

The U.S. Consulate in Reval, 1859-1870



Port city of Reval in the late 1800s. (Photo: Tallinn Photo Museum)

Nearly 150 years ago, the U.S. Department of State opened a full U.S. Consulate in the Russian Imperial port city of Reval (sometimes referred to as “Revel”). The main role of this consulate was to promote U.S. commerce and to protect American ships and sailors. Before the start of its Civil War (1861-1865), the United States experienced great industrial growth. As a result, the Department of State focused its energy on the twin goals of expanding U.S. diplomatic relations and spreading American ships and commerce to every corner of the world.

The U.S. State Department of 1860 consisted of just three organizational units: the Home, Diplomatic, and Consular Bureaus. The 1860 State Department had only 323 employees – 42 in Washington and 281 posted overseas. Most of the Department's overseas employees worked in one of the 253 one-man consulates located in various port cities around the world like Reval. These U.S. consuls were sometimes assisted by locally hired staff often called “vice consuls” – even though they had no formal diplomatic status. The U.S. Consulate in Reval may have been opened in anticipation of increased trade with Russia that was expected to result after the April 11, 1857 signing of a treaty between Denmark and the United States securing tariff-free passage for American vessels into the Baltic Sea.



The U.S. Consulate in Reval at Narva Street 7. (Photo: Tallinn Photo Museum)

The U.S. Consulate in Reval operated from 1859 until 1870. Along with the other U.S. consulates in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Odessa, it was assigned a “Schedule B” consul entitled to an annual salary of \$2,000. For most of this time, the U.S. Consulate was located at Narva Street 7 in a building which no longer exists. The four different consuls who worked in Reval sent back regular reports to Washington which focused mainly on commercial issues and included various dispatches related to: trade in alcoholic spirits and tobacco between Russia and the United States; U.S. tariff rates on imports from Russia; expeditions on tributaries of the Amur River; Russian and English commercial interests in Central Asia; Russian law relating to the sale of patent medicines; contagious diseases of horses and cattle; the construction by the Russian Government of telegraph lines to China; Russian opinion concerning the American Civil War; reform movements in Russia; and the Alaska Purchase Treaty of 1867.

U.S. Diplomacy and the American Civil War

During the Civil War, the office of the Secretary of State became a position of unprecedented power and importance under the leadership of William Henry Seward. Secretary Seward was President Abraham Lincoln's principal advisor on a broad range of urgent wartime domestic

matters as well as on the vital diplomatic effort to prevent European powers from recognizing or assisting the rebellious Confederacy. The success of U.S. diplomatic and consular representatives abroad in the early years of the Civil War was critical to isolating the South until the Union's Army and Navy could be mobilized to win the struggle. The State Department's authority grew in size and scope even as the whole U.S. Federal Government was centralized, expanded, and strengthened during the war.

Throughout its brief existence, the U.S. Consulate in Reval would have been closely connected to the nearby U.S. diplomatic mission in St. Petersburg and under the authority of the U.S. Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary residing there. From 1858 until he was recalled in 1860, the U.S. Minister to the Tsarist Court was Francis W. Pickens of South Carolina – one of the states that attempted to secede from the Union. Minister Pickens was replaced by John Appleton of the northern state of Maine who served from 1860 to 1861. He would be replaced in turn by Cassius M. Clay of Kentucky, who served for two periods from 1861 to 1862 and then again from 1863 to 1869. The gap during his absence was filled by Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania.

The Work of a U.S. Consul in Reval The first U.S. Consul assigned to Reval in 1858 before the start of the Civil War was Brook B. Williams of Washington, D.C. – although he never proceeded to post. As a result, the first resident U.S. Consul was Charles A. Leas of Baltimore, Maryland who served in Reval from 1859 to 1861. Leas would later go on to serve as the U.S. Consul in Stockholm (1861-1862) and Belize (1862-1865) during the course of the Civil War.

Clues about Leas' activities and interests as the U.S. Consul in Reval are available from an unlikely source. In October 1860, the German-language paper *Revalshe Zeitung* included information that Leas provided to the State Department which was eventually published in a “Blue Book” on commerce and trade relations intended for the U.S. Congress. *Revalshe Zeitung* noted with self-deprecating amusement the attention that Leas' reports drew to what they dubbed the “fishing village” of Reval. Leas report suggested that Reval's rail network should be connected to Russia's in order to increase Russian trade with the United States. According to Leas, access to the deep ports at Reval and Baltischport (now Paldiski) would ensure year-round access points for commerce, whereas the port at St. Petersburg was often blocked with ice and both St. Petersburg and Riga's ports had other “disadvantages and shortcomings.” The St. Petersburg-to-Reval rail line eventually opened in November 1870.

During his tenure, Consul Leas was a major advocate for improved rail connections throughout the Russian Empire, noting that it would ease the transfer of goods from Turkey, Persia, and even China. In this respect, Leas was ahead of his time. In January 2008, the Port of Tallinn

signed a deal with the Ningbo Port of China to build a \$222 million container terminal and Chinese goods distribution center by 2010 or 2011. It seems that the idea of Chinese goods passing through Tallinn en route to Europe and the United States may finally come to pass a full 150 years after Leas' original idea.

Throughout the Civil War, and for several years afterwards, Henry B. Stacey of Vermont served as the U.S. Consul in Reval (1861-1869), where he would die on the job. Stacey worked together with a "vice consul" named Woldemar Mayer who managed the small consulate in the consul's absence. The Baltic-German Mayer was very well connected, serving as a senator on Tallinn's Town Council from 1864 to 1877. Tragically, a note from Mayer "on behalf of the absent family" appeared in *Revalshe Zeitung* on June 7, 1869, stating that "Henry Balduin Stacey, the Consul of the United States of America, passed away on 6 June at approximately 3:45 p.m. at the age of 64 after a short bout with pneumonia." He appears to have been the first American citizen to die in Estonia. Stacey left behind a wife named Maria and daughter called Jennie back in his home town of Burlington.

The Journal of the Senate of the United States of America contains the following entry dated April 28, 1870: "Mr. Edmunds presented the petition of Jennie Stacey, praying an appropriation for bringing the remains of her father, Henry B. Stacey, late United States consul at Reval, Russia, to this country for interment; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations." Consul Stacey was initially buried in a cemetery in Tallinn's Kopli neighborhood which was later destroyed during the Second World War. It appears, however, that Jennie Stacey's petition was eventually approved and Consul Stacey's remains were returned to the United States.

Post-War Re-Organization

Consul Stacey was replaced by Samuel D. Jones who arrived the day after his colleague's death. Consul Jones would be replaced in turn by Eugene Schuyler of New York in November 1869. Schuyler himself was then re-assigned as the Secretary of the U.S. Legation in St. Petersburg in March 1870 – a position he would hold from April 1870 until July 1876. With Consul Schuyler's transfer to the Russian capital, the U.S. Consulate at Reval was shut down, perhaps as a part of the wider State Department reorganization and cost-cutting effort taking place at the time. As U.S. consulates in those days relied on the fees that they collected as expeditors to cover their operating expenses, it seems that the U.S. Consulate in Reval may not have been considered cost-effective due to the low volume of U.S. shipping which it helped facilitate.

After the Civil War, the Consular Service became the primary instrument in the search for the

best new markets for American goods. The State Department's internal bureaucracy was transformed to deal with the increasing responsibility of serving the interests of an industrializing nation whose economic growth was beginning to outdistance that of most European powers. The transfer of staff from Reval to St. Petersburg may also have been a part of this broader market repositioning. Yet another reason the consular position might have been moved from Reval to St. Petersburg is that Russian Imperial officials may have been concerned that the presence of foreign government officials might further encourage a further rise of Estonian nationalism (the first Estonian song festival was held in 1869).

As of 1870, U.S. interests in Reval were represented by a number of different U.S. Consular Agents starting with the former assistant at the U.S. Consulate, Woldemar Mayer. At the same time, Mayer's importance among Reval's political elite continued to grow. In 1877, Mayer was elected to the rank of *Burgomaster*, becoming one of the four men who ran the town of Reval until his death in 1883. Consular agents like Mayer were local hires who worked out of their own businesses or offices and so records of their activities are much more difficult to trace. However, it is possible that the U.S. Department of State hired its first consular agent to represent U.S. interests in Reval as early as 1803 when Levett Harris of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania arrived in St. Petersburg to become the first U.S. Consul in Russia. Records indicate that by 1812, a Baltic-German named Diedrich Rodde was already working as the U.S. Consular Agent in Reval. The State Department would continue using U.S. Consular Agents in Reval up through the Great War in Europe when another Baltic-German named R.E.A. Radau was hired in 1914.

The U.S. State Department would re-establish a full consulate in Reval only on November 8, 1919 with the arrival in Estonia of John P. Hurley of New York City. That day, U.S. Commissioner to the Baltic States John A. Gade of Massachusetts wrote a letter to the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs which stated: "I further beg to inform your Excellency of the arrival in Reval of Mr. John P. Hurley, Consul of the United States of America. Mr. Hurley is anxious at once to establish an office in Reval and render such assistance as is possible, at the present difficult period, in order to further future trade and commercial relations between Esthonia and the United States."

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