

Purchase Alaska... Then What?

The Treaty of Cession was signed, ceremonial transfer held, and payment made, but the U.S. had no plan for governing Alaska.



This image, *Old Glory Rises Over Alaska*, is from Humble Oil and Refining Co's *Great Moments in American History* published in the 1960s. Courtesy of Alaska State Library, P28-112. Alaska Purchase Centennial Commission Photo Collection

Transfer & Transition

The formal transfer ceremony took place in Sitka on October 18, 1867. Most of the Russians left that fall. The U.S. Army became the law of the land under the command of General Jefferson C. Davis. There was no civil government. Americans descended upon Alaska and began staking land claims—even trying to claim church grounds in Sitka!

Public Custom

In Sitka, the former Russian capital, residents created a pseudo government and elected a mayor. However, few newcomers found their fortunes and most left as quickly as they came. In 1873, the city council held its last meeting. In 1877, the U.S. recalled the Army. The U.S. Customs Collector, William S. Dodge, became the ruling official of the vast territory until Congress created a civil government in 1884.



General Jefferson C. Davis
Courtesy of Alaska State Library Photo Collection

General Jefferson C. Davis, leader of the U.S. Army in Alaska, gave his approval for the pseudo government and Sitka residents named William S. Dodge as mayor.



Governor John G. Brady
Courtesy of Alaska State Library Photo Collection

Chief Ah-na-llash was one of the Tlingit chiefs in attendance in 1898, when a group of Tlingit leaders came before Governor John G. Brady to air grievances.

In response, Brady stated, *"Now the United States after it bought Alaska did not pass any laws for a number of years. They simply sent soldiers here. I often think a wrong was done to the Tlingit."*



Chief Ah-na-llash
Lantern Slides of Alaska Photo Collection, P28-112

Moving Forward

The 1867 Treaty of Cession said the Alaska Native people were not citizens. From their first meeting with U.S. government officials, Native leaders called for recognition of their rights and land ownership. The 1884 law acknowledged Native ownership of lands in the territory, but stated Congress would address Alaska Native land claims at a later date. The Native people were not moved to reservations far from their homes, as was common practice at the time. It would take nearly a century for a land claim settlement.

Timeline:

March 30, 1867	April 9, 1867	June 20, 1867	October 18, 1867	July 27, 1868	July 27, 1868	August 1, 1868	August 15, 1868
Seward and de Stoeckl negotiate Treaty of Cession	U.S. Senate ratifies treaty	Russia and U.S. exchange ratifications	Ceremonial transfer of territory at Sitka	Congress appropriates \$7.2 million to complete purchase	Congress passes Customs Act for Alaska	U.S. Treasury issues check	Russia cashes check

150th Anniversary
Alaska Treaty of Cession
1867~2017