

**THE COMPANION
SERIES: OUR
COUNTRY: WEST**

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The Companion Series: Our Country: West by Various

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THE COMPANION SERIES.

Our Country: West.



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Our One American Castle.

Away up in Alaska, the northwesternmost part of our country, lies the strange old tumble-down, sleepy, little moss-grown town of Sitka, where stands our one American castle.

Crowning a rocky headland that rises precipitously from the water on three sides and descends with a steep slope to the town on the other, is the castle, with a small but somewhat formidable-looking battery at the foot of the terrace on the seaside.

The castle is one hundred and forty feet long and seventy wide, and is built of heavy cedar logs. Copper bolts, piercing the walls, rivet it to the rocks.

The Russian governors of the colony held residence in the castle, and traditions of the social splendor that reigned there still cling to the weather-beaten building.

With the Alaskans all things date back to the transfer of Alaska to the United States. Here, in the days before this transfer, princes and barons ruled. Something like regal splendor prevailed in Baranof Castle, as the palace was called in honor of the first governor.

Travellers in the early part of the present century give charming pictures of social life at Sitka. State dinners were given once a week, and a constant round of balls and festivities was kept up.

Baroness Kupreanof crossed Siberia on horseback to Bering Sea in 1835, in order to be with her husband at Sitka. There she made the castle a place of rendezvous for all classes of society, extending to each a charming and gracious hospitality.

A big brass samovar, or tea-urn, was always boiling in the dining-room, and by day or night a glass of the choicest caravan tea was served to every visitor. Beautifully wrought

samovars were brought out from Russia by the leading families. Specimens of these curious old urns may still be found in the curio shops, though they are rare.

The governors brought all their household goods from Russia, and in spite of the difficulties of transportation, surrounded themselves with many luxuries. The castle was richly furnished. The walls of the rooms were lined with mirrors and covered with Oriental hangings. On the waxed floors were buhl and ormolu chairs and couches, tables and cabinets. Such are the recollections of some who remember Sitka as it was before the transfer. In those days we called Alaska "Russian America."

October 18, 1867, was a beautiful, bright day, and the landlocked bay presented a brilliant panorama, with three United States vessels—the "Ossipee," the "Jamestown" and the "Resaca"—lying at anchor and flying their colors in the harbor. Farther out to sea were anchored the Russian fleet, gay with bunting. From every pole and roof in the town fluttered the Muscovite colors, in an almost unbroken line, from the castle to the pier.

At three o'clock in the afternoon the United States troops, the Russian soldiers and the state officials assembled on the castle terrace, at the foot of the tall flagstaff, from which floated the great Russian standard. The white inhabitants of the town gathered around the group, while a swarm of dusky aborigines formed the background.

As the clock in the government building struck the half-hour, the signal was given to lower the Russian flag, and simultaneously the battery of the "Ossipee" boomed out the national salute to the descending colors.

Then, as the American flag ran up the line, and the Stars and Stripes floated out on the breeze, a prolonged cheer that rang over the waters came from our three ships, while the Russian water battery on the wharf returned the national salute to the American eagle. After a few more formal ceremonies, the reign of America had begun.