

**Governor John F.A. Strong**  
**8th Governor of the Territory of Alaska, 1913-1918**



Alaska State Library - Historical Collections

**J. F. A. (John Franklin Alexander) Strong (1856-1929)**

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**Title:** Governor John F.A. Strong, 8th Governor of the Territory of Alaska, 1913-1918.  
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**Subject.LCSH:** Governors--Alaska  
**Personal Name:** Strong, J.F.A. (John Franklin Alexander), 1856-1929  
**Corporate Name:** Alaska. Governor (1913-1918 : Strong)  
**Location:** Juneau (Alaska)  
**Region:** Southeast Alaska  
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 Image (Portrait photographs)  
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### More about J. F. A. Strong:

*“It is simply the continuation of the policy of misgovernment that has obtained in Alaska since it became a possession of the United States with a perversity that is culpable and an indifference to our needs that is heartless.”*

— J.F.A. Strong, editor, Nome News, Oct. 14, 1899, on the lack of postal service for Nome in the winter of 1899-1900.

John Franklin Alexander Strong had already enjoyed a stellar career as a newsman in Washington and Alaska when President Woodrow Wilson appointed him territorial governor in 1913. During his five-year term, Gov. Strong, who had once used his newspapers to voice his discontent with the federal government, sought political means to make change. He criticized Washington for the pitiful amount of money budgeted for Alaska schools. He fought against big interests that sought to monopolize Alaska fisheries. He helped shepherd the founding of the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines. He lobbied for statehood, and otherwise did his best to serve the territory that he'd adopted as his home. Like others who serve the public, he did some things wrong and many things right. However, Strong carried a secret that would dishonor him.

J. F. A. Strong, also known in his newspaper circles as “Major Strong,” came North from Puget Sound in the Klondike Gold Rush and published papers in Dawson and Skagway. When Nome boomed in 1899, Strong and his young wife, Annie, headed west, founding first the *Nome News*, then the *Nome Nugget*. Five years later, after Nome played out, the Strongs moved on to smaller gold rushes, first to Katalla, then Iditarod (where he served as an Alaska Delegate to the 1912 Democratic National Convention), starting newspapers at each stop and playing the role of community booster in editorials. Next came the territorial capital where Strong founded yet another paper that's still in publication today as the *Juneau Empire*.

Strong was a popular choice when he was selected territorial governor. But in 1918, five years after his appointment, Strong was summarily dismissed by President Wilson when his well-kept secret surfaced. The president discovered that Gov. Strong was not from Kentucky, as he'd always claimed, but was a British subject, born and raised in Salmon Center, New Brunswick, Canada. Furthermore, Strong was a bigamist, having left a wife and three children in Canada before relocating to the Puget Sound area in 1888.

There was no mention of Strong's secret when news of his fatal heart attack appeared in the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* on July 29, 1929, two days after his death. His passing warranted a single paragraph in the *Anchorage Daily Times*. He and Annie had spent their remaining years together between Los Angeles and Seattle, with one year on a world tour. Upon Annie's death in 1947, at age 77, she made many bequests to Alaska organizations, including a collection of books, letters and music to the University of Alaska. The Territorial Museum in Juneau received a collection of Native baskets and totems. And, in memory of J. F. A. Strong, funds were designated to the University of Alaska for a journalism scholarship.

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### Links:

The Political Graveyard

<http://politicalgraveyard.com/bio/strong.html#RIU16LW0A>

Alaska Newspaper Project, Alaska State Library:

<http://www.library.state.ak.us/hist/newspaper/newspaper.html>

"Stories of the Gold Rush," Alaska State Library:

<http://www.library.state.ak.us/goldrush/stories/news.htm>

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### Birth of an institution

"When the Legislature convened in 1917, the idea of establishing an agricultural college at Fairbanks seemed ridiculous to most people at the capital but, as time passed, it was interesting to note how the attitude toward the College was changing and people were more willing to listen to argument in its favor. One prominent pioneer of Juneau said the morning after the Legislature had closed, I am almost persuaded to your college." And, when the bill finally passed, there were seven votes against it in the House but only one in the Senate. The bill was approved May 3, 1917.

"By this act and a subsequent one, the Legislature accepted the four sections of land granted by congress for a site of an agricultural college and school of mines, appropriated \$60,000.00 for buildings and equipment, authorized the Governor of the Territory to appoint eight trustees as a governing board and prescribed general rules for its conduct.

"On August 10, 1917, **Gov. J. F. A. Strong** of Alaska, appointed the following as trustees of the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines: H.B. Parkin, A.J.

Nordale, A. R. Heilig, R.C. Wood, Mrs. Luther C. Hess, Phil Ernst, L. S. Keller and L. F. Shaw. The Board of Trustees held their first meeting September 5, 1917.”

— Harriet Hess, remembering the founding of the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines. Excerpted from *Farthest-North Collegian* Vol. 3, No. 2, July 1925. The full text can be found at [www.alaska.edu/opa/eInfo/index.xml?StoryID=281](http://www.alaska.edu/opa/eInfo/index.xml?StoryID=281).

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