled, "Cassius Clay's Glimpse into the Future: Lincoln's Envoy to St. Petersburg Bade the Two Nations Meet in Asia," tells of Clay's pre-vision of a future when Russia and the United States would meet in the Far East—not to clash, but to cooperate. Clay tried to lay some kind of foundation for such a meeting and reciprocity; he may be called an innovator in foreign policy of the young American Republic. He was among the first United States diplomats to urge Russo-American identity of interests in Eastern Asia.

It is interesting to note that in the *Bolshaya Sovyetskaya Entsiklopediya* (Soviet Encyclopedia), Vol. 21, 2nd edition, Moscow, 1948-1958, p. 401, there is a short biography of Cassius Clay citing his military record in the Mexican War, his 7 years as the Minister in St. Petersburg, etc. The following sentence seems most significant, "He came out for (advocated) intensification of the U.S. expansion into the Far East."

## I

Clay had no delusions about the post or his mission; he did not underestimate the diplomatic "climate" in Russia and consider it an inferior post or worthless assignment. He knew that both Russia and the United States—each for different reasons—distrusted both London and Paris. He was well aware that this mutual hatred for England would help to make his mission a bit easier, but, not necessarily a "fait accompli."

He worked hard and diligently at his post, working to nurture that "conscious cordiality" between Russia and the United States which was a vital link in Northern diplomacy. Writing in his *Memoirs*, Clay

says, "I thought my first duty in Russia was to keep the Tsar, if possible, on the Union side; and, therefore, *my business was to please*."<sup>1</sup>

And, please he did — having no delusions about the character of Russia's "friendship." In fact, he published a letter which the Russian Foreign Minister, Prince Gortchakov, had sent to him at the end of his first tour of duty in St. Petersburg, in which Gortchakov plainly states that American and Russian mutual friendship is not only a "*rational political calculation*, it is yet more — a national instinct."<sup>2</sup> Clay was no more "bamboozled by the Muscovites" than Lincoln was, and perhaps, at times, chafed at the "autocratic control environment" in which he lived and worked for seven years. But his only complaint seemed to be that he was not being sufficiently reimbursed by the State Department for his efforts; he often pleaded for more money in his correspondence to Seward.

Only a person with Clay's unusual background and unique temperament could have succeeded at this post: a post traditionally regarded as a "hardship" post by our State Department. A biographer of Clay, David Smiley, writes, "Clay was to remain in Russia for more than six years only because the Russians were tolerant of his aberrations."<sup>3</sup> Again he writes, "In keeping Russia sympathetic to the United States, Clay's ministry was a success, in spite of his diplomatic blundering."<sup>4</sup> These "aberrations," if you please, apparently were the very factors which spelled success for Clay's mission; the only diplomatic blundering Clay ever seemed guilty of was his "gaucherie" at addressing the Empress *first*, before being spoken to by her majesty first!

Born in 1810, Clay was a Kentucky gentleman, educated in the North (Yale University), a rabid abolitionist, "militant" Anglophobe, a Republican, an expansionist, shrewd "entrepreneur," all wrapped up in a flamboyant, reckless, egotistical exterior. He fit in well with the glitter and pomp of the Russian court, especially when the tenor of the Tsar was for reform and liberation of the serfs. Since Clay's fanatical abolitionist orientation dominated and propelled his entire life, he enthusiastically endorsed Tsar Alexander's emancipation policy. Clay was in agreement with some of the Russian radicals, such as Chernyshevski: that the abolition of slavery was the only true goal of the Civil War; emancipation, whether it was of the serfs in Russia or of the slaves in the United States, convinced him of a government's merit.

The fact that he was an avowed expansionist ingratiated him with his "sworn" enemy, Seward, and also with the expansionist element in Russia. By nature, he was an Anglophobe, which ingratiated him immediately with the Russians who were still smarting from the humiliation at the hands of England and France in the Crimean War

ten years previously, and who actively sought the friendship of the young American Republic, radical as it was, as a counterweight against the power of England at this time. Russian policy, then, required the perpetuation of a united American nation as an essential element in the universal equilibrium, or balance of power.

Aside from all these positive variables working to Clay's advantage, a look at his *modus operandi* and tactics might better describe how hard he worked at his mission "to please."

He carefully cultivated the nobility in positions of power and influence; he cultivated Gortchakov's friendship methodically and carefully. Although Gortchakov was not very popular in St. Petersburg, rather penurious and not very gregarious, he *was* politically influential. Clay thought that for "general ability" Gortchakov was not equalled in his time by any other European diplomat; he also thought that the Russian Minister was at the bottom of many honors he received from the Russians. Clay remarked, "I saw a great deal of him and took great care to make him my friend. In this, I think I succeeded."<sup>8</sup> Both Seward and Gortchakov, one acting in the best interests of the United States and the other desirous of Russia's national interest, wanted Clay at his post for a long time.

Clay belonged to many clubs in St. Petersburg and was an honorary member of every one of them. He was also a member of the Naval Club at Kronstadt which was the recipient of a painting and an American flag, "perpetually unfurled" in the Club, from Ambassador Clay.

He went to concerts, to the ballet, and entertained lavishly and extensively. Sometimes he ended his letters to Seward, which were often an admixture of official diplomatic business plus gratuitous advice on how Lincoln and Seward should be running the war at home, with frequent pleas for more money to maintain his expensive post. His attention to women was never considered in bad taste because apparently he focused his attentions on "non-political" personages and therefore never became a *persona non grata* because of his amours. Clay himself claims, "So far as I could learn, I was the first American minister that ever attempted to entertain general society. The other ministers, either dissatisfied with the climate or discouraged by the great expense where there was so much wealth and display, were content to lead a quiet life. When I gave my first general ball, there was quite an effort to get an invitation."<sup>9</sup> Clay's soirees were noted for their lavishness and innovations: the many wines; the fresh oysters; and large roaming bands of musicians who played for the guests during the evening's entertainment. He also introduced "spiked" punch in a silver bowl for the ladies, which the Russian women — who were fond of stimulants properly disguised — considered quite a thoughtful

and "stimulating" innovation on Clay's part! (Clay was often asked for the recipe for this punch.)

Clay himself offers a pertinent appraisal of himself and his task: "I was in the prime of life, not a bad looking fellow who had seen much of the world, and who was *determined to please*. I broke through all etiquette so far as to be affable to all classes alike; and when I made a *gaucherie*, I was the first to laugh at it."<sup>1</sup> Clay never considered his mission as an exile to Siberia: to him it was a welcome challenge; at times, it was rather difficult, too. The so-called "Perkins claim," we shall see, strained Russian-American relations somewhat. Clay's strong stand *against* this claim, and *for* Baron Stoeckl and the Russian government, got him into a bit of "hot water" with the Administration. Clay maintained that it was his refusal to present the claim to Prince Gortchakov in 1862, on direct instructions from the Secretary of State, Seward, that led to his recall from his post in St. Petersburg in January of 1862. He was replaced by Simon Cameron and Bayard Taylor in the interim until his reassignment and return to Russia in March of 1863. (Clay then served as American Ambassador to Russia for six straight years, until 1869.)

An American, Benjamin Perkins, asserted that in 1855 during the Crimean War he made a contract with Baron Stoeckl, the Russian Minister in Washington, to supply gunpowder and ammunition to Russia which could be done only by running the British naval blockade. Perkins claimed he also made a contract with Rakielevicz, who posed as an agent of the Russian legation; he turned out to be a discredited Russian spy. The Crimean War ended and also the need for the supplies which never were delivered to Russia. Stoeckl denied he had ever made a contract with Perkins. The case was taken to the New York Supreme Court where it was dismissed for lack of evidence. Perkins was awarded \$200 out of the alleged contract with Rakielevicz. Perkins died; several years later when Congress was debating the appropriations bill for the purchase of Alaska, the alleged claim with regard to Baron Stoeckl was revived by Perkins' widow. She sold her "claim" to a Joseph Stewart who formed a joint stock company and lobbied vigorously in Washington to have this "claim" settled before one penny of the \$7,200,000 was paid to Russia for the purchase of Alaska.

Back in 1862, when he was first instructed to present this claim to Gortchakov, Clay disobeyed instructions from Seward, and refused to do so. Afterwards he wrote Seward explaining his actions: that it could not be recognized as a legitimate claim against Russia, that no valid case could be brought against Stoeckl or the Russian government, and that in his opinion it was a swindle. Clay also warned that

the prosecution of this claim would essentially damage his capacity for usefulness at the Russian court in other matters of greater importance. (Clay was soon recalled from his post, in January of 1862.) Then, in 1867, when the Perkins' claim was revived by Mr. Stewart, Seward once more instructed Clay in St. Petersburg to present the claim to Gortchakov, and to press the claim. This time Clay obeyed instructions—most reluctantly, however—and handed the claim to the Russian Foreign Minister. After reading the document, Gortchakov angrily declared, "I will go to *war* before I pay a single kopek!"<sup>8</sup> He forthwith handed back the document to Clay. With great relief to Clay, the whole thorny problem was dumped into the reluctant lap of Baron Stoeckl in Washington, who was instructed by Prince Gortchakov to resolve the problem at his own discretion.

Clay's fierce anti-slavery feeling was always in the forefront of his entire life; it became almost a "restrictive monomania." In letter after letter to a patient President, Clay argued for an entente with the "new liberal Russia" after the freeing of the serfs by Tsar Alexander II in 1861. However, to Lincoln's dismay, as the basis for such an alliance Clay, always the fiery abolitionist, expressed the hope that the southern states would have to liberate their slaves. "What was the use of fighting for the old Union with the cancer of slavery left?"<sup>9</sup>

The emancipation of the Russian serfs had a resounding effect on the American people and upon their debate over the problem of slavery in the southern states. The fact that there were differences between serfdom under the Tsar in Russia and slavery in Lincoln's America had not occurred to most Russians and Americans at that time. President Lincoln, however, was well aware of the tremendous differences between his limited powers as President and the unlimited powers of the autocrat of Russia. Lincoln never lost sight of his Constitutional oath—to defend and protect the Constitution of the United States. This meant, among other things, respecting the right of property which, unfortunately, included slaves. (According to the Dred Scott decision of the United States Supreme Court in 1857, slaves were considered private property.) Lincoln's situation was poignantly unique, and certainly not comparable with that of the Tsar's. Although Clay was mindful of Lincoln's Constitutional dilemma, he was not sympathetic to it. In Clay's mind, the Civil War was a failure if slavery were left in the Union. "But Clay's views on slavery and human bondage made his appointment to Russia an *obvious asset* to the United States."<sup>10</sup>

After an absence of a year from Russia, during which time Clay spoke out vigorously and passionately against slavery, and against any kind of peace settlement which included slavery, Clay was re-appointed

to his post in St. Petersburg. In agitating for an immediate freeing of Negroes in the seceded states, Clay helped create the sentiment that was finally responsible for Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of September 23, 1862. Some historians claim that Lincoln was alarmed at Clay's unrestrained agitation for emancipation: that it would drive Kentucky and the border states into secession for the Union, and forthwith despatched Clay back to St. Petersburg. But the facts show that during this interim period between his tours of duty in Russia, Lincoln actually assisted Clay in attempting to secure for him an independent command in the Union Army. But Clay wryly remarked that "Stanton and Halleck had killed off all the anti-slavery generals, and would sacrifice him, too."<sup>11</sup> So, Clay resigned his commission as a Major-General in the United States Army and asked Lincoln for his former post in Russia, where he said he could "better serve my country than in the field."<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, in the fall of 1862, Russia had been approached first by England and then by France to intervene with European powers on behalf of the Confederacy, to recognize it; the proposal was firmly rejected by Russia. Gortchakov wrote to Stoeckl that come what may, Russia would not alter her policy of extreme friendship for the United States: that the United States has the "unequivocal assurance of Russian friendship." England was also informed of this determination, and henceforth Lord Russell became increasingly uncertain of intervention, cooled off, no doubt, by the Northern "victory" at Antietam on September 17, 1862, followed shortly by Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation on September 23, 1862. When Russia refused to intervene, Lord Russell, writing to Palmerston on October 2, 1862, said, "My only doubt is whether we and France should stir if Russia holds back. Her separation from our move would insure the rejection of our proposals." Writing to Palmerston again on October 20th, Russell cautioned, "We ought not to move at present without Russia."<sup>13</sup> The maintenance of a united America was an axiom of Russian foreign policy: America serving as a counter-balance to British power. United, the United States was a check to England; divided, it would be easy prey.

Back in St. Petersburg in March, 1863, with the threatened interference of England and France still menacing the Union, and with military reversals of the Northern armies, Clay was well aware of the keen feeling prevailing in the Russian capital that the Union, unfortunately, could not hold together.

Then, in 1863, the tables were turned, so to speak, with the outbreak of the Polish Insurrection. Up to now, Clay had been actively seeking Russia's moral support of the Union; with the Polish rebel-

lion on her hands now it was Russia's turn to seek the support of the United States against intervention. The United States was invited to join England and other European powers in a declaration to Russia against her suppression of the Poles.

Although Seward and Lincoln and most Americans sympathized deeply with the Poles in their struggle against their Russian oppressors, Seward refused American intervention in a most skillfully worded note. The Secretary of State maintained that the United States must forbear from foreign alliances, intervention, and interference; that this policy has been traditional in American foreign policy. Copies of this refusal were sent to Clay in Russia, and to Adams in England. Gortchakov asked permission to publish Seward's note, to which Clay assented, noting that the Americans were grateful for the past conduct of Russia towards the United States in her troubles by a similar moral support of herself in defense of the integrity of its government. Seward opposed intervention by Europe in America, and by the United States in Poland on the same grounds: that in each case the intervening powers would be stepping beyond their rightful areas of interest. These refusals of intervention by Russia and then by the United States further strengthened the bond between the two countries, an unnatural but sincere and valuable friendship nevertheless.

The Confederacy's chances for recognition diminished appreciably when France and England became embroiled in the Polish question; the Roebuck motion to intervene on behalf of the Confederacy undoubtedly failed to pass in the British Parliament because of the Polish crisis. Europe, facing war on two fronts, declined to press for recognition of the Confederacy at this point. The Union, then, benefited from this entire situation. The visit of the Russian fleet to the ports of San Francisco and New York in the fall of 1863 contributed moral support for the Union, and also a "greater sense of security and confidence in Washington."<sup>14</sup>

Clay had an interview with the British Ambassador to Russia, Lord Napier, in the spring of 1863. Napier said then that England had decided not to intervene in Poland because he thought the insurrection was in part a religious conflict between Roman Catholics and Greek Catholic Russia; and he was not sure that England's true policy consisted in strengthening the Catholics and the Latin race in Europe.<sup>15</sup>

The visit of the Russian fleet did much to strengthen the good feeling between Russia and the United States; it was quite a boost to the **morale of the North**. Clay was delighted with the good will generated by the fleet's visit alone, and actually did not anticipate anything more—such as an alliance between the two countries as many had speculated or hoped for. As a result of the warm reception of the



Russian fleet in American ports, Clay was the recipient of much attention in St. Petersburg. In August of 1864, as the Representative of the United States government, Clay was invited to spend several days as the guest of their majesties at the imperial palace at Roptcha. Banquets were given at Krasnoya Selo, a lavish reception at Kronstadt with many toasts of Russian-American friendship exchanged.

When Tsar Alexander II escaped assassination, Clay immediately wrote a note of sympathy to the Russian ruler; in his note, Clay referred to the Tsar as "our hope for the future advance of Russia and the Eastern world in civilization, Christianity, and happiness."<sup>16</sup> A joint Resolution was passed by the Congress of the United States expressing sympathy to the Emperor; a Resolution of this type was indeed unusual in American legislative experience. In addition, the American government also sent a special envoy, Gustavus Fox, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, on a ship to Russia to deliver a copy of the Resolution in person. This truly was a unique gesture. In August of 1866, Clay presented a copy of the Congressional Resolution and the credentials of the State and Navy Departments to the Emperor at Peterhof Palace. Then a message was sent to Seward by cable, "Resolution of Congress presented personally to the Emperor." (This was the first cable sent from Russia to America.) Many sumptuous banquets and dinners were tendered the officers of the American vessels and of the Russian fleet, which had harbored in New York and San Francisco in 1863 to avoid being bottled up in the Baltic pending war with England and France over the Polish Insurrection.<sup>17</sup>

## II

After the crisis seemed past, by the end of 1863, Clay devoted much of his attention and energy to an enterprise which seemed tailored to order for Clay's concept of Russian-American reciprocity and American expansion into the Far East: the overland telegraph line proposed by the Western Union Company, to connect America with Europe by way of Siberia, by-passing England. Perry Collins, a United States agent in Eastern Asia, conceived the idea and did much of the necessary exploration and scientific research across Siberia. Collins had tried to secure a charter from the Tsar's government; nothing much happened until the Spring of 1863 when Clay, back in St. Petersburg, became the main moving spirit of the enterprise. Clay worked tirelessly, assisting Collins in this project. One valuable contribution was a working conference held by Clay, Prince Gortchakov, and General Ignatiev, Chief of the Asiatic Department. A written summary of this conference was submitted to a committee ap-

pointed by the Emperor. In essence, the summary provided for two wires from Nikolayevsk to San Francisco by way of the Bering Sea or the Aleutian Islands, at the option of the construction company. No restrictions were to be placed on the right of way, and the company would have exclusive privileges of telegraphing over the line. Proceeds were to be divided between the company and Russia at a fixed ratio. The company was to enjoy a subsidy for a period of years, and at the end to have only profits from business over its own line.

Wanting to extend the proposed line into China, Collins enlisted Clay's assistance in this matter. Clay immediately appealed to Gortchakov to induce the Chinese government to grant the Americans the necessary connection. Seeing his chance to exacerbate anti-British feelings of the Russian government Clay, himself an Anglophobe, referred to an *English* project of connecting India with China. He claimed that if England built her line from India to China, ". . . the despatches from China will reach Europe by a route avoiding the Russian line altogether. . . . The interests of Russia and America in the project of the Western Union are identical."<sup>18</sup> A few weeks earlier Clay asked Seward to instruct Anson Burlingame, United States Minister in Peking, to the same effect. He was to procure a charter for Collins and the Western Union from the Chinese authorities; and for that purpose, he was to cooperate with the Russian representatives in Peking. Seward approved of Clay's request, and immediately instructed Burlingame accordingly.

Collins was quite grateful to Clay for his assistance and said that, ". . . thanks to Clay, Russia will stand as an intermediary between Europe and America, uniting them with China and Japan through northern Asia."<sup>19</sup> The project was well under way, 850 miles of line having been constructed all the way to New Westminster, capital of British Columbia, which was the starting point of the line to Russia. Then, most abruptly, Seward informed Clay that the enterprise had to be given up. The immediate reason for the abandonment of the Russian-American telegraph line seemed to be the successful laying of the Atlantic cable in 1866. However, Seward also adverted to "certain negotiations between Russia and the United States with regard to Russian-America now pending which might modify any measures that should be adapted in regard to the telegraph undertaking."<sup>20</sup> Undoubtedly, Seward was referring to the impending purchase of Alaska, about which Clay was soon afterward advised — in April of 1867.

Thus, although the overland telegraph line project had failed at this time, this served as a *prelude* to the purchase of Alaska, and another bond of friendship between two emerging "giants." The pur-

chase of Alaska, "the northwestern limb of our continent," would allow the United States "to take a stride to Asia."<sup>21</sup>

### III

There were many reasons why Russia wanted to sell their colonies in America. *First* of all, because of the complete uselessness of the colonies for Russia: the Russian-American Company not only was economically insolvent, but was actually alienating the good will of a friendly people. *Second*, fears that they will be taken away from her sooner or later. Rear Admiral Popov, writing in a paper on the Russian colonies on February 7, 1860, warned that the Russians should not sneer at the Monroe Doctrine and Manifest Destiny; if they knew the Americans better, they would realize that these ideas are "in their very blood and in the air they breathe." He goes on to say that there are twenty millions of Americans, each one a free man, and obsessed with the idea of "America for the Americans." They have taken California, Oregon, and sooner or later they will get Alaska. Popov writes that it is inevitable, so why not cede the territory gracefully to them?<sup>22</sup> Stoeckl had repeatedly warned that Alaska was a "breeder of trouble" for Russia and America, and that Russia could not cope with the swarms of American settlers flooding the territory, including an unwelcome band of Mormons. And, *third*, the advantage of obtaining in exchange for the colonies a considerable sum of money. A fourth reason, of course, was the diplomatic consideration: the expulsion of the British from the Pacific and the positioning of British Columbia in a weakened state right in the jaws of Alaska to the north, and continental United States to the south. The colonies had always been in a militarily vulnerable position, always in danger of being seized by Great Britain at any time.

There were two main reasons advocated for the purchase of Alaska by the United States. *First*, the purchase was economically and commercially valuable because of its rich resources in fish, whales, furs, timber, and minerals—such as gold—thereby augmenting national strength. *Second*, because of the friendship of Russia. We could not offend Russia who had evidenced her friendship for the Union by sending her fleets to the United States during the Civil War by throwing a territory, which we had solicited, back in her face.

Many historians think that the prime reason, however, was Seward's desire to fulfill another part of his expansionist policy: the acquisition of Alaska was a stepping stone in his plan for further expansion of the United States in its march towards an Empire. Seward also viewed the Alaska purchase as enhancing his own political career. Seward was a confirmed expansionist and ready to acquire anything

which promised to increase the prestige or the territorial extent of his country. As early as 1864 he expressed the conviction that "our population is destined to roll its relentless waves to the icy barriers of the North, and to encounter oriental civilization on the shores of the Pacific."<sup>23</sup> Again, he predicted that the Russian-American colonies "will yet become the outposts of my own country."<sup>24</sup> Apparently Seward seemed to be planning on re-opening the stalled negotiations on Russian-America. In a confidential letter to Clay, December 26, 1864, Seward suggests that Clay invite Grand Duke Konstantine to come to the United States for a visit; Konstantine was the foremost advocate of ceding Alaska to the United States. Seward says that this visit "would be beneficial to us, and by no means unprofitable to Russia."<sup>25</sup>

Seward completed the purchase of Alaska through Baron Stoeckl in Washington, not informing Clay in St. Petersburg of the transaction until after its completion. At first, Clay was delighted, and complimented Seward on such a clever twisting of the (British) lion's tail. Later on, Clay became more insistent that he deserved some of the credit for Seward's masterful "coup." Clay wrote to Seward, "I was in favor of that purchase, as you know, from the very beginning and I may safely say that it was owing to the good relations which I have been able to maintain with Russia that such a purchase was possible."<sup>26</sup>

It is not within the scope of, nor the purpose of, this paper to prove that Clay's activities in St. Petersburg aided in the cession of Alaska. However, in light of some recent Soviet scholarship in this matter, Clay's statement to Seward might have some validity. The Hudson's Bay Company had been leasing privileges in Alaska from the Russian-American Company up to 1865, when its lease was due to expire. Clay had sought these privileges for the United States. A Russian document of the Ministry of Finance, dated 1866, states that Clay "verbally offered to pay annually a larger sum for the mainland (of Alaska) than the Hudson's Bay Company was paying for it." A modern Soviet commentator adds that the enterprising Kentuckian also suggested that in the event of refusal, he was ready to negotiate for those islands bordering Alaska which the Hudson's Bay Company had not leased.<sup>27</sup> If this is correct, then Clay could be accredited not only with aiding in the purchase of Alaska, but also in aiding American expansion into the Far East, with Alaska as a stepping-stone.

It was in the securing of the necessary monies, \$7,200,000, for the purchase of Alaska which threatened the Russian cession of its "white elephant" temporarily. First of all, Seward, anticipating difficulty in the passage of the treaty ceding Alaska to the United States by Russia, engaged in a most aggressive, carefully planned publicity campaign

and the wining-and-dining-route to win over some of the more tractable Senators to supporting the treaty. The Russian-American telegraph line also played a sizeable part in the passage of the treaty. Part of Seward's "educational campaign" was a well-documented paper from Collins, supplying accurate geographical and scientific information obtained in the construction of the Russian-American telegraph line, pointing out the tremendous sources of wealth waiting to be tapped.<sup>28</sup> Senator Sumner's remarkable three and one-half hour speech on the floor of the Senate finally turned the tide, resulting in the passage of the treaty through the Senate by a vote of 37 to 2. (The treaty later passed in the House almost unanimously.) In Sumner's speech on the floor of the Senate on April 9, 1868, he traced the history of Russian-America extensively; expounded on the vast resources of the territory awaiting economic exploitation; touched on the parallelisms of the two countries and their uninterrupted cordiality; hailed the co-operation of the two countries on the telegraph line project; pointed out that the treaty was a sign of friendship. He stated, near his conclusion, "Even if you should doubt the value of these possessions, the treaty is a sign of unity. It is a new expression of the *Entente Cordiale* between the two powers which is a phenomenon of history."<sup>29</sup> Sumner's brilliant and persuasive speech had been well researched. Most of Sumner's information on Russian-America was obtained from the report which Robert Kennicott, a Chicago naturalist who went along with the scientific expedition to the North American end of the overland telegraph line, had made and which had been filed with the Smithsonian Institution.

After many difficulties, the appropriations bill passed in the House of Representatives by a vote of 113 to 43 on July 14, 1868; it passed the Senate on July 17, 1868, and became law on July 27, 1868.<sup>30</sup> Formal transfer of Alaska took place in formal Russian-American ceremonies on October 18, 1868, when the Russian flag was lowered and the American stars and stripes were hoisted over America's Northernmost beachhead.

#### IV

Towards the end of his mission in Russia, Clay, through his usual voluminous correspondence to Seward, was advocating a new phase of the prevalent Manifest Destiny in the United States: engagement in closer ties with and cooperation with Eastern Asia as a checkmate to the rapidly expanding Russia in the Far East. At this time, Russia was busy extending her commerce and dominion eastward into Central Asia, and was anticipating expansion right up to, and control of, the Pacific. Clay did not think we should regard this expansion with dis-

trust, but with "gratification." He conceived of a *reciprocal* policy in the Far East where American and Russian interests would meet: not to clash, but to complement. In essence, he was advocating continuation of the old Russo-American policy of conscious cordiality, or Entente Cordiale, prevalent during the American Civil War years, plus a new dimension: *reciprocity* in the Far East.

Clay thought that the new life for Asia must come from the West, and that Russia was the only nation which could give this. Russia, he maintained, was a young nation of great promise; American interests necessitated a friendly attitude toward that land of rising promise. In a letter to Seward, Clay wrote of the many advances Russia was making in the fine arts, in science, literature. "A great destiny lies before her and let us be careful for our own sakes and the cause of humanity to reciprocate her friendly sentiments toward us."<sup>31</sup>

Clay took note that the Russians were taking the best whaling region in the Pacific, the Sea of Okhotsk, and soon it would become a "mare clausum." Practically all the western nations were free to profit from the new opportunities created by Russia in Eastern Asia, and he warned the State Department that it was up to the United States not to lag. "Russia carries on the war in Central Asia and colonizes in northern China and the isles of Japan, thus making points d'appui for future movements, either political or commercial, with those great centers of population and wealth. All the nations are looking in the same direction, and I therefore call the attention of our government once more to the *necessity of our having some formidable standpoint* in the sea bordering on Japan and China, where our armies and navies may rest secure."

Clay urged the United States to exercise the greatest possible care in selecting such a base, as the stakes were very high indeed in his judgment. "I think our future relations, commercial and political, with Eastern Asia and the adjacent isles will be so important as to make us very vigilant in now laying there the bases of future power and security."<sup>32</sup> Clay called attention to an island near Japan named Kinashi as a likely place for a base; better yet, there was a port *south of Korea* called Nanki, or *Port Hamilton*; he pointed out that it had one of the finest harbors in the world, about a mile square with a small entrance, rockbound, strong as Gibraltar. He urged that we should seize and hold that island at once since the United States has great interests in the Asiatic Seas.<sup>33</sup>

In a letter to Seward on April 17, 1868, Clay wrote, prophetically, "Great events are in the future in connection with China, Japan, and India. Nature has placed us in a position of mastery of the situation. IT WILL BE OUR FAULT IF WE COME NOT UP TO OUR POS-

SIBLE DESTINY."<sup>34</sup> Clay told Gortchakov that the Far East held room for both Russians and Americans and reminded the Russian Foreign Minister that Eastern Asia comprised vast countries yet to be explored, where the wealth of the world was concentrated. He assured the Russian government of America's good-will and also promised action; here Clay was referring to the telegraph line project. "The merchants of the United States whose interests are reciprocally identified with those of Russia for all time in this joint line, are fully awake to the importance of early and efficient action in this matter."<sup>35</sup>

Clay, then, did his best to alert Washington to the future strategic importance of American presence in Asia. Had the telegraph line project succeeded, and it almost succeeded, the United States would have played an earlier and more important role in Asia; and Clay's work would have been internationally recognized.

#### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, then, it may be said that *first*: not only did Clay distinguish himself at his post in St. Petersburg, but in so doing shored up a pivotal point in Northern diplomacy, i.e., Russia — keeping her friendly to the United States. How this helped to save the Union is outside the scope of this paper; but, Clay's successful mission to Russia certainly played a vital role therein.

And, *second*: Clay advocated a new American foreign policy of reciprocity with the rapidly expanding Russia in the Far East; American political and commercial involvement with Asia; and the securing of strategic bases as a "formidable standpoint" in the Pacific for the rapidly expanding United States.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

##### I. PRIMARY SOURCES

Federal documents provided rich source material for this study, especially in regard to the sale of Russian-America to the United States: *The Congressional Globe, Containing the Debate and Proceedings*, 38th to 40th Congresses (1864-1868) and *Senate Documents*, 40th Congress, 2nd Session, No. 79.

*The House Executive Documents* of the 40th Congress, 2nd Session, Doc. 157-180 were extremely helpful, especially the "Documents Relating to the Acquisition of Alaska," Doc. 176. Doc. 176 includes dispatches of Clay to Seward, confidential letter of Seward to Clay, Sumner's remarkable speech on the floor of the Senate urging passage of the treaty acquiring Alaska, and

much material on the rich resources of Alaska which had been gathered by the scientists working on the Russian-American telegraph line.

*Bolshaya Sovyetskaya Entsiklopediya* (Soviet Encyclopedia), Vol. 12, Vol. 21, 2nd ed., Moscow, 1948-1958 provided the Russian version of the American Civil War with a brief account of the Russian fleet visit to the United States; a short but significant biography of Clay is of interest viz-a-viz Clay's expansionism.

An excellent treasure trove for both background material and Clay's personal philosophy was Cassius Clay's *Memoirs, Writings, and Speeches*, Cincinnati, 1886. Clay's philosophy on abolition is presented alongside his colorful accounts of the diplomatic corps in St. Petersburg, and a touching tribute to the martyred President Lincoln. The Perkins claim is discussed at length as well as his many tilts with Seward. Clay's views on race supremacy and racial intermarriage are startlingly enlightened, and his critical analysis of these subjects were valuable in understanding Clay's fanatical abolitionist posture.

I looked at *The Works of William Seward*, G. E. Baker, ed., Boston, 1884; *The Letters of Franklin K. Lane*, A. W. Lane & L. H. Wall, editors, Boston, 1922; and *The Diary of Gideon Welles*, G. Welles, Boston & New York, Vol. 1, 1911. These were only of peripheral interest in this study.

## II. SECONDARY SOURCES

### A. BOOKS: GENERAL

Quite valuable was E. D. Adams' excellent work, *Great Britain and the American Civil War*, 2 Vols., New York, 1925 especially on British diplomacy during the Civil War. Thomas A. Bailey's *A Diplomatic History of the American People*, New York, 7th ed., 1964 provided me with a most penetrating discussion of Russian-American friendship and the "acceptance of Seward's ice box." More limited in relevance to my paper were four books: J. G. Randall, *The Civil War and Reconstruction*, Heath, Boston, 1953; Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, Vol. 2, New York, 1939; A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for the Mastery in Europe 1848-1918*, Oxford, 1954; and William A. Williams, *American-Russian Relations 1781-1947*, New York, 1952.

### B. BOOKS: RUSSO-AMERICAN RELATIONS

The best treatment of Russian-American relations prior to and during the Civil War period were Benjamin P. Thomas's excellent dissertation, *Russo-American Relations 1815-1867*, Baltimore, 1930 and Thomas A. Bailey's extremely analytical effort, *America Faces Russia*, New York, 1950. Most helpful were Thomas's examination of the threatened Anglo-French intervention in the Civil War in the context of Russian foreign policy, and his chapter on the purchase of Alaska. Bailey's three chapters cryptically analyzing Russia's friendship, the Russian fleet visit, and the purchase of Alaska were of great assistance. Especially pertinent was the author's discussion of the common ties joining Russia and the United States at that time: mutual expansionism, the rebuffing of unwanted joint interventions, and common problems of emancipating servile groups.

Max M. Laserson's *The American Impact on Russia—Diplomatic and Ideological—1784-1947*, New York, 1950 was most useful in the lengthy treatment of the Russian radicals, such as Chernyshevski, who so admired the young American Republic but who was so opposed to its "blight," slavery.

A. A. Woldman's *Lincoln and the Russians*, 1952, Collier's, 1961, told me



little about President Lincoln, but clued me in on Baron Stoeckl's views of the Civil War, of democracy, of Lincoln's statesmanship, and of Russian-America . . . a "breeder of trouble" between Russia and the United States. Woldman, like Bailey, discusses the "curious parallelism" of the United States and Russia.

Pitirim Sorokin's *Russia and the United States*, New York, 1944 presented a sociological interpretation of the "curious parallelism" of Russia and the United States during the Civil War period, citing the mutual hatred of England plus absence of any serious clash between the vital interests or basic values of the two countries to legitimate this hypothesis.

#### C. BOOKS: RUSSIAN-AMERICA

*Alaska and its History*, edited by Morgan B. Sherwood, University of Washington, 1967, a collection of twenty-five outstanding essays dealing with the Russian period in Alaska and the early American explorations, was most fruitful in studying the transitional stage of Alaska: from the Russian to the American period. Most informative were the following articles: "The Prelude to Russia's Departure from America," by Anatole G. Mazour; "Alaska Ice, Inc.," by E. L. Keithahn; "The Collins Overland Line and American Continentalism," by Charles Vevier; "The Sale of Alaska," by Reinhard H. Luthin; "George Davidson and the Acquisition of Alaska," by Morgan B. Sherwood; and "American Public Opinion and the Purchase of Russian America," by Richard E. Welch, Jr.

*America and Russia*, edited by Oliver Jensen, New York, 1962 made for enjoyable reading but was not too well documented. However, color and background material were provided by Allan Temko's article on "Russians in California;" Marshall B. Davidson's article on "A Royal Welcome for the Russian Navy;" and Robert L. Reynold's article on "Seward's Wise Folly."

*America's Foreign Relations* by Willis Fletcher Johnson, New York, 1916 treated of the motives for the Alaskan transaction but was too scant to be of much value for this study. However, the article by S. B. Okun in *Rossiysko-Amerikanskaya Kompaniya* (Russian-American Company), edited by B. D. Grekov, Moscow-Leningrad, was productive of new insight into Clay's part in the purchase of Alaska.

#### D. BIOGRAPHIES

Unfortunately, no really satisfactory biography has yet been written of Cassius Clay; of the two I examined, one was rather specialized and the other was almost too general in nature.

Invaluable, however, in my research was James Rood Robertson's excellent biography, *A Kentuckian at the Court of the Tsars, 1861-1862; 1863-1869*, Berea College, Kentucky, 1935, which is a most scholarly treatise on Clay's diplomatic tour of duty in Imperial Russia. Well documented, rich in the citation of consular despatches and correspondence of Clay, Gortchakov, Seward, and Stoeckl, and extremely analytical, Robertson's work was one of the most helpful sources at my disposal.

David L. Smiley's *Lion of White Hall: The Life Of Cassius M. Clay*, University of Wisconsin, 1962 was of little assistance since the author focuses more on Clay's earlier political career and marital struggles, only lightly touching on Clay's diplomatic career. However, Smiley's discussion of Clay's "restrictive monomania"—abolition, was interesting.

I examined F. Bancroft's *"The Life of William H. Seward,"* 2 Vols., New York, 1900 only briefly in order to "absorb" some of Seward's expansionist philosophy.

#### E. ARTICLES

##### 1. Clay

The finest article exclusively on Cassius Clay was Albert Parry's significant work, "Cassius Clay's Glimpse into the Future: Lincoln's Envoy to St. Petersburg Bade the Two Nations Meet in Asia," appearing in the *Russian Review*, I, II, Spring, 1943; pp. 52-67.

##### 2. The Visit of the Russian Fleet

There was almost a floodtide of material on this subject, with Frank A. Golder's "The Russian Fleet and the Civil War," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 20, 1915; pp. 801-812, the basic article from which the succeeding scholars developed their theses on the motives behind the visit of the Russian fleet to American ports during the Civil War. Other articles which were helpful were: E. A. Adamov, "Russia and the United States at the Time of the Civil War," *Journal of Modern History*, II, 1930; pp. 586-602; Thomas A. Bailey, "The Russian Fleet Myth Re-examined," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 38, 1951; pp. 81-90; William Magengast, "The Visit of the Russian Fleet to the United States: Were Americans Deceived?" *Russian Review*, Vol. 8, 1949; pp. 46-55; Earl S. Pomeroy, "The Myth after the Russian Fleet 1863," *New York History*, Vol. 31, 1950; 169-176; and E. W. Ellsworth, "Sea Birds of Muscovy in Massachusetts," *New England Quarterly*, Vol. 33, 1960; pp. 3-18.

##### 3. The Polish Insurrection of 1863

In his article, "Seward and the Polish Revolution of 1863," *American Historical Review*, XLV, 1940; pp. 828-833, Howard E. Blinn focused attention on Seward's decisional dilemma whether to intervene on behalf of the Poles against their Russian oppressors. More pertinent to this study was John Kutolowski's fine article entitled, "The Effect of the Polish Insurrection of 1863 on American Civil War Diplomacy," *Historian*, 27 August, 1965; pp. 560-577, in which the author hypothesizes that the Polish question aided Northern diplomacy.

##### 4. The Russian-American Telegraph Line

The most exhaustive treatment of this subject was Charles Vevier's well-researched piece, "The Collins Overland Line and American Continentalism," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 27, August, 1959; pp. 237-253.

##### 5. The Purchase of Alaska

Most helpful in analyzing the acquisition of Russian-America were two articles: Frank A. Bolder's "The Purchase of Alaska," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 25, 1920, pp. 413-424; and Thomas A. Bailey's "Why the United States Purchased Alaska," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 3, 1934, pp. 39-48. Other valuable contributions were William A. Dunning's pragmatic presentation, "Paying for Alaska: Some Unfamiliar Incidents in the Process," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 27, September, 1912, pp. 385-398; Jeanette Nichols' economic interpretation, "United States Congress and Imperialism 1861-1867," *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 21, 1961, pp. 526-538; and Hunter Miller's work, "Russian Opinion on the Cession of Alaska," *American Historical Review*, 1943, pp. 521-531.

## 6. Emancipation

Most relevant was Larry Anthony Rand's fascinating discussion of the impact of the freeing of the Russian serfs on the American people, and upon their debate on slavery; his article, "America Views Russian Serf Emancipation 1861," appeared in *Mid-America*, Vol. 50, 1968.

## 7. Miscellaneous: Background Material

The following articles were not too important in this study, but furnished "color" and broader perspective: Frank A. Golder's "Russian American Relations During the Crimean War," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 31, 1926, pp. 462-476; Frank A. Golder's "The American Civil War through the Eyes of a Russian Diplomat," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 26, 1921, pp. 454-463; V. M. Oliver, "Pre-Marxist Russian Radicals and the American Civil War," *Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 38, October, 1953, pp. 428-437; Albert Parry's "John B. Turchin: Russian General in the American Civil War," *Russian Review*, April, 1942, pp. 44-60; Joseph A. Logsdon's "The Civil War: Russian Version (II): the Soviet Historian," *Civil War History*, Vol. 8, December, 1962, pp. 365-372; Ada M. Stoflet's translation, "The Civil War—Russian Version (I): The Soviet Encyclopedia," *Civil War History*, Vol. 8, December 1962, pp. 357-364; and Gerald Runkle's "Karl Marx and the American Civil War," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 6, 1964, pp. 117-142, which presents the American Civil War as seen through the distorted prism of Karl Marx.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Cassius M. Clay, *The Life of Cassius Marcellus Clay: Memoirs, Writings, and Speeches, Showing his Conduct in the Overtthrow of American Slavery, the Salvation of the Union, and the Restoration of the Autonomy of the States*, Vol. 1, Cincinnati, 1886, p. 350.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338.

<sup>3</sup> David Smiley, *The Lion of Whitehall*, University of Wisconsin, 1962, p. 214.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>5</sup> Clay's *Memoirs*—*op. cit.*, pp. 442-443.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 420.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 406.

<sup>9</sup> A. A. Woldman, *Lincoln and the Russians*, 1952, Collier's, 1961, p. 120.

<sup>10</sup> Larry Anthony Rand, "America Views Russian Serf Emancipation 1861," *Mid-America*, Vol. 50, January, 1968, p. 48.

<sup>11</sup> Clay's *Memoirs*, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 309.

<sup>13</sup> E. D. Adams, *Great Britain and the American Civil War*, London, 1925, II, pp. 40-54 *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> John Kutolowski, "The Effect of the Polish Insurrection of 1863 on the American Civil War Diplomacy," *Historian* (27), Aug. 1965, pp. 575-576 *passim*.

<sup>15</sup> James Rood Robertson, *A Kentuckian at the Court of the Tsars*, Berea College Press, Berea, Kentucky, 1935, p. 151.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>17</sup> For an analysis of the fleet's visit, see Frank Golder's article, "The Russian Fleet and the Civil War," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 20, 1915, pp. 801-812. For additional articles on the fleet's visit, please refer to bibliographical essay at end.

<sup>18</sup> Clay to Gortchakov, *Paper Relating to Foreign Affairs*, 1st Session, 39th Congress, Part II, 1866, pp. 370-372.

<sup>19</sup> Collins to Clay, November 28, 1864, *ibid.*; pp. 370-371.

<sup>20</sup> Seward to Clay, March 28, 1867; *House Executive Documents*, 40th Congress, 2nd Session, Part I, Washington, 1868, p. 385.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Vevier, "The Collins Overland Line and American Continentalism," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 28, 1959, p. 253.

<sup>22</sup> For an excellent account of the purchase of Alaska, see Frank Golder's article, "The Purchase of Alaska," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 25, 1920, pp. 413-424.

<sup>23</sup> *The Works of William Seward*, ed. G. E. Baker, III, Boston, 1884; p. 409.

<sup>24</sup> F. Bancroft, *The Life of Seward*, II, N.Y., 1900, p. 471.

<sup>25</sup> Seward to Clay (confidential), Doc. 112, 26 December, 1864; *House Executive Documents*, 2nd Session, Doc. 176, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> Clay to Seward, June 25, 1868; *Message of the President of the United States and Accompanying Documents to the Two Houses of Congress at the Commencement of the 2nd Session of the 40th Congress*, Part I, Washington, 1868, p. 386.

<sup>27</sup> S. B. Okun', *Rossiysko-Amerikanskaya Kompaniya*, edited by B. D. Grekov, Moscow-Leningrad, pp. 234-235.

<sup>28</sup> Collins to Seward, April 4, 1867, *Documents Relating to the Acquisition of Alaska*, *House Executive Documents*, 40th Congress, 2nd Session, Doc. 176, p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>30</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 40th Congress, 2nd Session, Part 5, 1867-1868, p. 4159.

<sup>31</sup> Clay to Seward, April 17, 1868; *House Executive Documents*, 40th Congress, *op. cit.*, pp. 469-470.

<sup>32</sup> Clay to Seward, May 23, 1868, *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Clay to Seward, October 27, 1867, *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Clay to Seward, April 17, 1868, *ibid.*, p. 470.

<sup>35</sup> Clay to Gortchakov, Dec. 14, 1864; *Papers Relating to Foreign Affairs*, 1st Session, 39th Congress, Part II, Washington, 1866, p. 372.