

CONFLICT ON THE NORTHWEST COAST: AMERICAN-RUSSIAN RIVALRY IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST, 1790–1867. By *Howard I. Kushner*. Contributions in American History, no. 41. Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood Press/Williamhouse-Regency, 1975. xii, 228 pp. \$13.95.

In a world where territorial adjustments are usually made by force, the Russian sale and U.S. purchase of Alaska remains an intriguing anomaly. This study attributes the transaction to constant friction between the two countries, which began with the appearance of American maritime fur traders on the Northwest Coast and lasted until Russia, convinced that she would lose Alaska to an expansionistic America anyway, decided to depart gracefully.

There is much evidence to bear out this thesis. The author describes the irritating circumstance of U.S. fur traders poaching in what the Russians thought were their preserves. He discusses the tsar's ephemeral *ukaz* of 1821, which attempted to bar foreign vessels from Russian coasts on both sides of the Pacific, seeing the measure, though soon revoked, as one of the causes of the Monroe Doctrine. He describes the effects of American whaling, the Oregon Question, pre-Civil War expansionism, and burgeoning American commerce on Russian America until Russia finally resolved the rivalry by agreeing to sell.

In promoting this view, however, the author obscures the fact that a case might as easily be made for a longstanding friendship. The Russian-American Company colonies also worked *with* the American traders, to mutual benefit; the ice trade and the telegraph venture were pursued in harmony, and there were many expressions of good will by individuals. The fears of Murav'ev-Amurskii and Grand Duke Constantine did help to bring about the sale, but perhaps the most important factor was that for many years the colonies had not shown a profit and showed no likelihood of doing so.

There are extensive notes, and a lengthy bibliography (pp. 209–20), which will be useful to other researchers. However, for Russian materials, essential to the subject, the author has relied on a scant few which have been translated. He has not used the important documentary series *Vneshniaia politika Rossii* (*Russian Foreign Policy*), and only mentions N. N. Bolkhovitinov's work on the establishment of Russo-American relations. Zeal in promoting his thesis has also led the author to accept and build upon certain unfounded generalizations in secondary sources. Thus, he says that Rezanov feared "an American takeover" of the colonies—this is inaccurate; Rezanov feared that the Americans would take the best of the fur and that they would settle in places like Nootka and the mouth of the Columbia River which Rezanov wanted for Russia. He claims that American artisans acquired "a very important role" in Russian America, but names only three (the plotters at Sitka in 1809 are said to have wanted to enlist the American artisans, but there is no evidence supporting the claim). He says that "in 1836 several employees of the Russian-American Company crossed the Stikine River into the British sphere . . ."—not an adequate description of the Stikine Incident. He asserts that American whalers and traders were "not deterred" by the Hudson's Bay Company lease of the southern end of the Alaska panhandle, but the whalers did not operate anywhere near that region, and there were, by then, virtually no American traders on the coast. The growth of American commercial interest in Russian America is said to have been "the decisive blow," but it more likely helped to prop up the Russian colonies for a few more years.

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