



The
SIBERIAN
LETTERS
of **GEORGE**
KENNAN
the Elder,
1866-1867

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OCCASIONAL PAPER # 310



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This Occasional Paper has been produced with the support of the George F Kennan Fund.

The Kennan Institute is most grateful for this support.

The views expressed in Kennan Institute Occasional Papers are those of the author.

The author would like to thank her students in History 401, Seminar in Advanced Historical Study, at the College of Staten Island/ City University of New York, for their work on George Kennan and his letters.

Cover Image: George Kennan the Elder, 1868

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George Kennan the elder (1845–1924) was America’s first Russia expert and the namesake of the Kennan Institute, which was founded in part by his nephew George Frost Kennan (1904–2005), the architect of containment. Kennan the elder played an exceptionally important role in the history of Russian–American relations. From 1776 to the mid-1880s, Russia and America had been what one scholar aptly called “distant friends.”¹ Russia and America were cautiously friendly toward each other. Specific episodes of this good feeling included the correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and Emperor Alexander I and the visit of the Russian Navy to the port of New York in 1863, which was seen as support for the Union during the U.S. Civil War. Alexander II, who had abolished serfdom in 1861, was often compared to Abraham Lincoln.² Both Russians and Americans often compared Siberia with the American West as a land of the future.³ In the 1880s, Kennan led a major shift in American public opinion, turning it against the Russian government due to its treatment of political prisoners in Siberia. This shift in public opinion from a generally positive, if not particularly well-informed, view of the Russian government to a more critical and skeptical one proved to be long lasting.⁴

Kennan the elder was once young, though, and this work seeks to make him come alive through his own letters from his first trip to Siberia. Kennan went to work on the Russian–American Telegraph Expedition from 1865 to 1867, enduring some of the most inhospitable areas of the globe when he was just 20 years old. Kennan was born in 1845, and according to his unpublished autobiography, his interest in travel began early. “Before I was five years of age,” Kennan wrote, “I had a whole fleet of small wooden boats – cargo ships, warships, and pirates, which had been made for me by my father, or carved out of blocks by myself, and which I used to sail over the carpet in the dining room to remote ports in the

tropical zone behind the stove, or to the arctic regions in the spare bedroom, where there was no fire.”⁵ At 12 years of age, he had to quit school to support his family as a telegrapher because his father had lost his money. The telegraph, which transmitted information through Morse Code, tied together the world by allowing the quick spread of news in those places connected by telegraph wire.

Kennan’s own life was tied together by the telegraph, as he reflected later: “The web of environment ... in which I was caught, in my earliest childhood, was spun out of telegraph wire ... It was the telegraph that made me an assistant breadwinner for my father’s family, before I was twelve years of age; it was mainly the telegraph that prevented me from getting a university training; it was the telegraph that first sent me to Siberia, made me a traveler and an explorer, and gave me an interest in Russia; and to the telegraph I am indebted for my introduction to journalism, literature and the lecture field. I have sometimes wandered far, but by a telegraph line, or the influence of a telegraph line, I have always and everywhere been bound.”⁶

Kennan was forced to give up his boyhood early and become the provider for his family, which was difficult both in terms of his broken education, which he supplemented with voracious reading, and his sense that he had to be a man at a time when he was still really a boy. This sense of tension was crystallized when, at 13 or 14, he witnessed a gruesome amputation and felt nauseated and weak.⁷ This made him doubt his manhood, as did his rejection from the Union forces on grounds of his young age and doubtful health. Instead, he served in the Military Telegraph Corps, working for the Union but unable to see action and prove his mettle.⁸

Stationed at various places, it was in Cincinnati in 1863–4 that the long hours at the telegraph key began to lower his spirits. In response, he deliberately tested himself, walking the rough streets of what was still

a frontier town after he finished work at 2 a.m. and watching dangerous events, such as a criminal cutting someone's throat, without feeling faint. It was not enough. He began to feel that he would have a nervous breakdown if he were unable to leave Cincinnati.⁹ When he learned of the opportunity to go to Siberia as part of a massive project to connect the telegraph networks of Europe and America, he jumped at the chance.

The telegraph networks in America and Europe had quickly developed from the 1830s, but a big gap remained. There was no way to directly telegraph between the two continents, which meant that news was often weeks or months old by the time the ships that brought it arrived. Whoever could first connect the two would be able to charge high prices, at least until competitors managed the same feat, and would be hailed as a technological pioneer. There were several attempts to lay a cable at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, but various problems meant that the first attempts ended in failure.¹⁰ Cyrus Field worked on solving the problem on the Atlantic side, but another nineteenth-century visionary, Perry Collins, thought that another solution would be to connect the United States and Russia by going through Canada, Russian America (from 1867, known as Alaska), over the Bering Strait, and Siberia to bring together the American and Russian telegraph networks.¹¹

Despite serious difficulties, Collins was able to get agreement from British and Russian authorities and benefitted when Western Union bought him out. Kennan joined the Siberian group, known as the Russian-American Telegraph Expedition and became the most significant American traveler to Siberia after the first, John Ledyard, who traveled through Siberia in 1787 and 1788.¹² Kennan, eager to prove his manhood, found the possible challenges of Siberia to be what he needed.

Those challenges were many. The first leg of travel through Kamchatka was ardu-

ous (and pointless, as the telegraph line did not go through the area), the work in subzero weather was exhausting but necessary, as in the warmer months, the tundra was too soggy to put up poles, and mismanagement within Western Union meant that one party faced starvation until Kennan rescued them at some risk to himself. To top it off, the necessary supply ships, for which they had been waiting for months, came too late in the year and were stuck in the ice, forcing Kennan, who was in charge of the division headquartered at Gizhiga, on the Sea of Okhotsk, to share his party's dwindling supplies with the crew.

In 1866, after the successful laying of the transatlantic cable, Western Union decided to end the project, but Kennan did not receive this news until nearly a year later. Unfortunately, he had invested most of his earnings in the Western Union extension stock. This stock could have been exchanged for regular Western Union stock prior to the closing of the project, but Kennan found out about the project's closure too late to make the exchange.¹³ He lost most of his earnings and the possibility of paying off his father's debts and creating the foundation of a financially comfortable future.

And yet Siberia proved to be his destiny. In 1870, he published *Tent Life in Siberia*, which went through multiple editions and is considered by experts to be one of the great nineteenth-century works of travel.¹⁴ The book presents his hardiness as a fact rather than as an assertion, and the reader is impressed by his strength, equanimity, and powers of observation. The book made him an extremely successful lecturer.

The letters presented here show a more complex and human picture. We see Kennan in playful, angry, resigned, and expansive moods. His constant assertion that he was strong enough for the work (he was writing various members of his family) shows that he still felt that they needed to be convinced. The letters chosen are a selection from those held at

the Manuscripts and Archives Division of the New York Public Library. Because the major works on Kennan have focused on the larger Kennan archive at the Library of Congress for this period and others, these letters have not been studied until now and they help to give a deeper understanding of Kennan the elder when he was on the brink of his destiny.

It should not be a surprise that Kennan's view of Russia in the letters and in *Tent Life* was positive, given that this was the general view of Russia until Kennan himself led a shift toward a negative evaluation of the Russian government in the mid-1880s. In addition, Kennan was an ardent supporter of the Union, and, as mentioned earlier, Russia was seen also seen as a supporter. There were personal reasons to take a more positive view, linked to his need to be seen as a full-fledged adult and as a strong and capable man. If Kennan had rejected Russia in his writings, he probably feared that his readers would conclude that he was somehow not up to the difficult physical tasks of the expedition. This was not something that Kennan was willing to imply.

Kennan emerged as one of the main supporters of the Russian government. In 1870, Kennan traveled to the Caucasus for more material for his lectures. He presented the warfare against the Chechens and other mountain tribes as the unfortunate but necessary march of Russian civilization.¹⁵ Later on, Kennan was drawn back to Siberia due to criticisms of the Russian government's treatment of exiles there, which he expected to be able to refute.¹⁶

In 1885, in what would prove to be the turning point of his life, Kennan embarked on an extensive tour of the Siberian exile system. The Russian government provided him with assistance. At the same time, he met Nikolai Iadrintsev, a Siberian regionalist who, with others, was charged with declaring a United States of Siberia in 1865 as an independent republic and been exiled away from Siberia.¹⁷ He later wrote *Siberia as a Colony*, which argued that the Russian government exploited Siberia

and included information on the extent and conditions of the exile system. Iadrintsev also connected Kennan with a network of political prisoners and exiles whose personal testimony deepened Kennan's dawning rejection of the system.¹⁸

Kennan returned from the trip an avowed critic of the Russian government. His lectures on the exile system proved to be a sensation. He would appear in the typical garb of a Siberian exile, including shackles.¹⁹ With the publication of his *Siberia and the Exile System* in 1891, his fame only grew. Its impact has often been compared to *The Gulag Archipelago*.

As a whole, the 1890s were the most influential decade of Kennan's life. He influenced public opinion in favor of political prisoners, sometimes smoothing over their radical and revolutionary ideas, and against the Russian government. He emphasized that he was only a critic of the Russian government even as he was a friend of the Russian people, writing that "As for me, my sympathies are with the Russia of the people, not the Russia of the tsars; with the Russia of the provincial assemblies, not the Russia of the secret police; with the Russian of the future, not the Russia of the past."²⁰

At the same time, Kennan's political activity was not the only force in his life. In the latter part of the 1890s, he started refusing to give lectures on exile-related topics, stating they were too depressing, and turned again to lectures dealing with his first adventures in Siberia in the 1860s.²¹ Kennan was dismayed at the rise of the Bolsheviks to power and died in 1924. He remains one of the most influential Russia experts in American history.

But let us now turn to his letters, where he was not yet "the elder," but a young man out to prove himself through adventure.

In the first letter, we see Kennan working on his descriptive writing and displaying his habit of contrasting high and low. Here, he contrasts the ethereal beauty of Siberian nature with the filthy interior of a subterranean dwelling of the settled Koryak, a Siberian Native tribe. The letter includes what he presents as a fragment from his notebook, which served as one of the sources for Chapter 21 in *Tent Life in Siberia*, where he also presented a description of such a habitation. David Wrobel has noted that Kennan strongly preferred

what he called the “wandering Koraks,” who he saw as manly, strong, and independent, unlike the settled Koraks, who he felt had received the vices of civilization but none of the virtues.²² Kennan, in later life, defended the land rights of Native Americans, influenced partly by his favorable memories of Siberian Natives.²³

A note about editorial conventions: writing above the line in the original is indicated by { }, while sections that are struck out of the original are shown as [].

Head Quarters Asiatic Division
Ghijiga N.E. Siberia
Jan 31st – Feb. 12th [18]66

My Dear Sister Hattie;

My last letter to you was written I believe in a snowstorm on the Paren River where I passed one night on my way to “Camp Kennan” Tilghai River the present situation of Lieut Sanfords party. The letter was neither very long nor very interesting as of course it naturally would not be under such circumstances. I wrote it more as a curiosity and with a view to pass away the long long Arctic night then with any expectation that it would prove especially interesting. It’s not everyday however that you that you receive a letter written in a Siberian snowstorm a hundred miles from the nearest house. On my return to Ghijiga I met with a variety of not very pleasant adventures some of which I propose to relate for your amusement. Acting upon Sanford’s suggestion I’ll the sketch “Telegraphing in Siberia.” You can put it with my other sketches and you will eventually have quite a series. The descriptions of scenery etc. in the following you can rely upon as accurate. I have not tried to exaggerate or color them at all.

Telegraphing in Siberia

Part II

A torn leaf from the notebook of a Telegrapher

It was a clear and intensely cold morning on the coast of Penjinsk Gulf. Although it was nearly ten o’clock the sun had not yet risen but the single white star in the east quivered faintly and more faintly in the widening orange of dawn, and the snowy mountains of Kamanoi came out in more and more distinct relief against the deepening flush of daylight. A profound silence reigned around the lonely “yourt” in the woods which skirted the river and but for the loaded sledges which stood among the trees and the dogs curled up like black balls on the snow one would not have imagined that the huge snow drift before him was a human habitation. The scene was distinctively Siberian in every characteristic – the wonderfully clear transparent atmosphere, the dense grey mist hanging motionless over the open water of the gulf, the vast snowy steppe stretching away from the fringe of timber to the white spectral mountains in the distance, the dogs and sledges grouped carelessly here and there among the trees in the foreground, all composed a picture which has no counterpart out-

side of North Eastern Asia. As a glittering segment of the sun appeared between the distant cloud like peaks of Kamenoi the scene was one of enchanting beauty. The horizontal rays of light colored by some subtle influence of atmosphere seemed not merely to throw an external flush upon the objects which they touched but to fairly transfuse and imbue them with a deep glow to their very centre as if the rosy light was internal and shone out through a translucent medium. The elms around the yurt covered heavily with frost by the vapor from the open water of the gulf were lit up with a glory indescribable. Not only did every branch and delicate twig flash and sparkle like a string of jewels but seemed imbued by the red light of sunrise with color like rose quartz. The elm which overhung the yurt was one intricate network of rose color relieved by dazzling flashes of light as the gentle morning air stirred the branches. It was the very apotheosis of a tree. As the increasing light brought out more clearly the outlines of the mountains on the western horizon they too seemed touched with the wand of an enchanter and assumed a series of fantastic and constantly varying shapes as beautiful in coloring as they were novel in form – colossal pillars sculptured from rose quartz stretched up apparently thousands of feet into the air, mountains appeared inverted upon mountains and lower down a perfect chaos of startling precipices huge jagged rocks and picturesque valleys. While watching and admiring these the pillars would gradually unite their tops and form a Titanic arch like the portal of heaven through which appeared the blue of the sky beyond. Then the whole would melt {imperceptibly} into an extensive fortress with massive bastions and buttresses, flanking towers & deep embrasures, salient and reentering angles whose shadows and perspective were as natural as reality itself. Imagine this magnificent mirage suffused with a soft rose color by the rays of the rising sun and the reader will be able perhaps to form a faint idea of ones of the most beautiful of northern phenomena. Nothing which I have ever seen in the north surpasses it in beauty except the Auroral display of February 1865.

Our little party however had but a short time to indulge in admiration keen as might be their appreciation of the beautiful since we were to start on that day for the Paren River distant forty versts²⁴ across the steppe. The aesthetical therefore gave way to the practical and we were soon engaged in the prosaic every day duty of harnessing dogs packing sledges and preparing amid general confusion for a start. One by one the sledges departed with their loads and the long line wound in a torturous course across the steppe toward the Korak village of Kuil. Perhaps I ought to apologise for using the word village to designate the settlement of Kuil. I have no reason for so doing except that as it resembles nothing else on earth it must be a village Webster and all other lexicographers to the contrary notwithstanding. At first sight the traveller imagines that he looks upon a collection of Titanic hourglasses rudely constructed of wood which at some remote period had been expanded laterally by vertical pressure & reduced to a state of rickety dilapidation in the process. He examines them perhaps with the curiosity of an antiquarian as relics of some past age and unknown people but the idea of their present habitation by human beings hardly suggests itself to him. Upon being informed that the nondescript structure before him is a house, the wondering traveller enquires very naturally for the door. His greasy skin clad guide points with a broad grin of amusement to a smooth black pole set at an angle from the ground to the upper edge of the rickety hourglass. Perplexed to know what connection there is between a pole and a door he perhaps hesitates until his guide with a dexterity only to be acquired by long practice, climbs the pole and looks back at him from the summit with a few unintelligible words of gibberish which evidentially means “come up”. Very easy to say, but, for one whose early gymnastic education has been neglected, very difficult to accomplish. With shortened breath and dirty hands however he gains the summit only in time to see his guide disappear through a round black holes like the mouth of a chimney out of which the smoke is pouring in dense black clouds. Stifled and blinded by the smoke he follows the example of his leader &

lowers himself into the hole with a well founded apprehension of bringing up eventually either in an oven or a fire place. Trusting blindly however to good luck he slides down another oily pole until his feet meet Terra firma where, as he opens his fearful eyes to ascertain his situation he is saluted with a chorus of drawling “zda-ro-o-o-va-a-a’s”²⁵ from half a dozen skinny greasy old women who sit cross-legged on a raised platform around the fire sewing fur clothes. –The interior of a Korak yourt presents a strange and not very inviting appearance to a person who more fortunate than myself has never become accustomed to its dirt smoke and frigid atmosphere. It receives its only light and that of a cheerless gloomy character through the round hole above, which serves as window door and chimney and which is reached by a round log standing perpendicularly in the center.

The beams rafters and logs which compose the yourt are all of a glossy blackness from the smoke in which they are constantly enveloped. A wooden platform raised about a foot from the earth extends out from the walls on three sides to a width of six feet leaving an open spot eight or ten feet in diameter in the center for the fire and a huge copper kettle of melting snow. On the platform are pitched square skin tents called “pologs” which serve as sleeping apartments [and as] for inmates and as a refuge from the smoke which is sometimes almost unendurable. These “pologs” are lighted and warmed by a burning wick of dried moss floating in a pan of seal fat. A little circle of stones on the ground forms the fireplace over which is usually simmering a kettle of fish or reindeer meat which with youkala seals blubber and brain oil forms the Korak bill of fare. Everything that one sees and touches is dirty and greasy – The yourt of our old Korak friend Cheekin where our party stopped to drink tea presented upon our arrival an unusually repulsive appearance. On one side of the fire lay a huge dead seal in the process of thawing out while three or four women with arms bare and bloodied to the shoulder were engaged in cutting up a second. Beside the platform reposed a dog with a litter of young puppies whose squealing and whining mingled melodiously with the yells of two frantic babies and the horrible guttural lullaby of some old hag in one of the pologs. I slid down the log into the yourt and stood for a moment undecided whether to remain or to make a speedy exit. While deliberating upon the matter S – came down the pole like a falling star striking an unwary Korak who stood underneath on the head and doubling him up like an interrogation point. After a moment’s consultation we concluded to put aside our fastidiousness (what little we had left) and remain. As S.- remarked we had travelled too long in Siberia to yield to any such feelings of delicacy now. In a few moments Cheekin set before us on the head of an old barrel a tempting lunch of pine seeds and raw fish and even carried his hospitality to the extent of offering us a blubber stew with brain oil accompaniments. Highly as we appreciated his motives we felt compelled to decline the latter delicacy with thanks. Such sybaritic luxuries if indulged in are apt to unfit a man for the hardships incident to the lot of the explorer and make him discontented with the plainer fare of his everyday life. With rare thoughtfulness our host Cheekin brought literature to enliven our banquet in the shape of an old torn copy of the “London Illustrated News” from which we learned that “on Wednesday [the] Her Majesty the Queen rode out in her coach and four accompanied by the Countess of Salisbury” and that “the Prince of Wales rode horseback with his first equerry in waiting and a few gentlemen.” Of course this information gave us the most intense satisfaction. After doing ample justice to the banquet of this modern Sucullus we bade all the old women “Tahum” and achieved the ascent of the chimney – If the tears that were rolling down our cheeks were any criterion the parting with those old women was a heart rending one -----

T. i tak dalshe²⁶

George Kennan to Hattie Kennan, January 31 – February 12, 1866, Box 1, Folder 1, George Kennan Papers, Manuscript and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

The following letter is of great importance, as it shows that Kennan presented himself as a Siberian exile as early as 1866. Although it has been stated that Kennan did not write about Siberian exiles during this first trip, the fact that he titled his projected memoir *Life, Sufferings and Captivity of a Siberian Exile* is significant, because it shows a degree of identification with Siberian exiles. While it may have begun as a joke to show his family that he felt the separation from them keenly, this identification would only grow with time to the point that he would lecture in the costume of a Siberian exile, complete with shackles. He also makes a point of asserting that his consti-

tution is a strong one and not delicate at all. It is possible that being a Siberian exile was a way to separate himself from his family and to establish an adult identity. The letter also provides a clear explanation of the structure of the telegraph expedition and an interesting account of his work as a doctor in Siberia. The letter lacks the final part and signature, as do several others reproduced here. The recipient was Dr. Charles Morrill of Norwalk, Ohio, Kennan's hometown. Morrill (1820-1892) was a homeopathic doctor who lived to age 72, working up to the end, having gone on a house call the day before he died.²⁷ This letter is lacking the final pages and signature.

Ghijigha Head of Ghijighinski Gulf
Monday July 4th – 16th 1866

Dear Doctor,

I suppose Doctor you are now for the first time aware of the existence of such a place as that whose unpronounceable name stands at the head of this sheet. I fancy I see you as you tear open the envelope and glance at the letter, turn half around in that easy office chair of yours and demand with a look of astonishment, "Ghijigha! Where in the ----- name of all that's geographical is that?" You needn't look up some old Colton's Atlas or musty gazeteer with the hopes of finding it: Previous to our arrival it hadn't assumed sufficient importance to attract the attention of map publishers and gazeteer men so that we may be regarded for all practical intents and purposes as original discoverers. It is a little village situated in North Eastern Siberia at the head of Ghijighinski Gulf one of the northern arms of the Okhotsk Sea, a village destined to come into future notoriety as the "Head Quarters of the Asiatic Division Russian American Telegraph Co." I have been living here idly since my return from Anadyrsk on the 27th of March awaiting the arrival of our vessels but as they seem to have abandoned us entirely I have taken to writing my own memoirs in three volumes profusely illustrated to {be} handed down to posterity by my friends in case the said vessels never come and I fail to succeed in getting once more to a civilized country. It's to be entitled "Life sufferings and captivity of a Siberian Exile" written by himself. In the intervals of this more serious labor by way of relaxation I am also writing letters to all my friends with the faint hope of eliciting some response it being now fourteen months since I last heard from friends or home. I intended to have written you last winter previous to my departure for Anadyrsk but my time was almost wholly occupied with preparation for winter travel arrangements for dogs, sledges, and the outfit of our little party so that I had barely time to write a short letter home. Since that time I have wandered continually like a restless Korak over all the country between here and the Gulf of Anadyrsk driving my sledge in the day and sleeping on the snow under the blue polar sky at night so that I could not have written had I felt inclined. I never have received a letter from home since I wrote them that I was about to start for Kamchatka and I have a great curiosity to see what they thought when they learned that we had gone north through Kamchatka on horseback. Many were the anxious consultations of the little family circle around the fireside I have no doubt as the long winter evenings came on and great the fears for our safety. I know exactly how they would

talk; Father would expatiate upon my being too ambitious, too reckless & adventurous and would express fears that I might volunteer to go on hazardous & difficult expeditions too fatiguing for my strength. Mother would ever have before her eyes a picture of her wandering son lying sick in some miserable hut in the wilderness without friends without assistance & with no Doctor Morrill to help him out of his difficulties, while Jennie would talk anxiously of the hardships the storms the extreme cold and the danger that that “delicate constitution” of mine would give out under the many trials to which it would be subjected. Hattie with a little spark of pride in her brother’s adventurousness would combat Father’s views but still think with a sigh how hard it was to be exiled for so long from home friends society and country. Read them the letter & see if it isn’t exactly what they have thought a hundred times. In the meanwhile the unconscious subject of their discussions was driving dog sledges, hunting reindeer, getting lost in mountain storms, & living in Korak or Tchucktchi yourts on vast snowy steppes six thousand miles away. Happily none of their gloomy anticipations were realized. I have been on one or two somewhat hazardous expeditions but good fortune and good health have never deserted me & I have the satisfaction of knowing that I have not failed in anything which I have undertaken. I think that the strength of my constitution is now triumphantly proved: I have a better opinion of it myself than I have ever had before since it has held out through the hardships we have had to experience and it won’t do for Mother to base her fears any longer upon my delicate health & “want of vitality”!! Perhaps she thinks it doesn’t require any vitality to sleep on the snow in a temperature of 50° below zero, to ride horseback for a week wet to the skin day and night with nothing of any account to eat, to travel in five months on horses, reindeer & sledges over six thousand versts of Siberian country. Perhaps it don’t, but I think a young man with a delicate constitution would experience some difficulty in doing it.

I have written home an account of our “travels and adventures” which I presume Father has shown you so I won’t repeat it again but give you a short summary of the work accomplished in the Asiatic Division since our arrival here in December and the prospects for the successful construction of the line. The route six thousand versts in length between the Amoor River and Behrings Straits has been explored and located although in one or two places a further exploration in summer is desirable. Houses & buildings for our use have been purchased or built at Okhotsk Yamsk Ghijigha Penjina Anadyrsk & various other points along the route. Dogs sledges and reindeer for purposes of transportation have been bought and are on hand. Work has been going on at numerous places between here and Okhotsk & a considerable number of poles are in the ground. Fifty laborers were engaged at Anadyrsk in April and we confidently believe that all the poles for the Anadyr River are by this time cut and distributed as Mr Bush had ordered to raft them down the river as soon as the ice would permit. Yourts or houses for shelter have been built every thirty or forty miles between Anadyrsk & the mouth of the river and everything is so to speak in a state of forwardness. This has been accomplished since December by five men. The exploration was entirely satisfactory and I believe there is not a doubt in the minds of any of the officers who made it but that the line in Asia can be successfully built & maintained. I located the route between here and the mouth of the Anadyr and for that portion of it I can speak confidently. I would guarantee, properly supported, to build it in two years & work it as successfully and cheaply as any line of equal length in the States. I do not speak hastily or without consideration; I have been over the whole of it two or three times and am thoroughly acquainted with all of the obstacles and difficulties. The route between the Amoor River and the straits may be divided accordingly to the nature of the country into three distinct & widely differing divisions each presenting peculiar obstacles & each requiring a different method in the construction of the line. First the timbered region extending from the Amoor to a point two hundred miles west of Ghizigha. Second the barren region from that point to the Aklan River a distance of five hundred versts and Thirdly the river region from the Aklan to the mouth of the Anadyr eight

hundred versts. In the first division the heaviest work will consist of chopping away the abundant and unnecessary timber to make a road for the line. In the second the difficulty will be in transporting poles from long distances on dog sledges as there is hardly a tree in the whole 500 versts except occasionally on the banks of the streams. In the third or River division there is no difficulty of great importance: the line will follow everywhere the course of timbered & for the most part navigable rivers where there will be no necessity either of chopping away timber or of bringing poles from long distances. The rivers afford abundance of game and fish and excellent sites for stations. We will always be able to supply the stations throughout the year with fresh meat which can be obtained at a trifling price from the numerous tribes of Tongoos Koraks and Tchucktchis who roam with immense herds of reindeer everywhere. Horses and cattle will take care of themselves throughout the year in most places. There are thousands of them at Kolyma in lat 71°. Cabbages and turnips can be cultivated here & potatoes parsnips carrots & beans between here and the Amoor. Fish geese and ducks abound everywhere in summer. You see that the question of subsistence is not one which need trouble us. As for scurvy, it is almost unnecessary to say I have never heard of such a thing in the country. When the line is built & in working order, comfortable station houses constructed every thirty or forty miles each supplied with dog teams horses & cattle & surrounded by a little garden, newspapers magazines and new books circulating at short intervals throughout the line from St. Petersburg (arrangements for the have already been made), I really cannot see that it will be such a terrible hardship to live here. The officers will have light labor and plenty of amusement. They can cultivate their little garden, ride horseback, sail, shoot bear and reindeer in the summer and read, write, sleep, drive dog teams & trap foxes hares and partridges in the winter to say nothing of masquerades, dances, dog racing, and walking on snow shoes which are among the amusements of that season. We shall always get the news of the world of course as promptly and regularly as if we lived at home. I may be peculiar in my views but I had rather live two years of such a life here than one of that dull monotonous treadmill existence which I lived in Cincinnati. I have probably experienced as great hardships as any that can befall travelers in this country and much greater than will be possible for any of the employees to experience hereafter, yet on the whole I have enjoyed myself pretty well so well in fact that I have no objections to a year or two more. So much for life in Siberia as it will be.

I suppose you are not aware of the fact that I have acquired considerable reputation in Siberia as a medical practitioner. It is true & is an illustration of how a reputation may be sometimes established on a very slight foundation. I am considered in Anadyrsk as deeply skilled in the healing art and the numerous cases I have had there would have made a young physician's fortune- Ha Ha. It would have been a laughable sight if you could you have seen Doctor Kennan visiting his patients on a dog sledge some bright clear winter's morning in Anadyrsk. I used to go quite often to a Russian's about three miles up the river to visit an old lady who was sick with inflammation of the lungs. I was generally driven over by a Cossack with a fine team of dogs & it used to be a very pleasant drive. Sentinels were always posted outside of the house to give notice of my approach & upon my arrival I invariably received a salute of four or five guns fired in a volley. The house was always scrubbed clean & bright, the women had on their best dresses and gayest handkerchiefs, a kettle was simmering cheerfully over a bright fire in the fire place and a bunch of deer's tongues, tarts, & similar delicacies spread on a white cloth in the center of the room. I was previously under the impression that the patient's wants took precedence over those of the physician but it is not so in Siberia. I was compelled to eat lunch drink tea and smoke before paying any attention whatever to the patient, when that was done I would make out my prescription.

George Kennan to Doctor Morrill, July 4-16, 1866, Box 1, Folder 1, George Kennan Papers, Manuscript and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

In the next letter, we see Kennan in a light, playful mood, writing his sister Harriet (Hattie) all sorts of loving nonsense, including a discussion of whether or not he should write in a playful or serious mood. The underlying message, however, is much like the earlier letter to Dr. Morrill: Kennan is neither weak nor ill and they should not worry about him. He again calls himself a Siberian exile. An interesting aspect of the letter is a brief

biographical note on Kennan's boon companion, James Dodd, an American who had lived in the area several years doing business before joining the expedition.²⁸ The letter is also the first to mention the wait for the supply ships, which would drag on for several more months and bring even more anxiety when they finally arrived. Like the earlier letter, the end is missing.

Ghijigha Light House Head of Ghijighinski Gulf A.E.S.
Monday July 9th 1866

My Dear Sister Hattie,

I have been waiting anxiously and impatiently three interminable months for the arrival of those ----- (imagine some forcible expletive) vessels of ours, with some intelligence from home and friends, and have postponed writing you from time to time thinking that I should soon receive letters, and could then write more understandingly and in a vein better suited to the circumstances of my correspondents, which I have no doubt are considerably altered since last advices. For instance (by way of illustration you know) I don't know but that in the thirteen months which have elapsed since I left America, you have passed through all the successive stages of contemplation, admiration, declaration, consultation, acceptance, preparation, consummation, congratulation, and felicitation and have gone to live in the country and settled down into a sober staid married lady; in which case you see the nonsensical raillery and fun of a hare brained brother, wouldn't be at all appropriate to your altered views tastes and circumstances, and I doubt whether it would receive even that small degree of appreciation which it deserves. Something in the shape of a treatise on Domestic economy now, or a few moral axioms to be applied to the management of a household together with some reflections upon the responsibilities, mutual relations and duties appertaining to the state of matrimony would be just the thing. I've got the outline of such a letter all elaborately drawn in my mind now ready for any emergency. Under the present circumstances however I don't know what kind of better to write, gay lively, sensible (perhaps my temperament and disposition however put the latter out of question) or grave quiet and reflective to suit the mood you may be in. If I write in accordance with my mood at present it will be a disagreeable letter, for I am in anything but an amiable one on account of the non arrival of these confounded vessels for which we have waited in breathless expectation since the first of May. The brig "Hattie Jackson" arrived from San Francisco here more than three weeks since, but to my intense disappointment there were no letters for me. "Hine illae lachimae."²⁹ Unless my friends send me some token of remembrance soon, they need expect no more lively brilliant sparkling effusion from the Siberian exile. He will conclude that he lives no more in the memory of men, and will retire from the classic precincts and gay society of the Ghijigha Light House to

the seclusion of the Korak yurt in the mountains, where he will spend the balance of his days meditation upon the shortness of human memory and the uncertainty of postal communication and Western Union telegraph vessels. – Tak i boodet.³⁰

Ghigigha Light House N.E. Siberia
In the first month of the arrival of our vessels
And the seventh day
1866

The uselessness in this country of any artificial method of computing time has induced me to date my letter from the arrival of our vessels just as the Romans dated from the “founding of the city” or the Mahommedans from the “Hegira” the events in all three cases being those of the greatest importance in the history of the individuals. The fact is I don’t know exactly what day it is and that’s the nearest approximation I can make to it. I sat down this PM to write an answer to Ella Doolittle’s letter which I never received but as the said answer must be a sober sensible sort of production as that isn’t my forte I’m not making as rapid progress as desirable & I’ve concluded to suspend operations temporarily and enliven my ideas a little by writing to you –You must feel highly flattered that I write all my sensible letters to somebody else and inflict all my nonsense upon you, & I must confess it isn’t a very grateful return for many good sisterly letters you have written me, but you may console yourself with the thought that in the flighty careless letters you receive from me you get a better, more accurate picture of your brother’s thoughts & feelings than you would form innumerable reams of common place sentiment elaborately expressed in unexceptionable language. You see more of the personality of the writer and that for me is the greatest charm of letters. Should any of my correspondents prefer the style which I have adopted [Editor’s note: part torn off]. which I want them they have only to advise me of the fact and I shall take great pleasure in complying with their wishes. I am more at home in the former style than the latter–

I cannot tell you how much pleasure your good letters have given me. The amount of enjoyment which I have extracted from them up to the present moment is almost beyond computation but as I have only read them five times of course there remains a good deal for future extraction. The letters which I received at San Francisco fifteen months ago I read at Ghijigha for almost the fortieth time only a day or two before our vessels arrived and they were not exhausted then by any means, although the absence of any later ones, and the prospect that I wouldn’t get any later ones, made the perusal of them anything but exhilarating and enlivening exercise– Dodd wouldn’t read his, declaring that if he did he should be homesick for a week & knowing that such would be the case I wouldn’t urge him for in that frame of mind he is anything but agreeable society.– Perhaps you feel some curiosity to know who this Dodd, who has my “fidus Achates”³¹ for the last year and to whom you find such numerous reflections in my letters is. “He was born in the year 1842 of rich but respectable parents” in the suburbs of the city of Trenton N.J. Like Shakespeare and many other characters of renown his early history is involved in obscurity, but from the scanty information at the disposal of his biographer it may be inferred that he early exhibited evidences of that talent for consuming eatables, and that bashfulness in the presence of, and aversion for the society of the fair sex, which have since rendered him conspicuous and made him a shining light among good livers and confirmed bachelors. He made his first appearance upon the stage of active life at Petropavloski Kamchatka; a somewhat limited theatre for the full exercise and

display of his abilities, but one which he enlivened with his presence and adorned with his talents during a period of six years. Notwithstanding the latter of the above mentioned traits of character, he always continued to be the center of attraction in the most refined Kamchadal society, a fact which is to be attributed to his personal beauty and inherent excellence {of character} rather than to any effort which he made to assume that position.- Upon the arrival at Petropavloski of the Russian American Telegraph Expedition, the Chief of that enterprise lost no time in making so valuable an acquisition as Mr. Dodd to his party; a fact which speaks equally well for his own discernment and for Mr. Dodd's worth. Since that time Mr. Dodd has been engaged in explorations in Northern Siberia under the direction of Mr. George Kennan a young and talented officer of the exploration whose name is doubtless familiar to our readers in connection with the scarcity of dried fish in North East Siberia, apprehensions having been expressed that the present year's supply will be inadequate to meet his wants.- Under the direction of one whose tastes and habits were so congenial Mr. Dodd passed a pleasant year, carrying the grace polish and easy suavity of civilized life in {to} Korak yourts & Tchucktchi tents & doing much by example & exhortation to rescue those people from barbarism & diffuse among them the amenities of civilization. Upon his return to Ghijigha he received as a recognition of his valuable services the appointment of "Section Superintendent" of the "Land Section" of the Northern Division comprising the country between Ghijigha and Anadyrsk a position which none can doubt he will fill with ability and credit to himself and to the Company. At this point we are compelled to bring our short biographical notice to a close, with many wishes for the success and happiness of its subject & with the prediction that the talents which have raised him to his present position of importance and influence will sustain and elevate him to still greater reputation and eminence. We feel assured that our readers will join us in the hearty wish that "long may he wave."

Daily Ghijigha Herald of Progress -

There! Who will say that the local editor of the "Ghijigha Herald of Progress" can't write a biography. I calmly point to the above as documentary evidence that he can. The editor wishes me to state for the benefit of the public that applications for written biographies will meet with prompt attention upon as reasonable terms as are consistent with the present advanced price of dried fish seals blubber and the other necessaries of life. Satisfaction guaranteed or money refunded. A few dried fish will be taken in part payment if offered at an early period. Ha Ha. I copied that "biography" from the style of a "puff" which Mr. Knapp received in the "Ohio State Journal" at Columbus while I was there. He will remember it. Of course it's a caricature of Mr. Dodd.

Presuming upon his superior knowledge of Russian he was indulged lately to an unwarranted extent in making fun of me to the Russian and native ladies and I feel perfectly justified in taking such satisfaction as I can. It's a fact though about his bashfulness. If he comes home with me I'll cure him of that. I would send you a photograph of him but he has none. We have travelled together now just a year and I have found him to be true in danger, cheerful under hardships which would have daunted a weaker spirit and a [tru] good friend always-

A little later

I have just been reading over your letters again and the Major remarks upon observing the smile on my face that “they appear to give me a great deal of satisfaction.” They do, with one exception. You seem to feel so much anxiety about my safety. I have already written in a letter to you all, everything which I could think of that would relieve your fears. You have never known me to deceive you, believe me when I tell you that I do not consider myself in one particle more danger here next winter than I would be at home. I did think last fall that the journey which I was about to undertake to the northward was something serious and I wrote home under that impression; - more’s the pity- but after thorough experience I have become convinced of what I have written you above, that we are all as safe here as we would be anywhere. If any one gets to sympathizing with you in a mournful sort of way about your brother’s danger, terrible hardships, “delicate constitution” and all that sort of thing making you feel anxious and uncomfortable without any reason for it laugh at them as I would if I were there and come home and read this letter.

I have been in danger only two or three times since I came to this country and these were under circumstances which will probably never occur again. Of these occasions -- once on the Samanea Mountains, once on the Tigil Mountains and once at the mouth of the Anadyr I have written you full accounts. But I positively won’t write anymore if it makes you anxious. I feel like a criminal now, for having written you, as I suppose I must have done, last winter something to increase your fears. As for my inability to live though a second winter I could laugh at the idea did you not treat it so seriously. Why my dear “Harriet” there isn’t half as much danger of my not living though next winter as there was of my not living through the last winter which I spent in Cincinnati, & no one thought the danger then was so imminent as to call for anxiety. And furthermore I had much rather spend another winter here than another such as that there. Believe me I am in earnest. Don’t let your imagination picture me as freezing to death or starving to death on any of these desolate steppes: Think of me if you like dancing at a native ball to the music of a two stringed guitar three pewter spoons and a comb or sitting with Dodd on a Korak yourt.

George Kennan to Hattie Kennan, July 9, 1866, Box 1, Folder 1, George Kennan Papers, Manuscript and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

The next letter is Kennan's draft of a letter that he must have found difficult to write, as he had to criticize his superior without alienating him. The ships, about which Kennan had already written his sister Hattie, had not come all summer. The head of the expedition, Col. Charles Bulkley, the former head of the Union military telegraph in the South, had "promised faithfully that ships with men, material, and supplies for the immediate prosecution of the work, should be at Geezhaga and at the mouth of the Anadyr River as early in the season as ice would permit them to enter."³² However, Bulkley did not keep his promise.

Major Sergei Abaza, a Russian who knew Siberia and the telegraph well, had been appointed head of the entire Siberian division, but he had not been kept informed by Bulkley, who most historians do not see as an effective leader. In his letter to Bulkley, Kennan had to report for Abaza, who Kennan very much respected but who had been left in the dark, in order to find out what Bulkley's orders were and to bring to Bulkley's attention the fact that the ship arrived too late in the season to be able to leave before ice formed. The confusion that this caused is vividly portrayed in Chapters 32 and 33 of *Tent Life* as well.

Ghijiga North Eastern Siberia
September [] October [] 1866
Col. Chas. S Bulkley
Engineer in Chief

Sir [Editor's note: space left blank in the original] Maj Abasa left this port Sept 19/ Oct 1 on the Russ. Gov Steamer Saghalin for Okhotsk. [Editor's note: space left blank] In [the] {his} absence [of Major Abasa] I have the honor to report that the Company's barque "Palmetto" arrived at Ghijiga on the 8th/20th of September after a passage of 112 days from San Francisco. Owing to her draught of water she was unable to enter the river but as she broke her best bower anchor a few days after her arrival it was considered unsafe to let her lie outside and she was accordingly run in as far as possible grounding on a bar at the mouth of the river where she now lies. By persevering effort we have succeeded in discharging nearly all of her cargo but as it could be landed only in the lighter and small boats at high tide and at night it has been a work of the greatest difficulty. The "Palmetto" has been considerably injured by pounding against the bottom in a southerly gate while she was lying on the bar but she has been pronounced by competent authority to be seaworthy and will sail from this port with the next high tide about October 5th/17th. I hope by that time to discharge all of her except sixty or seventy tons of coal which she will carry back to Petropavlovski as ballast. The Ghijiga River has closed with ice to within three miles of its mouth and the large quantities of floating ice between the vessel and shore will make it impossible to discharge the coal and replace it with ballast in time to send her to sea with the next tide. Her anchor has been replaced by a new one of equal weight obtained from the Russian Government Steamer "Saghalin" and such other additions and repairs made to her equipments as the resources of the country would allow. It is difficult while the vessel is lying here aground to

determine the extent of the injuries she has sustained and whether it will be possible for her to return this fall to San Francisco or not. Major Abasa desired me therefore to leave it to the judgment of her officers to be decided after ascertaining how she behaves in a heavy sea. Should her officers after leaving here consider her safe to go to San Francisco this fall she will do so: if not she will winter in Petropavlovski. I enclose a copy of my letter [on] [the subject] to Mr Peirce, upon the subject.

The Company's barque "Onward" has not yet arrived and the lateness of the season makes it extremely improbable that she will do so although we know nothing of her whereabouts or the disposition which has been made of her passengers and cargo. {She cannot possibly enter this port now} Mr Peirce writes by the "Palmetto" that in case the "Onward" arrives at Petropavlovski too late you have authorized him to stop her there, but Major Abasa has received no notification from you of that arrangement and Mr Peirce does not inform him what disposition you wished made of the vessel in such an emergency. [Under these circumstances Major Abasa was at a loss what dispositions to make.] Thinking [however] that the "Onward" has {probably} reached Petropavlovski he left with me an order to be sent to Petropavlovski by the "Palmetto" directing the "Onward" to discharge there her passengers and cargo and return immediately in ballast to San Francisco. A copy of the order is enclosed. [His intention in so doing was to have the "Onward" or some vessel of equal capacity and light draught come to Petropavlovski early next spring with coal, {or stores} to have her there discharge the coal, {or stores} and taking on board the cargo and passengers landed there this fall, sail direct for Ghijiga. A good vessel arriving at Petropavlovski early in May would have plenty of time to bring one cargo to Ghijiga and to return and bring the other during the summer.] If the "Onward" does not arrive at Petropavlovski at all of course this order will be of no avail- but in any case you will know what has become of her and what arrangements to make for the transportation to Ghijiga next year of her cargo wherever it may be.

Major Abasa {goes on} [left this place September 19th Oct 1st on the Russian Government Steamer "Saghalin" for] {from} Okhotsk [and] {to} Yakutsk {for the purpose of hiring} [where he goes to obtain] laborers and {purchasing} horses for next summer's work. [I regret that he had no opportunity of writing you himself before leaving but I have endeavored to express to you accurately his wishes and intentions with regard to our vessels.] {He will probably return in January} He [will] {intends to} write you fully [via St Petersburg] on his arrival at Okhotsk. I forward here with receipts for the cargo of the "Palmetto" and landing certificates for the goods in bond.

I am with much respect and esteem

Your ob[edien]t s[er]v[an]t

Geo Kennan

George Kennan to Col. Charles Bulkley, September – October 1866, Box 1, Folder 1, George Kennan Papers, Manuscript and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

The following letter has a massive chunk missing, but one small part can be read, in which Kennan unburdens himself to his father regarding the missing ships and other misfortunes. Kennan's rescue of the party of starving telegraph workers at the mouth of the Anadyr River can be found in Chapters 33 and 34 of *Tent Life*, where he notes that the "Golden Gate" arrived too late at the Anadyr River, causing terrible privation to the expedition there. A few months earlier, in December 1866, wrote Abaza that: "It looks just as if Col. Bulkley deliberately intended to 'cripple' us here, and kept the "Golden

Gate" at Plover Bay two weeks in order to accomplish his object as completely as possible! He has done it. I believe I cannot be accused by anyone of prejudice against Col. Bulkley. Never a word against him or his management has passed my lips before; but the leaving of the Bush party to starve at the mouth of the Anadyr, and the detention of the "Golden Gate" until winter set in, are things which would make a saint indignant. He may explain these to the satisfaction of the Company but he never can to mine. I have lost confidence in him entirely."³³

Head Quarters Asiatic Division
Ghijiga North Eastern Siberia
Feb 4th-16th 1867

My Dear Father,

The Company's vessels arrive here just at the setting in of winter, they are lost and their large crews are thrown on our hands in such a terrible country as the mouth of the Anadyr with only two months' provisions, and we have to take care of them and keep them alive till spring as best we can. Then comes the famine at Anadyrsk, the dogs there all die off & the people scatter to the four winds in search of food. This prevents us from bringing up the party at the mouth of the Anadyr or affording them any material assistance. Whether their provisions there will last until our vessels arrive next summer I do not know. I hope that the bringing up of 15 men will relieve them so that the other 31 will be able to get along. I wouldn't go as much anxiety another year as I have this for three times my present salary.

George Kennan to his father, John Kennan, February 4-16, 1867, Box 1, Folder 1, George Kennan Papers, Manuscript and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

The last letter, to Kennan's cousin Emma Hitchcock, provides a fitting coda to the story, as it describes in an elegiac manner another long wait for ships to arrive and the final news that they brought: that the entire expedition was to cease operations. Although Western Union had ordered this in October

1866, word did not reach Kennan until July 1867, nearly a year later.³⁴ Kennan reflects on what he will need to do to wrap up the expedition in place of Abaza and is philosophical about not being able to guess where the next New Year will find him. Like other letters, it lacks an ending.

Barque "Onward"
At Sea off Yamsk bay
August 21, 1867

Dear Cousin Emma,

Your welcome letter written I suppose some time during the year of 1865, (it was not dated) reached me per barque "Onward" about a month since, after having been once around the globe, experiencing a variety of adventures and vicissitudes which do not commonly fall to the lot of letters. How many unimaginative dead letter office clerks, and stolid Russian Government censors had puzzled over the contents before it reached my hands I don't know. It seems they found nothing treasonable in it if it was addressed to a Siberian exile, for they forwarded it on to Nikolawsk and from there to America from which country it came to across the broad Pacific. I can only conjecture in what parts of the world it has been forwarded from the curious foreign post marks and half legible writing with which the envelope is adorned. "Aachen Bromberg Eydkuhnen", Moskrae, Perm & Nicolaevsk seem to be a few of the places at which it has stopped, though where in the name of all that's geographical they are I confess my ignorance.

The long, long months which elapsed after the breaking up of winter wore wearily away with us in the expectation of vessels from America or something which should put a little life into that antiquated old settlement, Ghijiga. Day after day we climbed the steep bluff to the Light House and cast longing glances over the wide expanse of the water between the Matuga and Cape Catherine but only to turn away with a deep sigh of disappointment over the hope deferred, which makes the heart sick. Occasionally the flutter of a sea bird's wing or the looming up of an iceberg on the distant horizon would cause our hearts to leap into our throats for an instant with joyful anticipations of news and letters from the dear ones who live in "God's Country" but as the object faded away into indistinctness and finally disappeared in the blue sky, our hopes sank again even lower than before, and with slow steps and gloomy countenances we returned to our cheerless quarters.

On the afternoon of July 9th, as I sat writing at my little green table I was aroused by an exultant "hurrah" from the summit of the bluff and glanced out of the window just in time to see Fawcett waving his hat from a projecting point of the hill and Lewis coming down at a perfectly reckless speed his head at least a yard in advance of his feet which were vainly endeavoring by terrific strides to keep that portion of his body from distancing them entirely. It was evident that something had happened and I rushed out to demand an explanation. Out of breath from

the violence of his exertions Lewis could only gasp out “A ship” pointing at the same time in the direction of Cape Catherine. It was the work of only a minute to rush up the bluff to the little log tower dignified with the same name of “Light House” from which were plainly to be seen the upper yards of a large square rigged vessel standing directly in before the wind. As the whaling fleet had long before left that vicinity we at once decided that it must be one of the Company’s vessels and cartridges were hastily prepared to fire signal guns. Fearful that if we once took our eyes from her swelling sails she would vanish into thin air like the Phantom Ship or be transformed into a delusive iceberg we remained on the bluff until the fading twilight and rising mists of evening hid her from sight and the mosquitoes presuming upon our indifference to their reconnaissances made an attack in force which compelled us to seek the shelter of the house. The vessel proved to be the Company’s barque “Onward” from San Francisco and brought the unexpected and disheartening news of the abandonment of our line. I ordered her at once to Okhotsk where Major Abasa then was, and sailed on her myself intending to hand in my reports & accounts, and leave for home at once via Irkoutsk & St. Petersburg. A despatch however which Major Abasa received two days after our arrival requesting his immediate presence in St. Petersburg completely all my plans for reaching home by Christmas, and threw upon me all the labor of collecting our scattered parties, settling accounts and closing out our business. Long experience however has taught me to bear disappointment philosophically and I submitted to the extension of my exile with as good a grace as possible. Major A and I left Okhotsk on the same day, he for St. Petersburg and I for Yamsk Ghijiga and intervening points where we have parties and stores. After collecting them I shall return on the “Onward” to Okhotsk, despatch the vessel to San Francisco and await at the former place orders from St. Petersburg. I hope to be home via the latter place some time in February but of course it is very uncertain. I shall certainly reach America before summer.

I suppose our folks are in high state of excitement about this time over my expected arrival in September or October and they will be greatly disappointed to learn that I shall not be there to spend Christmas. It cannot be helped, I am much disappointed as they. Who can tell one Christmas where he shall spend the next? January 1st, 1864 New Years Day I spent at home, New Years Day 1865 I was riding a refractory mule through the dense tropical forests of flowery Nicaragua stopping here and there to pick oranges by the roadside, or to admire the flashing green and golden plumage of a beautiful bird or the green vines hanging in dense masses from the tree tops.

January 1st, 1866 I was far away on the bare desolate snow steppes of Siberia, crouching though the long Arctic night round the camp fire, whose heat was hardly felt in the deadly chill of 50 degrees below zero. I have watched the old year out and the new year in many times but none will remain longer in my memory than the clear cold starry night on the Nalgimski Steppe, under the frowning brow of Mt. Nalgim. New Years Eve 1867 found me again by the camp fire on the banks of the Paren River with a furious north easter roaring a deep diapason through the tree tops and whirling the snow in dense clouds over our heads. I awoke on New Years morning buried deep in a shroud of snow. New Years Day 1868 will find me –where?

I hope in St. Petersburg on my way home. I shall then have completed the circuit of the world and travelled enough to my content my restless spirit for a while. I shall devote my time principally to visiting my friends, becoming civilized, and enjoying once more the amenities of social life. Perhaps it would interest you my dear Coz to know what a sojourner in this dismal country misses most, for what he feels the most intense longing. It is not as you might imagine the material comforts of life such as comfortable house, a warm fireside, or a good dinner. These things

or being deprived of these is a mere trifle. I miss most music and conversation. I never before realized how essential both are to life and I never knew how dearly I loved music until I heard last summer the brass band of the Russian Corvette “Varag”. We had gone on board of her in the evening and were waked most unexpectedly the following morning by the strains of “Hail Columbia” from the powerful band of twenty pieces. We were all fairly electrified, and hardly breathed until the martial air was ended and the instruments took up the softer notes of the prison song in “Travatore” the music dying away over the still waters of the gulf and the louder passages echoing faintly from the high bluffs of Matuga.

Never before had these bluffs sent back the airs of “Travatore and Riggoletta”³⁵ and they probably never will again. I believe last winter I would have travelled on dog sledges five versts to hear the Corvettes band play the Faust March, the Anvil Chorus, and some of the beautiful airs from Martha.³⁶ That day on the “Varag” will long be remembered as a white day in my dreary calendar. When we left the vessel and she steamed slowly out her band playing “Ever be happy and blest as thou art.”³⁷ I confess I felt a choking sensation in my throat and as the waving caps on her quarter decks could no longer be seen, we all turned away with gloomy countenances and silently turned our faces toward that dismal lighthouse feeling bluer than we had for so many a long month before. You who live in a land of society and music do not realize what blessings you enjoy. Travel for two months as I did last winter with a band of dirty savage Koraks over the vast snowy steppes between Ghijiga and Anadyrsk without a soul to talk with and never once hearing your own language, live for a week or ten days in a black cold smoky underground hut without books, with no society save that of two or three old Korak women, and with a howling snow storm raging outside and see if you wouldn’t change places with almost anyone in the world.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, after Kennan wrapped up the affairs of the telegraph expedition, he undertook a 5000 mile journey by dogsled and troika to Moscow and St. Petersburg. For 30 months’ work he received just \$1000 in wages,

after his stock losses were deducted, or only about a dollar a day.³⁸ And yet the experience gave direction to the rest of his life and he would return to it again and again on the lecture circuit as one of his most popular lectures. Difficult as the experience was, he became an adult and started on his path as America’s first Russia expert.

NOTES

- 1 Norman Saul, *Distant Friends: The United States and Russia, 1763-1867* (Lawrence, KS, 1991).
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865* (Cambridge, UK, 1999).
- 4 David S. Fogelsohn, *The American Mission and the "Evil Empire": The Crusade for a "Free Russia" since 1881* (Cambridge, UK, 2007); Jane E. Good, "America and the Russian Revolutionary Movement, 1888-1905," *The Russian Review* 41, 3 (July 1982): 273-287; Frederick Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship, 1865-1924* (Athens, OH, 1990).
- 5 Quoted in Nicholas Daniloff, "George Kennan and the Challenge of Siberia," *Demokratizatsiya* 7, 4 (Fall 1999): 604-605.
- 6 Quoted in Travis, 4.
- 7 Travis, 8; Daniloff, 601.
- 8 Travis, 6.
- 9 Ibid, 7.
- 10 John Steele Gordon, *A Thread Across the Ocean: The Heroic Story of the Transatlantic Cable* (New York, 2003).
- 11 John B. Dwyer, *To Wire the World: Perry M. Collins and the North Pacific Telegraph Expedition* (Westport, CT, 2001).
- 12 John Ledyard, *John Ledyard's Journey through Russia and Siberia, 1787-1788: The Journal and Selected Letters*, ed. Stephen Watrous (Madison, WI, 1966).
- 13 Travis, 18.
- 14 David Wrobel, "Considering Frontiers and Empires: George Kennan's Siberia and the U.S. West," *Western Historical Quarterly* 46 (Autumn 2015): 285-309.
- 15 George Kennan, *Vagabond Life: The Caucasus Journals of George Kennan*, ed. Frith Maier, with contributions by Daniel C. Waugh (Seattle, 2002).
- 16 Taylor Stults, "George Kennan: Russian Specialist of the 1890s," *The Russian Review* 29, 3 (July 1970): 275-285.
- 17 Dimitri von Mohrenschildt, *Toward a United States of Russia: Plans and Projects of Federal Reconstruction of Russia in the Nineteenth Century* (Rutherford, NJ, 1981), 105.
- 18 Helen Hundley, "George Kennan and the Russian Empire: How America's Conscience Became an Enemy of Tsarism," (Kennan Institute Occasional Paper # 277).
- 19 Wrobel, 301.
- 20 Stults, 276.
- 21 Ibid, 281.
- 22 Wrobel, 293.
- 23 Ibid, 307.
- 24 A verst is equivalent to 0.6629 miles.
- 25 Russian: Greetings.
- 26 Russian: And so on and so forth.
- 27 *Commemorative Biographical Record of the Counties of Huron and Lorain, Ohio* (Chicago, 1894), 265-266.
- 28 Saul, 365.
- 29 Latin: Hence these tears.
- 30 Russian: So it will be.
- 31 Latin: Faithful friend.
- 32 Saul, 364; George Kennan, *Tent Life in Siberia: An Incredible Account of Adventure, Travel, and Survival* (New York, 2007), 365.
- 33 Saul, 368.
- 34 Ibid, 369.
- 35 Kennan means here Giuseppe Verdi's *Il Trovatore* and *Rigoletto*.
- 36 The Faust March is from Hector Berlioz' *La damnation de Faust* and the Anvil March is from Verdi's *Il Trovatore*, while *Martha* is a romantic opera written by Friedrich von Flotow (1812-1883).
- 37 Here Kennan means the song "Ever be happy and light as thou art" from the Pirate's Chorus of *The Enchantress*, an opera by M.W. Balfe (1808-1870).
- 38 Wrobel, 291.

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