

Alaska Exploratory Expedition (The Allen Expedition), 1885



University of Alaska Anchorage. Archives & Manuscripts Dept.

Collection Name: Fred Wildon Fickett (1857-1928). Papers, 1877-1906. UAA-HMC-0108

Identifier: UAA-hmc-0108-series8b-1

Title: Members of the Copper and Tanana Rivers Expedition, 1885.

Description: Annotations on image. Top: "1885 Alaska". Bottom: "Fickett Allen Robinson [Robertson]". In 1885 Fickett volunteered for an expedition to explore the Copper and Tanana Rivers under Henry T. Allen. Allen's expedition covered over 1,500 miles of wilderness in five months. Formal portrait of the three expedition members taken in Saint Michael, a village on St. Michael Island in Norton Sound. From left to right: Private Fred Wildon Fickett, Lt. Henry T. Allen and Sergeant Cady Robertson. All three men are carrying guns. Original photograph size: 4 1/4 x 6 1/2 inches.

Subject.TGM: Explorers
Men
Military officers
Firearms

Personal Name: Fickett, Fred Wildon, 1857-1928
Allen, Henry T. (Henry Tureman), 1859-1930
Robertson, Cady

Location: Saint Michael (Alaska)

Region: Southeast Alaska

Time Period: 1867 to 1896

Date.original: 1885

Type: Image (Photographs)
Image (Group portraits)

Related Materials: <http://www.lib.uaa.alaska.edu/archives/CollectionsList/CollectionDescriptions/CtoF/FICKFW.wpd.html>

Rights: <http://www.lib.uaa.alaska.edu/vilda>

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More about the Allen Expedition:

During the waning years of the western American Indian wars, the military posted Gen. Nelson A. Miles in the Pacific Northwest. Miles was a veteran of battles against Native Americans. He led a battalion in chase after Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce Indians and eventually contributed to Joseph's surrender. As Native American revolutions grew sparse, Miles turned to the expanse of another frontier: the vast and unexplored territory of Alaska.

General Miles sent two preliminary expeditions into the interior of Alaska, one of which could be deemed successful. In 1883, Lt. Fredrick Schwatka explored the Yukon River basin. However, the general's desire for knowledge of the territory was not satisfied. He commissioned Lt. William Abercrombie to follow the Copper River to its confluence with the Yukon. Abercrombie was unsuccessful to say the least. He declared the river impassable and the Natives unhelpful. And yet while the success of Lt. Abercrombie's trek was still unknown, General Miles asked a staff member, an 1882 West Point graduate named Lt. Henry Tureman Allen, make the journey as well.

Allen chose two soldiers to accompany him up the Copper River: Cavalry Sgt. Cady Robertson and Pvt. Frederick Wildon Fickett, a meteorologist with the Signal

Corps, who had been stationed in Sitka and recently reassigned to Portland, Oregon, headquarters for the Army's Department of the Columbia. Also joining them were two civilians, John Bremner and Peder Johnson. While the soldiers' most obvious mission was to plot and map their journey, and make scientific observations about the natural world, they also were expected to record the habits and nature of Native Alaskan tribes that they encountered. Long years of war with Native Americans in the States had created an apprehensive U.S. military. They were unnecessarily wary of the Alaskan Natives, but danger was still inherent in their mission.

"At least three groups of Russian explorers traveled into the Copper River country never to be seen again," Allen wrote later, "and several other armed parties were turned back."

Influenced in part by Abercrombie's reports, Lt. Allen carried with him the notion of ill-tempered Natives, but frequently observed the people with curiosity rather than disdain. Abercrombie had referred to the indigenous people as devious and manipulative. Allen, rather, wrote that the information supplied by the Natives "may not be prompted by maliciousness." Expecting resistance and hostility, the Lieutenant was instead surprised by their generosity and willingness to trade. He marveled that they did not seem to purposefully sabotage his voyage. Unbeknownst to Allen, the Natives were performing reconnaissance of their own from the moment the party first arrived, observing the white men and passing along messages to other Natives ahead of and behind the expedition's route. Ahtna oral histories report that the Natives believed the men were Russians, and their deaths were diverted when Tyone Chief Nicolai learned that they were from the United States and prevented the killings. Chief Nicolai of Taral, near present-day Chitina, lent guides, who continued to deliver messages ahead to other tribes, cautiously observing and ensuring safety and protection as the men ascended the Copper, then the Tanana River to its confluence with the Yukon.

Nicolai also revealed to Allen the location of an untouched vein of nearly pure copper ore. Regrettably for the Athabascans of this area, this discovery, as well as other regional gold rushes, ultimately led to the arrival of many more white men—miners, traders, railroad men, powerful capitalists—to exploit what was one of the largest copper deposits on record. Within two decades, the land that the Natives had occupied for thousands of years was irreversibly changed.

Ultimately, the greatest threat to the expedition was hunger and illness. The men traveled lightly on shriveled stomachs, rarely having enough food to save. The starving explorers were so consistently exhausted and ravenous, they welcomed rotten meat rather than the idea of hunting at the end of a long day's journey. In his report, Allen quoted from Fickett's journal: "Rotten moose meat would be a delicacy now. So weak from hunger that we had to stop at noon to hunt. All so weak that we were dizzy and would stagger like drunken men." Allen confirmed Private Fickett's thoughts when he wrote, "The most difficult of all our endeavors, however, was the necessity of hunting supper at the expiration of such a day's march." All the men eventually contracted scurvy, also known as Barlow Disease, from an insufficient intake of Vitamin C. The men most likely suffered from symptoms such as spotted skin, spongy gums, and bleeding mucous membranes.

In his journal, Allen wrote of party member John Bremner and his ill health: ". . . I noticed that the severe hardships to which Bremner had so long been exposed were affecting both his mental and physical constitution. His ankle, sprained at Chittystone, had assumed an unusual size, which was due, as we found later, to scurvy. For two

weeks Sergeant Robertson had been covered with black spots, which developed later into another form of scurvy.”

Although food and other provisions from Natives had somewhat relieved the party, the soldiers disbanded when they reached Koyukuk River. “John Bremner and Peder Johnson chose to remain on the Yukon to continue prospecting during the remainder of the summer,” Allen wrote. “Sgt. Robertson was to go to Saint Michael’s on the return trip of the steamboat *Yukon*.”

Accompanied by several Natives, Allen and Fickett continued northward and became the first white men to explore the Koyukuk River north of the Arctic Circle. They traveled to its headwaters overland and returned to the Yukon River by canoe, traveling until the end of August. Joining Robertson at St. Michael, the trio posed for a formal photograph, marking the end of their remarkable journey. Upon their return, the soldiers successfully mapped the Copper, Tanana, and Koyukuk Rivers. They had traveled more than 1,500 treacherous miles in fewer than twenty weeks.

A few years later, Private Frederick Fickett submitted his thesis, titled “Alaska,” to Maine State College and received a Master of Science degree. He married and retired from the army in 1890, eventually moving to Arizona to combat the nagging health concerns he retained from his trek in Alaska. He studied law and managed mining operations before his death in 1928 at the age of 70.

Lt. Henry T. Allen retired from the Army in 1923 as a Major General after serving as a Brigadier General in World War I. He died on August 30, 1930, and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

In June 1985, linguist James Kari of the Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska Fairbanks, organized a conference to commemorate the centennial of the Allen Expedition. The conference site was Mentasta, an Athabascan village between the Tanana and Copper Rivers. Speakers included descendents of Natives who had witnessed the Allen party’s struggle up the Copper River Valley and beyond. They retold the oral histories of their ancestors, and were joined by scholars who presented the academic perspective of the historic expedition. Among the speakers were Walter Chorley, Katie John, Walya Hopson, Morgan Sherwood, Heath Twitchell and Joan Antonson.

Links:

Lt. Henry T. Allen, West Point website:

http://americanhistory.si.edu/westpoint/discover_map_print1.html#

Guide to the Fred Wildon Fickett Collection, University of Alaska Archives:

<http://www.lib.uaa.alaska.edu/archives/Guides/FWFGde-Pt1.html>

Summaries of Fickett’s diaries and journals in the Collection:

<http://www.lib.uaa.alaska.edu/archives/Guides/FWFGde-Pt2.html>

Fickett Glacier, USGS website:

http://geonames.usgs.gov/pls/gnis/web_query.GetDetail?tab=Y&id=1421900

History in Gates of the Arctic National Park, National Park Service website:

http://www.nps.gov/gaar/Expanded/key_values/cultural_resources/history.htm

Old West, June 16, 1890, posted on Buck's Cowboys' Web Spot, by Buck Callahand:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Buck/message/49>

Newspaper image from collection of Larry Fickett, a descendent of Fred W. Fickett:

<http://www.three-systems.com/gen/tibpics.htm>

Arizona State Library, Archives, and Public Records:

<http://cip.lib.az.us/Collectiondata.asp?collectionid=441&title=Family+papers%2E>

Records of Lt. Allen Conference, 1985, Mentasta, Alaska:

[http://www.lib.uaa.alaska.edu/archives/CollectionsList/CollectionDescriptions/KtoN/LTA
LLEN.wpd.html](http://www.lib.uaa.alaska.edu/archives/CollectionsList/CollectionDescriptions/KtoN/LTA%20LLEN.wpd.html)



Biography of Major General Henry Tureman Allen, Arlington National Cemetery:

<http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/htallen.htm>

(The General's son, Henry Tureman Allen, Jr., Colonel, United States Army, is also buried in Arlington National Cemetery.)

More reading:

Compilation of narratives of explorations in Alaska ...

W R **Abercrombie**; Edwin F **Glenn**; O O **Howard**; Ivan **Petroff**; Patrick Henry **Ray**; Wilds
Preston **Richardson**; E Hazard **Wells**

1900

English Book 1 p.l., vii, 3-856 p. illus., plates, fold. maps. 31 x 25 cm.

Washington, Govt. print. off.,

Libraries with Item:

Location	Library	Code
AK	ALASKA RES LIBR, BUR OF LAND MGT	UDA

AK	KETCHIKAN PUB LIBR	Q2Z
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AK	SHELDON JACKSON COL	Q2X
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, ANCHORAGE	UAA
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, ELMER E RASMUSON LIBR	UAF

Compilation of narratives of explorations in Alaska.

W R **Abercrombie**; Henry Jureman **Allen**; Edwin F **Glenn**; O O **Howard**; Ivan **Petrov**; Patrick Henry **Ray**; Chas W **Raymond**; Wilds Preston **Richardson**; Frederick **Schwatka**; E Hazard **Wells**

1900

English Book : Microform 1 p.l., vii, 3-856 p., 33 leaves of plates : ill., 27 fold. maps ; 30 cm.
Washington : Gov't. Print. Off.,

Libraries with Item:

Location	Library	Code
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, ELMER E RASMUSON LIBR	UAF

Report of an expedition to the Copper, Tananá, and Kóyukuk rivers, in the territory of Alaska, in the year 1885, "for the purpose of obtaining all information which will be valuable and important, especially to the military branch of the government"

Henry T **Allen**

1887

English Book : Microform 172 p. incl. tables : ill., plates (part fold.) maps (5 fold.) ; 24 cm.
Washington : Govt. Print. Off.,

Libraries with Item:

Location	Library	Code
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, ELMER E RASMUSON LIBR	UAF

Report of an expedition to the Copper, Tananá, and Kóyukuk rivers, in the territory of Alaska, in the year 1885,

Henry T **Allen**

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English Book 172 p. incl. tables, plates (part. fold.) maps (5 fold.) 23 cm.
Washington, Govt. Print. Off.,

Libraries with Item:

Location	Library	Code
AK	ALASKA RES LIBR & INFO SERV	RLA
AK	ALASKA STATE LIBR	ALK
AK	ANCHORAGE MUNICIPAL LIBR	XYZ
AK	ANCHORAGE MUS OF HIST & ART LIBR	XY6
AK	KETTLESON MEM LIBR	Q2V
AK	SHELDON JACKSON COL	Q2X
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, ANCHORAGE	UAA
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, ELMER E RASMUSON LIBR	UAF

Reports and papers,

Henry T **Allen**

1884-1886

English Archival Material : Microform ft.

The collection consists of documents and reports from the Army Adjutant General's records concerning Allen's trip to Alaska in 1884 and his 1885 expedition, papers relative to the writing and publication of Allen's expedition report in 1886, and Allen's Alaska diaries for 1884 and 1885 from the Library of Congress.

Libraries with Item:

Location	Library	Code
AK	ALASKA STATE LIBR	ALK
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, ANCHORAGE	UAA

Papers,

Fred Wildon **Fickett**

1877-1906

English Archival Material 3.5 cu. ft.

The collection contains diaries and journals, notebooks, correspondence, military orders and papers, legal papers, photographs, printed materials, and artifacts. The bulk of the diaries and notebooks cover the period of 1876-1878 and 1880-1888. Most of the correspondence is between Fickett and his fiancée, Nellie Lord. His letters are generally descriptive of his activities in the Army, especially in Alaska, while her letters deal with her life in Maine. There are over 50 photographs, most of which concern Alaska. The printed items include a scrapbook and typescript and printed copies of Allen's report.

Libraries with Item:

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AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, ANCHORAGE	UAA

Access this Item:

<http://www.lib.uaa.alaska.edu/archives/CollectionsList/CollectionDescriptions/CtoF/FICK KFW.wpd.html>

Henry T. Allen papers, primarily related to the Copper River region military expedition in 1885 and personal correspondence,

Henry T Allen

1882-1927

English Archival Material 2 boxes (0.44 linear ft.)

Letter, clippings, documents primarily concerning the Copper River region; correspondents include Jeanny Dorea Johnston, who became his wife in 1887, and Brigadier General Nelson A. Miles.

Libraries with Item:

Location	Library	Code
AK	ALASKA STATE LIBR	ALK

Guide to the Fred Wildon Fickett Collection /

Dennis F Walle

1985

English Book iii, 85 p. : ill., ports. ; 28 cm.

Anchorage, Alaska : University of Alaska, Arctic Environmental Information and Data Center,

Libraries with Item:

Location	Library	Code
AK	ALASKA RES LIBR & INFO SERV	RLA
AK	ALASKA RES LIBR, BUR OF LAND MGT	UDA
AK	ALASKA STATE LIBR	ALK
AK	ANCHORAGE MUNICIPAL LIBR	XYZ
AK	ANCHORAGE MUS OF HIST & ART LIBR	XY6
AK	KENAI COMMUN LIBR	XZ\$
AK	KENAI PENINSULA COL, UAA	X@5
AK	MATANUSKA SUSITNA COL	XZU
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, ANCHORAGE	UAA
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, ELMER E RASMUSON LIBR	UAF
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, SE, JUNEAU	Y4Z
AK	VALDEZ CONSORTIUM LIBR	X#2

An expedition to the Copper, Tanana, and Koyukuk rivers in 1885 /

Henry T Allen

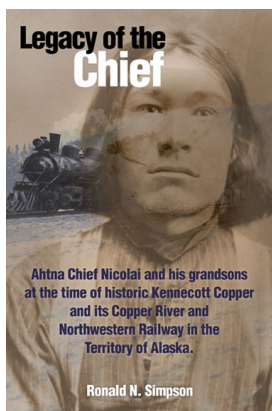
1985, 1885

English Book 96 p. : ill. ; 28 cm.

Anchorage, Alaska : Alaska Northwest Pub. Co., ; ISBN: 0882403001 (pbk.) :

Libraries with Item:

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AK	A HOLMES JOHNSON MEM LIBR	XZ#
AK	ALASKA STATE LIBR	ALK
AK	ALYESKA CENT SCH LIBR	Q2N
AK	ANCHORAGE MUNICIPAL LIBR	XYZ
AK	ANDERSON SCH/COMMUN LIBR	X\$3
AK	CANTWELL SCH COMMUN LIBR	X#9
AK	FAIRBANKS N STAR BOROUGH LIBR	X#4
AK	FORT WAINWRIGHT POST LIBR	V91
AK	HAINES COOP LIBR	Q2R
AK	HOMER PUB LIBR	XY8
AK	JUNEAU PUB LIBR	Q2L
AK	KENAI COMMUN LIBR	XZ\$
AK	KENAI PENINSULA COL, UAA	X@5
AK	KETTLESON MEM LIBR	Q2V
AK	KODIAK COL LIBR	XZ@
AK	NENANA PUB LIBR	X\$6
AK	PALMER PUB LIBR	XZV
AK	PETERSBURG PUB LIBR	Q2T
AK	SEWARD COMMUN LIBR	X@3
AK	SITKA SCH DIST	Q2Y
AK	SOUTHEAST ISLAND SCH DIST	Q3K
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, ANCHORAGE	UAA
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, ELMER E RASMUSON LIBR	UAF
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, SE KETCHIKAN CAM LIBR	Q3J
AK	VALDEZ CONSORTIUM LIBR	X#2



Legacy of the chief /

Ronald N **Simpson**

2001 **1st ed.**

English Book : Fiction 800 p. : ill., maps ; 24 cm.

Anchorage, Alaska : Publication Consultants, ; ISBN: 1888125861

Subtitle: Ahtna chief Nicolai and his grandsons at the time of historic Kennecott Copper and its Copper River and Northwestern Railway in the territory of Alaska

Libraries with Item:

Location	Library	Code
AK	ALASKA STATE LIBR	ALK
AK	ANCHORAGE MUNICIPAL LIBR	XYZ
AK	FAIRBANKS N STAR BOROUGH LIBR	X#4
AK	KENAI COMMUN LIBR	XZ\$
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, ANCHORAGE	UAA
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, ELMER E RASMUSON LIBR	UAF
AK	VALDEZ CONSORTIUM LIBR	X#2

Legacy of the chief /

Ronald N **Simpson**

2002 **2nd ed.**

English Book : Fiction 800 p. : ill., maps ; 23 cm.

Copper Center, AK : Copper Rail Histories ; Anchorage, Alaska : Publication Consultants, ; ISBN: 1888125950

Subtitle: Ahtna chief Nicolai and his grandsons at the time of historic Kennecott Copper and its Copper River and Northwestern Railway in the territory of Alaska

Libraries with Item:

Location	Library	Code
AK	SEWARD COMMUN LIBR	X@3
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, ANCHORAGE	UAA

Tatl'ahwt'aenn nenn' =

The headwaters people's country : narratives of the Upper Ahtna Athabaskans /

Katie **John**; James M **Kari**

1986

English Book x, 219 p. : ill., maps ; 23 cm.

Fairbanks : Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska, ; ISBN: 1555000002 (pbk.)

Libraries with Item:

Location	Library	Code
AK	A HOLMES JOHNSON MEM LIBR	XZ#

AK	ALASKA RES LIBR & INFO SERV	RLA
AK	ALASKA RES LIBR, BUR OF LAND MGT	UDA
AK	ALASKA STATE LIBR	ALK
AK	ANCHORAGE MUNICIPAL LIBR	XYZ
AK	ANCHORAGE MUS OF HIST & ART LIBR	XY6
AK	ANCHORAGE SCH DIST	XY4
AK	CHARTER COL LIBR	C#Z
AK	CHUKCHI CONSOR LIBR	X\$4
AK	FAIRBANKS N STAR BOROUGH LIBR	X#4
AK	FORT WAINWRIGHT POST LIBR	V91
AK	HAINES COOP LIBR	Q2R
AK	KENAI COMMUN LIBR	XZ\$
AK	KENAI PENINSULA COL, UAA	X@5
AK	KODIAK COL LIBR	XZ@
AK	KUSKOKWIM CONSORTIUM LIBR	XY7
AK	MATANUSKA SUSITNA COL	XZU
AK	MOUNT EDGECUMBE HIGH SCH LIBR	Q2W
AK	SEWARD COMMUN LIBR	X@3
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, ANCHORAGE	UAA
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, ELMER E RASMUSON LIBR	UAF
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, SE KETCHIKAN CAM LIBR	Q3J
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, SE, JUNEAU	Y4Z
AK	US FISH & WILDLIFE SERV, ALASKA AREA OFF	UDK
AK	VALDEZ CONSORTIUM LIBR	X#2

Opening the Alaskan package /

John C Reed

1966

English Book p. 147-162 : ill., map ; 28 cm.

[New York, N.Y. : Explorers Club,

Summary of major American exploration in Alaska, including trips by Kennicott, Dall, Schwatka, Stoney, Allen, Harriman, and Brooks.

Libraries with Item:

Location	Library	Code
AK	ALASKA STATE LIBR	ALK
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, ANCHORAGE	UAA

Meteorology /

Fred W Fickett

1964, 1900 [1st facsim. ed.]

English Book p. [488]-494 ; 29 cm.
Seattle, Wash. : Shorey,

Libraries with Item:

Location	Library	Code
AK	ANCHORAGE MUNICIPAL LIBR	XYZ
AK	ANCHORAGE SCH DIST	XY4
AK	GEOPHYSICAL INST, INT ARCTIC RES CTR	ES0
AK	KENAI PENINSULA COL, UAA	X@5
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, ELMER E RASMUSON LIBR	UAF
AK	UNIV OF ALASKA, SE, JUNEAU	Y4Z