Robert Kennicott was an early “Gilded Age” explorer of the soon-to-be Territory of Alaska. He apparently died of heart disease in 1866, while in the vanguard of U.S. efforts to extend the still-young nation’s “Manifest Destiny” to the north and west. In the photo at the left, he’s shown wearing the uniform of the Western Union Telegraph Company, which I suppose might have been patterned after the Union Army’s or the Confederate Army’s dress codes of the day. Before the purchase of Alaska became reality in 1867, Western Union had actively investigated beating its competitors to unite Europe and North America by cable telegraph through British North America, Territory of the Russian America Company, across the Bering Sea to Russia with a linkup near Irkutsk. Kennicott gave his name posthumously to a glacier, a river, and other physical features in Alaska. It was also used posthumously, but spelled Kennecott, for a mining region, a company, and a townsite.
Lt. Allen’s trek of 1,600 miles (2,600km) from Nuchek, up the Copper River, and over the pass to the Tanana and Yukon drainages, then up the Koyukuk and back, down to tidewater at Unalakleet—was called the greatest exploratory feat since the Lewis & Clark Expedition. Along the way, Allen and his men were greatly helped by indigenous people, beginning with Chief Nicolai, Tyone of Taral.
Lt. Frederick Schwatka, Left, (as he appeared in 1871 cadet uniform at Westpoint) was figuratively a military ‘descendant’ of Kennicott and Allen.

Schwatka served General Miles, who was the commander of the Columbia Division of the U.S. Army during a difficult transitional period, during which the Army was still sorting out its role (s) in the administration of the new Territory of Alaska, as Morgan Sherwood’s (1965 and 1992) book details.
There are a number of noteworthy punctuations to a chronology of the years 1865-1900 for us Alaskans.

First, there are a series of events underlined in blue: severe changes of direction for the civilian oversight or control of Alaska’s affairs between 1867 and 1884. How chaotic that must have been.

Against that backdrop, the events in red underline or in red boxes are punctuations people’s accomplishments, Russian-American Telegraph Expedition, death of Kennicott, Frederick Schwatka’s first expedition, his NYTimes attempt to climb Mt. St. Elias, the Leslie Expedition with Glave and Jack Dalton, that floated the Alsek River, and finally, the Schwatka-Hayes Expedition of 1891.
Schwatka’s first Alaska foray in 1883 was when he was 12 years post Westpoint, so about 30 years of age. He must’ve made his boss (General Nelson Miles) shudder at times by freely assigning names to physical features, such as to Bennett Lake (named for James Gordon Bennett, Jr. publisher of the New York Tribune) and the Nordenskjöld River (named for the Finn who completed the Northeast Passage in 1879) in British North America, while in the uniform of a U.S. Army officer.

Then there’s Miles Canyon on the upper Yukon River near modern Whitehorse, which Schwatka named for his commanding general, so the General may not have complained too loudly.

Here’s a mystery: why do these gulls, so far from the sea coast, get portrayed as if there is a breeding colony in the Interior?
Schwatka participated in 6 expeditions after graduating from Westpoint. Four were in high latitudes. 1. King William Island, 2. first Yukon Recon in 1883, 3. Mt. St. Elias failure in 1886, and 6. The Taku-Copper River Expedition of 1891.
As was customary in the Gilded Age Schwatka the explorer arranged to have his photograph taken in a studio where he wore garb appropriate to his adventures. Or, as here on the right, a field artist sketched the explorer showing off an example of his literary coverage in a published chronicle, such as the *London Illustrated News*, to exotic or indigenous admiring audiences. (This example perhaps came from his expedition of 1878 to King William Island, where he sought—like so many people before him—to find clues about the fate of the Franklin Expedition).
Two books come into play on Schwatka. Morgan Sherwood published a scholarly work in 1965, (reprinted in 2001) detailing the hectic, but little-known, activities of explorers in Alaska between the end of the U.S. Civil War, and 1900, just after the Klondike Gold Rush. Sherwood himself believed that Frederick Schwatka died before he could get his account of the 1891 expedition published. But it was published by an obscure publication called the New York Ledger. It took the form of 18 letters serialized. After the rediscovery of the account, Arland Harris had it reproduced, annotated, and accompanied by a reprint of the Charles Willard Hayes (1892) National Geographic Society account. This volume appeared with the imprint of the University of Alaska Press in 1996.
At the beginning of the Schwatka-Hayes Expedition, the pair was talked into taking a new route into the Interior by ascending the Taku River, just south of Juneau. Here is shown the cover of the *New York Ledger’s* first serial issue in March 1892, featuring a photo taken by Hayes. Schwatka is sitting in the stern of the bidarka at the left, holding a long pole. He topped 6 feet by a couple of inches, and weighed 18 stone at the time (252 pounds, or 114 kg) such that he joked occasionally in his 18 letters about playing the role of “ranine” ballast in boats on the expedition. (Yeah, I had to look up the word “ranine,” too.)
Here’s the portly Schwatka at about age 39, alongside Hayes.