

The History of the Alaskan Panhandle (VI)

Name: _____

The History of the Alaskan Panhandle

The **Alaskan Panhandle** is the long, narrow strip of land in Southeast Alaska that stretches along the Pacific Ocean. Today, it is part of the United States, but it has a long and interesting history.

A long time ago, this area was home to Native Alaskan groups, including the **Tlingit people**, who lived there for thousands of years. In the 1700s and 1800s, **Russian explorers and traders** came to Alaska and claimed parts of the land.



In 1867, the **United States purchased Alaska from Russia for \$7.2 million**, which is about 2 cents per acre! At the time, many people in the U.S. thought the deal was foolish and called it “Seward’s Folly,” after Secretary of State William H. Seward, who arranged the purchase. They thought he overspent. But over time, people realized it was very important because Alaska had **gold, fish, timber, and other resources**.

After the purchase, the U.S. owned Alaska, but the **exact borders of the Panhandle were unclear**. Canada (then part of the British Empire) also claimed some of the land.

To solve the problem, both countries agreed to **arbitration**, which is when a neutral third party decides the outcome. They chose **a six-person international panel** to review the claims (3 Americans, 2 Canadians, and 1 British). In 1903, the arbitration officially gave the **Alaskan Panhandle to the United States**. This peaceful solution avoided war and clarified the border. This upset Canada, because the Panhandle was **strategically important**, with ports and resources, and losing it to the U.S. felt like a **slap in the face**. Canada was very disappointed by the decision because they felt like Britain (who technically owned Canada at the time), which was supposed to help them, had let them down. The decision showed that relationships between countries and colonies could be complicated, and that it was hard for Canada to have control over its own land at that time. The Alaskan Panhandle was given to the United States because the panel agreed with America’s interpretation of old treaties, thought the land and mountains made a natural border, wanted to give the U.S. access to important ports, and because the British judge on the panel supported the U.S. side.

When the Alaskan Panhandle became part of the United States, the **Tlingit and other Native Alaskan peoples** were not asked for their opinion. The new U.S. government took control of the land, which affected how they could live, trade, and govern themselves. They had to follow new laws, and their traditional lands were sometimes used by settlers, miners, and businesses without their permission. This made it harder for the Tlingit to keep their culture, traditions, and way of life.

The Panhandle’s history is important for several reasons. It shows how countries can **disagree over land** and how peaceful solutions, like arbitration, can resolve disputes. It also shows how land that belonged to native people was divided **without their permission**, which affected the Tlingit and other groups.

Today, the Panhandle is known for its **forests, wildlife, and natural beauty**, as well as its ports and fishing industries. Its history reminds us that boundaries on a map are often shaped by **politics, negotiation, and resources**, not just geography.

Reflection Questions

1). Was the dispute solved in a fair way?

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The Alaskan Panhandle: Purchase, Dispute, and Impact (V2)

Name: _____

The **Alaskan Panhandle** is a long, narrow strip of land along the Pacific Coast in Southeast Alaska. Its history shows how exploration, international disputes, and diplomacy shaped borders and affected the people living there.

Long before Europeans arrived, the **Tlingit people** and other Native Alaskans lived in the Panhandle for thousands of years. They had their own governments, trade systems, and ways of life. In the late 1700s, **Russian explorers and traders** arrived and claimed parts of Alaska.



In 1867, the United States purchased Alaska from Russia for **\$7.2 million**, roughly 2 cents per acre. At the time, many Americans criticized the deal, calling it "Seward's Folly," because they thought that they had overpaid. Later, people realized it was valuable because Alaska was rich in **gold, timber, fish, and other natural resources**.

After the purchase, the **Alaskan Panhandle's borders were unclear**, and both the United States and Canada (then part of the British Empire) claimed parts of the territory. Canada was particularly upset because the Panhandle was strategically important for trade and resources, so losing it to the U.S. felt like a **slap in the face**. Canada was extremely disappointed by the decision because they felt that Britain, which governed Canada at the time and was expected to support its interests, had let them down. The situation showed how complicated relationships could be between countries and their colonies, and how difficult it was for Canada to have full control over its own land during that period.

To settle the dispute, both countries agreed to **arbitration**, where a neutral panel would make the decision. The panel, called the **Alaska Boundary Tribunal**, had six members: three Americans, two Canadians, and one British representative. The **British representative, Lord Alverstone**, ultimately sided with the U.S., giving the Panhandle to America. The panel based its decision on several reasons: the U.S. interpretation of old treaties, the geography of the land and mountains, the need for U.S. access to important ports, and the support of the British judge.

The **decision had major effects on the Tlingit and other Native Alaskan peoples**. They were **not included in the negotiations**, and their traditional lands were divided without their consent. The new U.S. government imposed laws and regulations, and settlers, miners, and businesses used the land and resources for their own purposes. This disrupted traditional hunting, fishing, and trade practices, making it harder for the Tlingit to maintain their culture, traditions, and way of life.

The history of the Panhandle is significant for many reasons. It shows how **resources, geography, and politics** can lead to disputes, how **diplomacy and arbitration** can prevent war, and how **decisions by powerful countries** can have long-term effects on both native populations and international relationships. It also highlights Canada's frustration at being overruled by Britain, and how the arbitration shaped Canada-U.S. relations for years.

Today, the Alaskan Panhandle is known for its **forests, wildlife, ports, and natural beauty**, but its history reminds us that maps and borders are not just drawings—they are political decisions that can affect people and lands for generations.

Reflection Questions

1) Was the dispute solved in a fair way?

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