

Mongolia and the United States

A Diplomatic History

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Contents

Acronyms	vii
Glossary of Mongolian Terms	ix
Introduction	xi
Chapter 1: Early Encounters	1
Chapter 2: Establishing Diplomatic Relations	17
Chapter 3: Supporting Democracy	37
Chapter 4: Partnering on Development	61
Chapter 5: Building Commercial Ties	87
Chapter 6: Promoting Security	101
Chapter 7: Sustaining People-to-People Relationships	117
Chapter 8: Looking Ahead	141
Annexes	
Key Agreements between the United States and Mongolia, 1987–2012	153
US Ambassadors and Heads of Agencies in Mongolia, 1987–2012	155
US-Mongolia Joint Statement Issued at the White House, June 16, 2011	157
US Senate Resolution on Mongolia, Sponsored by Senators Kerry, McCain, Murkowski, and Webb, June 17, 2011	161

Major Sources and Further Reading	165
Acknowledgments	171
Index	175
About the Author	187

Introduction

On January 27, 1987, senior diplomats from the United States and Mongolia met in a modest ceremony below a portrait of Thomas Jefferson in the Treaty Room of the Department of State in Washington, D.C. Their purpose was to sign the legal documentation needed to finally establish formal diplomatic relations between the two countries. This in turn led to the appointment of the first ambassadors and the opening of new embassies in Ulaanbaatar and Washington. It also became the catalyst for a rapid growth in relations in any number of areas, not only in the political arena but also in culture, education, business, development, and security.

Twenty-five years later, the bilateral relationship between the United States and Mongolia continues to both deepen and expand. In all these areas and more, Mongolians and Americans are increasingly meeting, learning from, understanding, and partnering with each other to achieve common aims and objectives.

This book provides a retrospective look at the first quarter century of diplomatic relations between the United States and Mongolia, recalling in part a dispatch written nearly 100 years ago by an American diplomat named A. W. Ferrin. At the time, Ferrin was a commercial officer assigned to the US legation in “Peking.” In his dispatch, he highlighted the growing commercial opportunities available to American businesses in Mongolia. At the same time, he suggested that an American diplomatic presence in Urga—as Mongolia’s capital city of Ulaanbaatar was then known—would prove “helpful” to Mongolia. In fact, the entire phrase used in the dispatch that Ferrin sent to his superiors at the State Department in Washington, D.C., in 1918 continues to resonate nearly a century later: if the United States were to open an office in Urga, he argued, it would

almost certainly prove to be “*a most helpful factor in the development of a wonderful country.*”

Although Ferrin’s plea was unsuccessful in his lifetime, this phrase—which recurs at several points in the narrative that follows—poignantly conveys in only a few words what many Americans, diplomats and ordinary citizens alike, aspire for out of the US-Mongolia relationship. From the view of many Americans who have visited, Mongolia is indeed a “wonderful country,” one that includes a fascinating history, vibrant culture and inspiring landscapes. There is also a genuine desire on the part of many Americans to see Mongolia succeed in its efforts to emerge as an unqualified success story in Northeast Asia, one that shares important core values with the United States and can potentially set a positive example for others in the region and beyond.

History also resonates across important aspects of the relationship. For example, when Mongolia and the United States celebrated the 20th anniversary of bilateral relations in 2007, the Mongolian Postal Service issued a set of two stamps to mark the occasion. One stamp featured Genghis Khan cast in bronze, sitting on his throne in the large, recently completed memorial outside Government House in Sukhbaatar Square in downtown Ulaanbaatar. The other depicted President Abraham Lincoln cut from marble, also looking larger-than-life from the vantage point of the Lincoln Memorial on the Mall in Washington, D.C.

As shown on the stamps, the two huge sculptures are very similar, each showing a national hero seated in an almost identical pose that exudes power, confidence, and authority. Both stand out as leading historical figures and as instantly recognizable symbols of their respective countries. While different in many important respects, the juxtaposition of the two leaders in these commemorative stamps also serves to underscore that Genghis Khan had forged unity among the Mongol people during the thirteenth century, just as Abraham Lincoln six centuries later successfully fought to maintain the unity of the United States, helping to establish and sustain a “more perfect union.” Although separated by different histories and cultures as well as thousands of miles and a huge ocean, perhaps it was inevitable that Mongolia and the United States—one an old nation that became a great power during the thirteenth century, the other

a new country that emerged as a world power only in the twentieth century—would eventually meet.

There are, of course, several ways to analyze and critique relations between countries, including countries as different and as geographically far apart as Mongolia and the United States. One approach might be to highlight geopolitical issues, focusing on Mongolia's strategic location between two large powers, Russia to the north and China to the south. Another might be to focus on national interest, presenting US-Mongolia relations in either more pragmatic or more hard-headed terms as being primarily driven on both sides by the quest for national advantage, whether related to national security, the search for influence, or a concerted effort to gain commercial benefit. Certainly, the foreign relations of any country are based on a mix of ideology, idealism, and national interests.

All these issues and more inevitably arise when any two countries engage with each other seriously on the world stage. To complicate matters further, bilateral relations between countries are never conducted in a vacuum. On the contrary, they become increasingly pronounced when set against the reality of a wide and complex web of bilateral relationships involving other countries both near and far, as well as with a growing number of multilateral players. For Mongolia, forging an effective foreign policy that achieves an appropriate balance among many often competing priorities and potential partnerships will always remain as an especially formidable challenge that more or less defines and determines Mongolia's place in the world.

It is also the underlying rationale behind what is typically described as Mongolia's "third neighbor" approach to foreign policy. Since the early 1990s, every Mongolian government of all political persuasions has attempted to simultaneously maintain friendly ties with its "first" and "second" neighbors, Russia and China, while also reaching out to a wider world consisting of a multiplicity of "third neighbors," including Japan, Korea, India, Canada, Australia, the various countries forming the European Union, and the United States. Put another way, in recent years Mongolia has actively sought to maintain a "three-dimensional" foreign policy, one that consciously promotes positive and productive engagement with its two immediate neighbors while also seeking to build constructive ties with a much wider set of other countries, as well as a range of multilateral institutions situated in every corner of the world.

Against that backdrop, this book intentionally deals with only one set of “third neighbor” relationships—those involving the United States and Mongolia, two countries that have been interacting diplomatically for only a quarter century while maintaining a remarkable set of people-to-people ties for at least 150 years. The approach is primarily narrative and descriptive rather than highly critical or theoretical. It is not rooted in any grand theory of international relations or meant to become a platform for extended reflections on how nations compete, cooperate, or interact with each other within a wider geostrategic arena. Rather, it touches in significant part on the human dimensions of the US-Mongolian partnership as it has played out in a number of important areas over the last 25 years. More than anything, the intent here is to record and preserve some of the major highlights in an emerging and fascinating story, one in which many chapters remain to be written.

The narrative begins in the early 1860s, when the first American adventurers began arriving in “Outer Mongolia,” a distant area on the map that at the time was seen as one of the most remote and forbidding places on earth. A subsequent chapter explores in greater depth the several “false starts” and “unexpected turns” that eventually culminated in the January 1987 agreement to establish relations, exchange ambassadors, open embassies, and engage in normal diplomatic relations.

Five successive chapters in turn assess and describe the several areas in which US-Mongolian ties have flourished over the last quarter century. In particular, these five chapters—which represent the “core” of this book—describe a multitude of efforts on the part of both Mongolians and Americans to support democracy, partner on development, build commercial ties, promote security, and sustain people-to-people relations.

A final chapter provides an overall assessment of the current state of the relationship while also taking a speculative look at possible future developments. Several annexes include, among other things, a listing of some of the major agreements signed between the two countries over the past 25 years. The texts of two official documents produced in the summer of 2011—one issued by the White House, the other by the United States Congress—highlight and summarize the major areas of cooperation and mutual support achieved during the first quarter century of what has become a vibrant diplomatic relationship.

The manuscript concludes with a section on major sources and further reading, providing details on books, articles, monographs, and other sources of information for those wishing to explore in greater depth some of the themes highlighted here. At the same time, it needs to be emphasized that many of the recollections on which this narrative is based are purely personal in nature and until now have never been written down anywhere.

Put another way, the catalyst for this effort was decidedly nonacademic in nature, reflecting instead a conscious and deliberate attempt to capture some of the early memories and anecdotes linked to the early diplomatic history of the United States and Mongolia before they disappear forever. This was aided by a willingness on the part of six of the first seven American ambassadors to Mongolia to contribute memories of their own. In addition, some of the first Mongolian staff to work at the US Embassy in Ulaanbaatar provided their recollections. Finally, as a participant in certain parts of that history—first as USAID country director in Mongolia from August 2001 until April 2004 and then as US ambassador to Mongolia from November 2009 until July 2012—my own perspective and personal views are inevitably reflected in certain passages in the text that follows.

My sincere hope is that this book will remind Americans and Mongolians alike of some of the more interesting and important aspects of their shared history during its critical early stages. Perhaps it will one day also provide useful raw material for further reflection, critique, and analysis on the part of others about an intriguing and increasingly complex diplomatic relationship that continues to unfold. Finally, it should be emphasized that the faults inherent in this approach are mine alone—and that the views expressed in this volume are those of the author and do not purport to reflect those of the US Department of State or the US government.

Chapter 1

Early Encounters

“I have found my country, the one I was born to know and love.”

The accounts vary in content and the dates are not entirely clear, but in either 1899 or 1900 two young men briefly met at the central monastery in Urga, as Ulaanbaatar was then known. One was a prominent lama known as the eighth *Jebtsundamba*, who 11 years later would lead the Mongolian quest for freedom from the Qing Empire, emerging as the “Holy King” or “Bogd Khan” (1869–1924) of a newly independent state. The other was a young mining engineer from California named Herbert Hoover (1874–1965) who, 28 years later, would become the 31st president of the United States.

Hoover was working in China at the time. Part of his job involved taking long trips into the countryside by horseback, exploring for possible mineral wealth. In the first volume of his memoirs, published many years later under the title *Years of Adventure*, Hoover recalled: “One of these horseback journeys reached as far as Urga, the Mongol capital in the Gobi Desert. . . . The monotony of that trip was enlivened by a call on the Hutuktu Lama—a Living Buddha—through the introduction of a Swedish engineer who was building a telegraph line connecting Peking with Russia and the influence of his friend the Russian consul.”

Hoover was still in his late 20s while the future Bogd Khan had only recently turned 30. According to Hoover’s account, he arrived at Gandan Monastery to find the Living Buddha “riding a bicycle madly around the inner court.” Few other details are available about the meeting that followed between the two future heads of state. However, Hoover does report that the young lama entertained his visitors “with a phonograph supplied with Russian records.”

There are no records to indicate what the Mongolians thought of their brash and opinionated visitor. The brief meeting did, however, both reflect and foreshadow important aspects of the increasing number of encounters between Americans and Mongolians during those early years. For Americans, Mongolia represented an ancient civilization as well as an exotic destination, far removed from their day-to-day experience. For Mongolians, newly introduced inventions from Europe and North America such as bicycles, telegraph lines, and record players represented the wave of the future, precursors to new technology that during the coming years would become more widespread and eventually change the face of Mongolia forever.

* * * * *

Herbert Hoover was not the first American citizen to visit the capital of Mongolia. In the preceding decades, other adventurous compatriots crossed the Gobi Desert to see the area then labeled on maps as “Outer Mongolia.” For some, the trip to Urga was part of a much longer journey, one that started in China and ended in Siberia.

The Mongolian National Archives contain evidence of these early visitors that includes an intriguing collection of ornate and colorful “travel passes” provided to various foreign visitors, allowing them to “transit” Mongolia. These documents date to the mid-nineteenth century, a time when first Europeans and then Americans began to travel the globe in growing numbers. One of these travel passes, written in Mongolian using a phonetic Manchu script, was given to a visitor explicitly identified as an “American.” The travel pass is dated 1862, a time when Abraham Lincoln presided over a deeply divided United States that had only recently embarked on a protracted and bloody civil war that threatened its very existence. While the pass provided authorization to transit Mongolia, it also noted that no bribes should be solicited or collected at any point along the way. A facsimile copy of this 1862 travel pass is now part of the Tibetan and Mongolian collection at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., a gift from the Mongolian National Archives donated in January 2012 to help commemorate 25 years of US-Mongolia diplomatic relations.

The document also very possibly marks the launch of the first people-to-people ties involving nationals of both countries. According to the text, the

American visitor was named either “Mr. Felosi” or “Mr. Pelosi,” and his traveling companion was from France. According to a subsequent report from the Mongolian border post at the Siberian border to supervisors back in Urga, the two travelers, accompanied by a Mongolian guide, were seen to arrive on camels and were at first thought to be from Russia.

A few years later, an American with a much more detailed surviving historical record—the journalist and travel writer Thomas W. Knox (1835–96)—traveled by horse and cart from Peking to Kyatka, following the old tea route that continued for another 3,000 miles to St. Petersburg. The author of 45 books, Knox wrote a 12-page account of his travels in an article entitled “A Journey through Mongolia” that was later published in the August 1868 issue of *Galaxy* magazine.

Born in New Hampshire, Knox gained his reputation as a controversial Civil War correspondent for the *New York Herald*, writing reports that angered both General Grant and General Sherman, two of the leading Union commanders of the war. His reporting from the Civil War was later published to considerable acclaim under the title *Camp-Fire and Cotton-Field*. Not long after the Civil War, Knox embarked on a round-the-world tour, including a memorable journey across China, Mongolia, and Russia that he later described in his best-selling book, *Overland through Asia*. Subsequently, he wrote about his travels in the Middle East in a volume entitled *Baksheesh*. Still later, he launched a highly successful series of adventure books for boys set in some of the most remote regions of the world.

According to Knox’s Mongolia travelogue in *Galaxy* magazine, it was only in 1859 that the Chinese finally authorized foreigners to traverse the region on their way to Siberia, a trip that up until that point he describes as “about as feasible” as a journey to “the South Pole.”

Knox’s expressed admiration for the Mongolians he encountered during his travels, while also noting, “They are proud of tracing their ancestry to the soldiers that marched with Genghis Khan.” He must have shared some of his experience in the American Civil War with his Mongolian traveling companions, noting at one point that “around their fires at night no stories are more eagerly heard than those of war, and he who can relate the most wonderful traditions of daring deeds may be certain of admiration and applause.”

Knox's descriptions also provide fascinating glimpses of Mongolia as it used to be. At one point, he notes, "The country opens into a series of plains and gentle swells, not unlike the rolling prairies of Kansas and Nebraska." He observed trains of oxcarts along the way, some stretching for a mile or more. He also noted that "boiled mutton" was the "staple dish" of Mongolia, served "unaccompanied with capers or any other kind of sauce or seasoning," instead simply handed over "all dripping and steaming."

Fording the Tuul River just before entering Urga, Knox indicated that the camels had to be persuaded to cross "with clubs," having an "instinctive dread" of water, especially deep and flowing water. Recalling the eastern approaches to what is now Ulaanbaatar, he first described a small Chinese settlement (an old Taoist temple from that time still survives), followed by "large houses" occupied by Russians (near what is today the Orthodox Church and what was once the Russian Consulate). Finally reaching the city, he noted that it "is not laid out in streets like most Chinese towns; its by-ways and high-ways are narrow and crooked and form a network very puzzling to a stranger."

Looking back nearly 150 years later, Knox's few comments on the geopolitical situation in Mongolia seem highly prescient. For example, he characterized China's hold on Outer Mongolia as "not very strong," adding that the Mongolians seemed "indifferent to their rulers and ready at any decent provocation to throw off their yoke." He also suggested that Czarist Russia already had "an eye upon Mongolia" and was even then contemplating "taking it under the powerful protection of the double-headed eagle."

During subsequent decades, travel to Mongolia, while still an adventure, became more commonplace. Certainly, by the later part of the second half of the nineteenth century, a small but growing number of Americans from an increasingly wealthy United States began to find their way to Mongolia, whether as adventurers, missionaries, or merchants. These early contacts in turn eventually involved other American visitors, including both diplomats and tourists.

By the early 1900s, visitors from the United States were becoming much more frequent. Indeed, the name American *Denj*—an area of contemporary Ulaanbaatar just off Peace Avenue and near the Hotel Kempinski that was once known for the American businesses that congregated there—probably dates back at least 100 years. According to some accounts, these early American

business executives imported Mongolia's very first car, a Model T Ford. Also, the first silent films ever seen in Mongolia were very possibly shown in the American *Denj*.

US diplomat and former ambassador to Russia, China, and the Ottoman Empire William Woodville Rockhill (1854–1914) was another early American traveler to Mongolia who left a written record behind. He passed through Urga at the conclusion of his ambassadorship to the Ottoman Empire and only a year before he died suddenly of a heart attack in Hawaii. Traveling with his wife via the Trans-Siberian railway in 1913, he took a weeklong detour to visit Outer Mongolia.

Among other things, Rockhill noted a strong desire on the part of Mongolians for “complete independence.” He placed Mongolia's population at that time at 700,000—down considerably from the three million that his research suggested had lived in Mongolia during the mid-seventeenth century. Describing life in Mongolia's capital city just prior to the start of World War I, he commented that “trade prospered, order prevailed and the people were satisfied.”

It is very likely that Rockhill was the first American diplomat to speak Tibetan as well as Mongolian, having visited both Tibet and Inner Mongolia in 1888–89 during a leave of absence from his assignment as a junior diplomat at the US legation in Peking. A scholar as well as a diplomat, he published a number of books and articles about his experiences, including *Land of the Lamas* and *Diary of a Journey through Tibet and Mongolia*. Rockhill donated his entire collection of 6,000 books on China, Tibet, and Mongolia to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., which is now the repository of one of the world's largest collections of written material related to Mongolia.

In a poignant footnote, the holdings of the Library of Congress also include a small diary maintained by a young diplomat—Thomas W. Haskins (1879–1908)—who accompanied Rockhill on at least one of his several trips to eastern China. The diary, presented to the Library of Congress as a gift in 2011 by relatives of Thomas Haskins, contains a brief description of a meeting involving Rockhill, Haskins, and the 13th Dalai Lama that took place in Wutaishan in June 1908. Less than a month later, Haskins—not yet 30 years old—passed away following a sudden illness, leaving a young widow to mourn his death.

Rockhill's own impressions of Mongolia during the early years of the twentieth century were not entirely positive. For example, he declared Urga a dirty city and was pessimistic about the country's economic prospects. That said, he also described Mongolians as "easy-going" and concluded that Mongolians had "good grounds" for striving for independence.

Rockhill's visit to Urga in 1913 was followed seven years later by that of another American diplomat, Charles Eberhardt (1871–1965). However, what distinguished Consul Eberhardt's five-day pioneering journey in 1920 is that he came under official State Department auspices, met with senior Mongolian officials, and returned with a strong recommendation to open what would have been the first official US diplomatic presence in Ulaanbaatar.

His recommendation reflected the fact that an increasing number of American citizens were living and working in Mongolia. Increasing American interest was evident as well, especially on the commercial front. For its part, Mongolia's early quest for independence included a concerted effort to reach out to other countries, among them the United States. Partly associated with the quest on the part of some Mongolians for "modernization," some Mongolians at the time even advocated the adoption of a Latin alphabet for their language.

* * * * *

Strangely enough, an American steamship built in New Jersey and launched in 1903 as the SS *Mongolia* also helped introduce the land of Genghis Khan into the American consciousness during the first decades of the twentieth century. Built for the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, the *Mongolia* for several years connected the western United States with Asia, bringing passengers in both directions, along with her sister ship, the SS *Manchuria*. A 13,000-ton vessel, the *Mongolia* was relatively large and accommodated more than 1,600 passengers, 350 of them in first-class luxury and 1,300 in steerage. During those years, the passenger lists from the *Mongolia* included intending Chinese emigrants who booked a one-way passage across the Pacific to California.

The *Mongolia*, by then already past her prime, was sold in August 1915 to the Atlantic Transport Line and quickly became a fixture on the sea route between New York and London. When Germany announced a submarine blockade around the United Kingdom, the *Mongolia* was armed with three six-inch deck

guns as a form of self-defense. According to some accounts, it was the *Mongolia* that fired the first American shot when the United States entered World War I on the side of Britain and France, taking aim at a German U-boat in the North Atlantic and possibly sinking it. Another incident, widely reported across the United States at the time, was the death of two female nurses, Edith Ayers of Ohio and Helen Wood of Illinois, accidentally killed when a propellant cap exploded during a firing demonstration, sending shrapnel in every direction.

For most of the war, the SS *Mongolia*—now bearing the military appellation USS *Mongolia*—served as a troop ship, carrying thousands of American soldiers to Europe to join the fighting. After an armistice was signed in November 1918, the USS *Mongolia* continued its troop ship role, carrying thousands of battle-hardened veterans back to the United States to rejoin their families.

The *Mongolia's* remaining career was much less memorable. For a time, she sailed between New York and Hamburg. Later, she was put on the route from New York to San Francisco, passing through the Panama Canal. In 1929, both the *Mongolia* and the *Manchuria* were bought by the Dollar Steamship Lines and renamed as the *President Fillmore* and *President Johnson*, an odd choice considering that Millard Fillmore and Andrew Johnson rank among the two least distinguished presidents in American history. In 1940 the *Mongolia* was sold and renamed again, this time as the *Panamanian*. Six years later, she ended her life as scrap in a wrecker's yard in Shanghai.

How did the *Mongolia* and her sister ship the *Manchuria* get their names? Almost certainly, they were named to reflect exotic and remote parts of the globe at the start of what became the “American Century,” as part of a possibly unconscious attempt to begin to imprint the names of strange and distant places more firmly into the minds of the American imagination. There was logic, too, in selecting a specifically Asian place name, given the fact that the *Mongolia* was initially built to cross the Pacific and connect Asia with North America.

In retrospect, it is the role played by the *Mongolia* in ferrying Asian migrants across the Pacific to the western United States during the early 1900s that seems especially poignant. The fact that the *Mongolia* later engaged with a German U-boat, possibly fired the first American shots of World War I, featured in headlines across the United States following the accidental deaths of two war nurses, and was used to transport many thousands of young soldiers to the battlefield

only adds to the interest. Mongolia may be a land-locked country—yet it also became the name for an American steamship from the “golden age” of steam travel, sailing for years across first the Pacific and then the Atlantic, regularly reminding tens of thousands of passengers over a period of many years about the distant land of Genghis Khan.

Of all the foreigners with ties to the United States to encounter Mongolia and write about it during the early part of the twentieth century, perhaps none is more fascinating or knew more about Mongolia than Frans August Larson (1870–1957), sometimes known as the “Duke of Mongolia.” Born in poverty in rural Sweden, he was orphaned at the age of nine. Possibly viewing missionary service as a means of escape as well as a way to see the world, Larson joined a foreign mission society and was assigned to northern China in the late 1890s.

Larson learned Mongolian quickly and became adept at making friends, qualities that proved immensely important in 1900 when he led a group of 22 Swedish and American missionaries into the Gobi Desert, across Mongolia, and on to Siberia to escape the violence of the Boxer Rebellion then raging across many parts of China. The group that he rescued included his American wife and fellow missionary Mary Rogers and their two young children. Later, Larson became the first Christian and Missionary Alliance representative in Mongolia.

Larson’s remarkable 1,000-mile journey across the Gobi Desert, through Mongolia, and on into Siberia in 1900 was only one milestone in a life of high adventure, one that saw him traverse the Gobi no less than 36 times on camel, horse, and even bicycle. He ultimately focused on business and politics more than missionary work, though his wife Mary continued working for the church throughout her life.

Larson’s linguistic skills proved invaluable, and visiting diplomats typically sought his views on major issues of the day. Most notably, he helped organize the logistics for much better-known explorers such as the American Roy Chapman Andrews and the Swede Sven Hedin. He also knew many of the leading Mongolian personalities of the early 1900s, including the Bogd Khan and many of his ministers. Larson’s first memoir—entitled *Duke of Mongolia*—reflects a deep admiration, respect, and affection for Mongolia. He describes himself as

“fortunate” to have had the opportunity to “learn their language, their mode of living, their happiness, their sorrow and, so often, their sudden death.”

Larson himself lived in both Inner and Outer Mongolia for nearly half a century, leaving only in 1939 when he was almost 70 years old and the threat of a second world war was already looming. Subsequently, he moved to the United States, where he lived through much of the 1940s and 1950s, first running a chicken farm in Alabama and then spending the remaining years of his remarkable life as a housing developer in California, interrupted only briefly by interludes in Sweden and Canada.

According to Larson’s granddaughter Barbara Sitzman, memories of Mongolia figured prominently throughout Larson’s retirement. “My childhood was sprinkled with real life adventure stories of wolves, Chinese bandits, *kumiss* (fermented mare’s milk) and wild horse races,” she recalled many years later. In her account, Larson’s love of Mongolia was also reflected in two other activities that he enjoyed until the end of his long and eventful life: first, he routinely picked the winning horses at his local racetrack in California; and, second, he kept the family television tuned to wrestling shows.

Larson’s knowledge of Mongolia proved enormously helpful to Roy Chapman Andrews (1884–1960), perhaps the most well-known American to interact with Mongolia in the decades prior to the establishment of formal diplomatic relations. “I have found my country,” Andrews wrote after his first trip to Urga in 1918, “the one I was born to know and love.” As for Urga, Andrews called it “the most fascinating city I have found in all my wanderings.”

A larger-than-life figure, Roy Chapman Andrews, according to some accounts, was one of the inspirations for “Indiana Jones,” the fictitious adventurer and explorer who launched an entire movie series. Andrews is best known today for his expeditions to the Gobi Desert during the 1920s, explorations that discovered new varieties of dinosaurs and demonstrated for the first time that dinosaurs hatched from eggs.

Born in Wisconsin, Andrews dreamed of a life of adventure from an early age. After attending Beloit College, he traveled to New York, where he worked as a janitor at the American Museum of Natural History because no other jobs were

available. Sometime later, he managed to join the crew of two scientific expeditions, one focused on the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) and another involving exploration in the Arctic.

Several years later, Andrews began planning his first Gobi expedition, using Dodge cars to explore regions west of Beijing. Between 1922 and 1925, he mounted four expeditions to the Gobi and returned again for a final visit in 1930. "The Flaming Cliffs," one of the most evocative sites in the various expeditions that Andrews launched, is today on every tourist itinerary to Mongolia's South Gobi province, featuring bright red rock formations and stunning sunsets against the vast expanse of the Gobi that are as memorable and inspiring as when Andrews first observed them nearly a century ago. The books he wrote, such as *Across Mongolian Plains* and *The New Conquest of Central Asia*, continue to offer insights for those interested in the way that foreigners viewed Mongolia during the 1920s.

Andrews reached the height of his popularity in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s. A flamboyant and effective self-promoter, he became an especially well-known figure as a result of his contributions to *National Geographic* and his lecture tours. His accounts of his adventures in the Gobi Desert brought exotic sights and different perspectives into homes, schools, and libraries across depression-era America.

The perspective among Mongolian authorities at the time was much more mixed, fed partly by the suspicion with which all things American were viewed among Mongolians in leadership positions and, most especially, by their Soviet patrons. Some expressed concern that he was a "spy," and others that he was simply robbing Mongolia of important aspects of its archaeological heritage. Viewed decades later, his written comments on both Mongolia and China very much reflect the tenor of the times, including a tendency toward broad characterizations and sweeping judgments that strike most present-day readers as little more than racist stereotyping.

Yet the photographs taken on his various expeditions, as well as the written descriptions that he left behind, help document a part of Mongolia as it used to be, providing fleeting insights into a way of life that was on the verge of disappearing forever. More recently, contemporary Mongolians have been intrigued by the photographs, which resonate especially among those seeking to retrieve

something of Mongolia's lost past. Indeed, as one of several events organized in 2012 to mark the 25th anniversary of US-Mongolia diplomatic relations, one Mongolian television station visited the American Museum of Natural History in New York and produced a documentary focused entirely on Andrews and his various expeditions. At least one of the several books written by Andrews about his experiences in Mongolia—*On the Trail of Ancient Man*—was in 2010 translated and published in Mongolian.

Although Roy Chapman Andrews ranks as the best known among those Americans who traveled to Mongolia during the 1920s, he is by no means the only one. For example, General Joseph Stillwell (1883–1946), later a four-star general famous for his role in both China and Burma during World War II, was one of an increasing number of Americans to travel to Urga to see the sights of what was then regarded as an exotic as well as exceptionally remote part of the world.

Similarly, the prolific travel writer Harry Franck (1881–1962) drove from Kalgan in China to Ude in Siberia in 1922, passing through Urga en route. He later chronicled his travels in a volume entitled *Wandering in Northern China*. At about the same time, Janet Elliott Wulsin (1894–1963) from New York was in the middle of a four-year series of journeys through China, Mongolia, and Tibet along with her husband Frederick, an anthropologist. An account of their travels was later published in *National Geographic* in 1926.

Born into a wealthy New York family, Janet Wulsin had served in France as a Red Cross nurse during World War I. She met her future husband Frederick Wulsin, a Harvard University graduate from Ohio, in Paris. Apparently inspired by the example of Roy Chapman Andrews, they mounted their own expedition to China, Tibet, and Outer Mongolia. The couple later divorced and it was only after Janet Wulsin's death that her daughter Mabel Cabot, discovering her mother's letters and diaries, published a fascinating book called *Vanished Kingdoms: A Woman Explorer in Tibet, China and Mongolia, 1921–1925*. The striking hand-colored photographs taken by Janet and Frederick Wulsin are maintained in the archives of Harvard University's Peabody Museum, providing a series of brilliant and highly informative early images from across the region.

By the late 1920s, Mongolia was firmly part of the Soviet orbit, and the brief yet intense series of early American encounters with Mongolia already appeared to be receding into history. However, even during this period there was at least one notable meeting, this time involving US vice president Henry Wallace (1888–1965).

Regarded as one of the outstanding progressive intellectuals of his day, Wallace displayed a keen interest in Eastern religions. For a time he fell under the spell of the Russian-American artist, writer, and mystic Nicholas Roerich (1874–1947), who had lived in a small log cabin in Ulaanbaatar during 1926–27. Remarkably, Roerich's log cabin still survives—located just off Peace Avenue east of Sukhbaatar Square, it was turned into a small museum in 2009. It also serves as one of the few remaining architectural examples from the time when the buildings of Ulaanbaatar were mostly made of wood and built in a Russian style.

Wallace's early ties with Nicholas Roerich were later seen as a source of potential embarrassment, especially in 1948, when he ran for president. Decades earlier, Wallace had opened his awe-struck letters to Roerich with the remarkable phrase "Dear Guru," an indication of the respect he had held for Roerich at the time. Later, as secretary of agriculture, Wallace provided direct support to Roerich's controversial and ultimately unsuccessful expedition to China, Manchuria, and Mongolia in the 1930s to search for drought-resistant grasses.

Almost certainly, Wallace would have recalled these earlier connections with Mongolia when he briefly visited Ulaanbaatar in early July 1944 at the end of a long journey that also included China, Siberia, and Soviet Central Asia. On arrival at Ulaanbaatar Airport, he was met by Marshal Choibalsan and many thousands of ordinary and no doubt curious Mongolians who had never seen an American before. At the time, the entire population of Ulaanbaatar did not yet exceed 100,000, while the entire population of Mongolia was estimated at around 1.5 million.

During his brief visit to Mongolia, Wallace was entertained by a folk opera, slept in a *ger* (what the Russians call a yurt), was presented with a *deel* (traditional Mongolian clothing), and visited two herder families. He also attended several pre-*Naadam* events, in anticipation of Mongolia's annual cultural festival, and was shown some of the "classic" sites featured in most tours of Ulaanbaatar to this day, including the Bogd Khan's winter palace. He was also given a pair of

riding boots as well as a bow and arrows—and a selection of Mongolian stamps to pass on to President Franklin Roosevelt, an avid stamp collector. While originally scheduled to stay in Ulaanbaatar for just one night, Wallace ended up having to stay for two, spending an extra day in Mongolia after his flight to Chita in Siberia was turned back because of bad weather.

Although not entirely supported by the historical record, some Mongolians credit Wallace's apparent interest in wanting to see Gandan Monastery as a useful gesture in restoring some measure of respect for Buddhism and perhaps even "saving" the landmark monastery at a time when hundreds of other monasteries had been destroyed and religion was being actively suppressed across the country. Even today, there are Mongolians who claim that Wallace's desire to see Gandan Monastery might have helped spare it from destruction, as was the fate of so many other Mongolian monasteries throughout the darker years of the Soviet period.

In reality, Wallace sometimes referred to Buddhism in Mongolia in less than flattering terms. For example, at one point in a travelogue published after his return to the United States under the title *Soviet Asia Mission*, he noted appreciatively that Mongolia had been "freed of the monkish control of pasture land." His comments on Mongolian lamas occasionally took on a negative tone, at one point referring to them as a "robust though shiftless lot."

Wallace was accompanied on his 1944 trip to Ulaanbaatar by Owen Lattimore (1900–89), an American scholar and foreign policy advisor who was regarded as one of the first great American specialists to study, research, and write on Mongolia. Born in the United States but partly raised in China, where his parents taught English at a local university, he worked variously as a journalist, editor, researcher, scholar, and businessman. Lattimore traveled extensively across East and Central Asia and spoke both Chinese and Mongolian. A prolific writer, he authored many books, including *The Desert Road to Turkestan*, *High Tartary*, *The Mongols of Manchuria*, *Mongol Journeys*, and *Nomads and Commissars: Mongolia Revisited*.

During the 1950s, Lattimore was accused of being overly sympathetic to the Soviet Union and Communist China. As a result, he faced a grueling attack in Congress led by Senator Joseph McCarthy. He subsequently moved to England and in 1963 became the first professor of Chinese studies at the University of

Leeds. While at Leeds, he maintained and even deepened his strong interest in Mongolia, which he visited regularly throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In 1967, Lattimore also became the first American—indeed, the first Westerner—to be elected to the Mongolian Academy of Science.

* * * * *

While the 1960s are typically viewed as a period in which there was virtually no contact between the United States and Mongolia, a handful of intrepid tourists and an even smaller number of prominent Americans continued to make their way to what Vice President Wallace had described during his own travels as “one of the most remote regions of the world.” Perhaps most notably, the well-known *New York Times* journalist Harrison Salisbury (1908–93) visited Mongolia in 1959. He was followed not long afterwards by US Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas (1898–1980) who subsequently wrote up his impressions of the Mongolian steppe in an article for *National Geographic* under the title “Journey to Outer Mongolia,” published in 1962. Douglas also wrote an article for the *New York Times* making the case for US recognition of Mongolia as an independent state.

Several notable academics, some of them emigrants to the United States from other countries, kept the study of Mongolia alive in the United States during the Cold War period, despite the fact that the United States had not yet recognized Mongolia as an independent state. These include Nicholas Poppe (1897–1991) at the University of Washington; Francis Cleaves (1911–95) and Joseph Fletcher (1934–84) at Harvard University; Denis Sinor (1916–2011) and Gombojab Hangin (1921–89) at Indiana University; and Henry Schwarz (1928–) at Western Washington University.

In the absence of any official political or economic ties, it was the work, dedication, and commitment of these and other academics that maintained and even expanded interest and knowledge about Mongolia in a number of colleges and universities across the United States. Some schools—including Indiana, the University of California at Berkeley, Brigham Young, Columbia, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, and Western Washington—even offered Mongolian language courses on occasion. In addition, they supported Mongolian-related research, sometimes

funded by the US Office of Education or the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Founded in 1961 and located at Indiana University, the Mongolia Society also represented an important early effort on the part of American academics and others to maintain interest, support research, and publish material on Mongolia, making it available to a larger English-speaking audience. Headed by Alicia Campi at the time, the Mongolia Society celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2011. Its various publications—including *Mongolian Survey* and *Mongolian Studies: Journal of the Mongolia Society*—remain important sources of information in English about Mongolia, both past and present.

Despite these and other efforts, Mongolia remained a strange and exotic place for most Americans throughout the Cold War period. More usually, when “Outer Mongolia” was mentioned at all during the 1950s and even well into the 1960s and 1970s, it was as a very distant place, as remote and far removed from the United States as it was possible to imagine.

U.S.-Mongolia Joint Statement

Issued at the White House

June 16, 2011

The President of the United States, Barack Obama, and the President of Mongolia, Elbegdorj Tsakhia, today reaffirmed their commitment to a United States–Mongolia comprehensive partnership based on common values and shared strategic interests. They emphasized their countries’ common interest in protecting and promoting freedom, democracy and human rights worldwide, and continued their intention to strengthen trade, investment and people-to-people ties so as to support economic growth and deepen the bonds of friendship between their two peoples. The two sides underscored their commitment to promoting a peaceful, stable and prosperous Asia-Pacific region through closer regional cooperation and support for regional multilateral institutions.

The United States and Mongolia reaffirmed their nations’ commitment to the principles of cooperation outlined in the 2007 U.S.-Mongolia Joint Statement, and to the consensus reached in the 2004 and 2005 U.S.-Mongolian Joint Statements. The United States applauded the progress made by the Mongolian people in the past 22 years to deepen the foundations of their young democracy, congratulated Mongolia on assuming the Chairmanship of the Community of Democracies in July 2011, and expressed its full support and close cooperation with Mongolia in successfully fulfilling the Chair’s responsibilities.

Mongolia welcomed and supported the key role played by the United States as an Asia-Pacific nation in securing peace, stability and prosperity in the region. The United States reaffirmed its support for a secure and prosperous Mongolia that plays an active role in regional affairs and that promotes strong, friendly and open relations with its neighbors. The United States and Mongolia pledged to work together to address their shared economic, security and development

interests through regional institutions in the Asia-Pacific and through the United Nations and other multilateral organizations.

The two sides committed to further develop their countries' strong economic partnership. The United States confirmed its support for Mongolia's efforts to integrate its economy into regional and international economic and financial institutions. Mongolia expressed its appreciation for continued U.S. support and economic assistance. Mongolia noted the important role that U.S. companies, with their internationally leading management, technical, safety, environmental and sustainable mining practices, will play in the development of the country's coal, other mineral resources, infrastructure, agriculture, energy and tourism industries. The United States welcomed Mongolian International Airlines' decision to purchase Boeing commercial jetliners and its declared intention to expand its fleet further with U.S. aircraft in the future. The United States and Mongolia expressed their intention to ensure a welcoming investment and business climate for each other's companies. In this regard, the two sides highlighted the importance of concluding the negotiations and signing a bilateral Transparency Agreement by the end of 2011, taking into full account the resources, capacity and legal processes of each country. In order to further deepen economic ties, the two sides signed additional memoranda aimed at trade promotion and aviation cooperation.

Mongolia expressed its thanks for the support provided by the United States under the Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact Agreement, and both sides looked forward to the continued successful implementation of Compact projects that will increase transparency, stimulate sustained economic growth and alleviate poverty in Mongolia. The Mongolian side expressed its intention to take the necessary steps to qualify for consideration for a second MCC Compact Agreement.

The United States thanked Mongolia for its support of the international coalition in Afghanistan, for its announced intention to re-deploy peacekeeping forces to Iraq, and for the country's notable support for UN peacekeeping efforts in Africa. Mongolia thanked the United States for the support it provided to Mongolia's Defense Reform Program. As part of this effort, the nations are working together to build an air mobility capability to support peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance operations. Both sides decided to continue

practical cooperation in peacekeeping training through exercises such as Gobi Wolf, Khaan Quest and Pacific Angel.

The United States and Mongolia have decided to explore mutually advantageous activities in nuclear energy based on the September 2010 Memorandum of Understanding between the two countries. The United States recognized and supported the Mongolian Nuclear Initiative, and applauded Mongolia's nuclear weapons free status. Mongolia confirmed its support for President Obama's Prague vision to include the call for a "New International Framework."

The United States and Mongolia expressed their intention to deepen and broaden people-to-people ties. Building on the creativity of our societies, both countries emphasized the importance that educational and cultural exchanges play in the bilateral relationship, and confirmed the role that innovative public-private partnerships can play in strengthening bilateral ties.

Index

- Academy for Educational Development, 139
- Across Mongolian Plains*, 10
- Afghan diplomats, Mongolian training for, 106
- Afghanistan, Mongolian military service in, 50, 102, 104–6, 112, 142
- Agreement on Trade Relations, 90
- Agricultural Bank, 75, 76
- Aikman, David, 26
- Air Force One, 43
- Alabama, 9
- Alaska, 71, 79, 111, 112, 113, 126, 136
- Alaska National Guard, Relationship with Mongolian military, 111–13
- Albright, Madeleine, 44, 46–47, 52, 54
- Altai Cashmere, 92
- Altanbulag, 115
- Amarbayasgalant Monastery, 130–31, 134
- Amarjargal (foreign minister), 46
- Ambassadors for Development, 126–27
- Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, 128–31, 134
- American Association of People with Disabilities, 52
- American Business Group, 96
- American Center for Mongolian Studies, 134–35
- “American Century,” 7
- American Chamber of Commerce, 142
- “American Corners,” 128
- American *Denj*, 4, 5, 88, 89
- American Joint Stock Company, 87
- American-Mongolian Automobile Company, 21
- American-Mongolian Business Council, 96
- American Museum of Natural History, 9, 11
- American University, 124
- Amicale, 90
- Anchorage, 113
- Anderson and Meyer, 87, 898
- Anderson, Desaix, 38
- Andrews, Roy Chapman, 8, 9–11, 19, 117
- Anthology of American Poetry*, 133
- Apache tribe, 132
- “Arab Spring,” 49
- Ariunna (head of Arts Council of Mongolia), 125
- Arizona, 76
- Arkhangai, 23, 58, 129
- Arlington Cemetery, 141
- Armitage, Richard, 54
- Armstrong, Louis, 111
- Arnold, Julean, 18
- Arts Council of Mongolia, 125, 133–34
- Asia Foundation, 39, 40, 50, 64, 139, 141
- Asia Museum (San Francisco), 141
- Asia Society, 143

- Asian Development Bank, 69, 91
Asian Wall Street Journal, 77
 Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 109
 Australia, 46, 56, 93, 118, 147
 Austro-Hungarian Empire, 17
 Axelbank, Albert, 26
 Ayers, Edith, 7
 Azzaya (sergeant), 50, 104, 142
- Baabar (writer and political commentator), 37
 Baasan (author and diplomat), 28
 Baatar, Tsendiin, 119
 Badamgarav, Gantuya, 124
 Bagabandi (president), 46, 141
 Baganuur, 63, 131
 Baker, James, 34, 35, 44–45, 46, 136
 Baker, John, 101, 102
 “Baker Street,” 34
 Baker, Susan, 34
Baksheesh, 3
 Baltimore, 53, 119
Basic Media Writing, 133
 Batbold (prime minister), 43, 48
 Batchimeg (member of parliament), 125
 Batmonkh (party chairman), 28, 33
 Bayangol Hotel, 94
 Bayanhongor, 58
 Bayan Olgii, 101, 128
 Bazarsuren, Batjargal, 98
 Beevor, Antony, 22
 Belgium, 17
 Bellingham (Washington), 136
 Beloit College, 9
 Berlin Wall, 37
 Biden, Joseph, 42, 43–44
 Biden, Naomi, 43
 Bloomberg Television, 93, 94
 Bloomington (Indiana), 120
 Bodoo (prime minister), 20, 21
 Boeing, 98, 142
- Bogd Khan, 1, 8, 12, 17, 18, 97
 Bold (minister of defense), 142
 Bold, Ravdan (ambassador), 28, 29, 31
 Bolshevik Revolution, 19
 Border Forces Communications Project, 113–14
 Boxer Rebellion, 8
 Brainard, Lael, 143
 Brandeis University, 122
 Brigham Young University, 14
 British American Tobacco Company, 18
 Brookings Institution, 142
 Brown, William A., 26
 Buddhism, 13, 22, 119, 120, 129, 130–31, 144
 Bulgan, 58
 Bulgaria, 65
 Burma, 11, 22, 49, 54
 Buryats, 119
 Bush, George W., 43, 50, 80, 127
 Bush, Laura, 43
 Business Council of Mongolia, 96
 Buyan Cashmere, 92
 Byambasuren, D. (first deputy prime minister), 38
 Byrnes, Mike, 101
- Cable News Network (CNN), 132
 Cabot, Mabel, 11
 California, 6, 9, 120, 135
 Camper, Leah, 95
 Camper, Rodney, 95
 Campbell, Craig, 113
 Campbell, Kim, 49
 Campbell, Kurt, 49
 Campi, Alicia, 15, 28, 29, 31, 33, 119
 Camp-Fire and Cotton-Field, 3
 Canada, 9, 46, 93, 96, 102, 124, 134
 Carter, Jimmy, 27, 44
 Cashell, Lee, 91
 Cashmere, Mongolian, 90, 92, 123
 Caterpillar, 91, 92, 93

- Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance, 108
- Center for Mongolian Historical and Cultural Heritage, 130
- Central Bank, 62, 85
- Central Methodist University, 121
- CHF (formerly Cooperative Housing Foundation), 74, 84
- Chiang Kai-Shek, 26
- Chicago, 120, 132, 135
- Children's Heart Project, 124
- Chile, 25, 54, 71
- China, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 18, 20, 22, 24, 25, 42, 46, 49–50, 51, 56, 78, 79, 87, 88, 91, 93, 98, 99, 101, 102, 103, 107, 146
- Chinggis Khan University, 130
- Chita, 13
- Choibalsan, Marshal, 12
- Choir, 81, 82, 135
- Chow, Antonio, 102
- Citadel (South Carolina), 121
- Clark, Lewis, 20
- Clinton, Hillary, 44, 47–50, 52, 55
- “Cold War,” 15, 117
- Christian and Missionary Alliance, 8
- Christianity, 120, 144
- Cleaves, Francis, 14
- Colorado, 120, 135
- Colorado State University, 62
- Columbia University, 14
- Communist Party (US), 26
- Community of Democracies, 48, 54–55
- Congress, 24, 41
- Congressional Mongolian Caucus, 142
- Consulate, Mongolia (San Francisco), 141
- Consulate, Russia (Ulaanbaatar), 4, 21
- Consulate, US (Kalgan), 18, 19, 20, 21
- Cooperative Housing Foundation, *see* CHF
- Coral Bracelet*, 120
- Cornell University, 124
- Corruption issues, impact on Mongolia, 55, 56, 72–73, 145
- Council of American Overseas Research Centers, 135
- Council on Foreign Relations, 141
- Cox, Jackson, 96
- Cranston, Alan, 41
- Croft, Alison, 95
- Cuba, 28
- cultural exchanges, 52
- Cummings, Brigitte, 91
- Cutler, Walter L., 26
- Czechoslovakia/Czech Republic, 35, 37, 54
- Dalai Lama, 13, 120, 144
- Dale, Kareem, 52
- Danzanravjaa, *see* “Lama of the Gobi”
- Danzanravjaa Museum, 129
- Danzin (minister of finance), 21
- DaRin, Brian, 95
- Darkhan, 74, 82, 91, 93, 127, 131, 136, 137
- Davaagiiv (ambassador), 29
- Democratic Party, 40, 57, 65
- Denmark, 17, 81
- Denver, 120, 135
- Denver Street, 23, 135
- Denver Zoo, 135
- Department of Agriculture, 62, 84
- Department of Commerce, 96, 98, 142
- Department of Defense, 44
- Department of Education, 134
- Department of Energy, 62, 114
- Department of Interior, 62, 79
- Department of Labor, 62
- Department of State, 6, 19, 25, 29, 30, 31, 40, 44, 52, 125, 126, 132, 134, 139, 149
- Department of the Treasury, 62, 84, 85
- Desert Road to Turkestan*, 13

- Development Bank of Mongolia, 98
 Development Solutions, 74, 138
Diary of a Journey Through Tibet and Mongolia, 5
 Dinger, John, 35
 disability issues, US assistance with, 52–53, 126–27, 132
 Dodge, 19, 89
 Dornod, 114, 127
 Douglas, William O., 14
 Dreier, David, 42
 Dugersuren (foreign minister), 26, 27
 Duinkerjav (Mongolian employee at US Embassy), 33
Duke of Mongolia, 8, 88
 Dundgov, 136
 Durevdash (radio director), 133
 “Dutch Disease,” 70–71
 Dwyer, Jim, 97
- Eagle Television, 93
 Eberhardt, Charles, 6
 Educational Advising and Resource Centers, 127
 Eisenhower, Dwight, 125
 Eisenhower Scholarships, 125
 Elbegdorj (president), 42, 43, 46, 48, 49, 98, 103, 104, 109, 123, 137, 141–43
 Elections, Mongolia
 in 1996, 40–41, 45
 in 2012, 48, 56, 57–59
 Embassy of France (Ulaanbaatar), 34, 35
 Embassy of Germany (Ulaanbaatar), 35
 Embassy of Japan (Ulaanbaatar), 34
 Embassy of Kuwait (Ulaanbaatar), 45
 Embassy of Mongolia (Washington, DC), 31
 Embassy of UK (Ulaanbaatar), 25, 34
 Embassy of US (Beijing), 27, 28, 29, 32
 Embassy of US (Moscow), 31
 Embassy of US (Tokyo), 28, 29
- Embassy of US (Ulaanbaatar), 23, 30–35, 38, 45, 51, 52, 95, 96, 117, 122, 124, 125, 127, 130, 131, 134
 Energy Regulatory Authority, 66
 English Access Micro Scholarship Program 127–28
 Enhhuyag, B., 125
 Enkhbat (TV director), 133
 Enkhbayar (president), 43, 55–57, 80, 113, 125, 137, 141
 Enkhbold, Z., 125
 Erdenebilig, Ariunstsatsral, 123
 Erdenebold, Uyanga, 126
 Erdenebulgan (opera director), 125
 Erdenechuluun (ambassador), 24
 Erdenet, 74, 82, 112, 127, 131, 136
 Erdene Zuu Monastery, 58
 European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 62, 69, 78
 Ex-Im Bank, 97, 98
 Experiment in International Living, 118
 Exports,
 from Mongolia to the United States, 89, 90, 91–92
 from the United States to Mongolia, 94–95
 Eznis Airlines, 98
- Fairbanks, 112, 113, 136
Far Eastern Economic Review, 77
 “Faulty Towers,” 35
 Federal Aviation Authority, 142
 Ferrin, A.W., 18, 149
 Field Museum (Chicago), 135
 Finch, Chris, 39
 first American visitor to Mongolia, 2–3
 Five Hills Training Center, 102, 104, 107
 “Flaming Cliffs,” 10
 Flek, Bela, 131
 Fletcher, Joseph, 14
 Fluor, 93
 Ford motor cars, 5, 19, 89, 92, 97

- Foreign Commercial Service, 98
 Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, 145
 Foreign Military Financing, 110
 Foreign Ministry, 27, 28, 29, 31, 34, 35, 47, 58
 Fourth of July Celebrations, 33
 France, 3, 7, 17, 25, 34, 35, 48, 88, 102, 106
 Franck, Harry, 11, 19
 Freedom House survey, 56
 Free Trade Agreement, 99
 Friends of Mongolia, 139–40
 Frost-Solomon Task Force, 41
 Fulbright, J. William, 122
 Fulbright Program, 122–24
- Galaxy* magazine, 3
 Ganbat, D., 125
 Ganbayasgakh, Geleg, 51
 Ganbold (author and diplomat), 88
 Gandan Monastery, 1, 13, 120
 Gankhuyag (artist), 143
 Gearan, Mark, 137
 Gender Equality Center, 51
 General Agency for State Inspection, 114
 General Directorate of Tax, 85
 General Election Commission (GEC), 56, 58
 General Electric (GE), 83, 94
 Genghis Khan, 3, 6, 8, 76, 105, 108, 135, 147
 Genghis Khan Hotel, 94
 Genghis Movie Theater, 123
 George Washington University, 82
 Georgia State University, 122, 123
 Ger Initiative, 74, 138
 Germany, 6, 7, 17, 19, 22, 35, 37, 62, 69, 81, 91, 102, 104
 Giant Steps of Asia Jazz Festival, 97
 Gillette, Mark, 102
 Gingrich, Newt, 40
 Girvin, Matthew, 140
- Glasnost*, 37
 Global Peace Operations Initiative, 110
 Globe International, 133
 Gobi Desert, 1, 2, 8, 9, 10, 19, 20, 34, 44, 74, 81, 89
 Gobi Initiative, 74, 78, 138
 Gobi Wolf, 107, 108–9, 112
 Gombosuren (foreign minister), 33, 34, 136
 Gorbachev, Mikhail, 29, 37
 Gotov (presidium secretary), 33
 Government House, 43, 48
 Goyo Cashmere, 123
 Great Hural, 40, 42, 46, 83, 103, 125
- Habitat for Humanity, 118, 127
 Hall, Gus, 26
 Hangai Mountains, 58
 Hangin, Gombojab, 14, 30
 Hanson, Tom, 31
 Harley Davidson, 21
 Harvard University, 11, 14, 122, 127, 141
 Haskins, Thomas W., 5
 Hatgal, 118
 Havana, 28
 Hawaii, 5, 108, 109
 Hazara minority in Afghanistan, Mongolian interaction with, 105, 106
 Hearst Newspaper Syndicate, 133
 Hedin, Sven, 8
 Henti, 108, 136
Herder from the Future, 74
 Heumann, Judith, 52
High Tartary, 13
 Hochberg, Fred, 98
 Holman, W., 21, 87
 Hong Kong, 31, 69, 90
 Hoover, Herbert, 1–2
 Hotel Kempinski, 4
 House Democracy Partnership, 41, 42, 142
 House Foreign Affairs Committee, 38

- House of Representatives, US, 41, 142
 House of Youth, 38
 House US-Mongolia Friendship Caucus, 41
 Hovd, 19, 127, 128
 Hovsgol National Park, 79
 Howell, Chuck, 35, 136
 Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program, 124
 Human Rights Day, 38
 Hungary, 37, 65
- Ichinnorov, M., 125
 Ikh Nart Nature Reserve, 135
 Illinois, 7, 120
Impact of China and Russia on United States–Mongolian Relations in the Twentieth Century, 28
 Imparato, Andrew, 52
 India, 46, 54, 56, 78, 107, 108, 119
 “Indiana Jones,” 9
 Indiana University, 14, 15, 122
 Institute for International Education, 127
 Institute of Language and Literature, 129
 International Atomic Energy Agency, 53
 International Finance Corporation, 78
 International Military Education and Training, 109–10
 International Monetary Fund, 69
 International Republican Institute (IRI), 40, 41, 50, 64
 International Rescue Committee, 139
 International Visitors Leadership Program, 125, 132
 “Investment Guide to Mongolia,” 95
 Investment Incentive Agreement, 90
 Iran, 53
 Iraq, invasion of Kuwait, 45
 Iraq, Mongolian military service in, 50, 102, 104, 112, 142
 Ivanhoe Mines, 125
- Jackson, James, 26
 Japan, 17, 22, 23, 28, 34, 42, 46, 48, 51, 62, 69, 77, 92, 99, 102, 107
 Jargalantin Am Valley, 46
 Jargalsaikhan (political commentator), 125, 126
 John Marshall Law School, 122
 Johns Hopkins University, 14
 Johnson, Donald, 27, 28, 29
- Kalga, 11, 18, 19, 20, 21, 87, 89
 Kalmyks, 119
 Kamman, Curtis, 25, 28
 Kansas, 4
 Karlsen, John, 91
 Kazakh Muslim minority in Mongolia, 144
 Kazakhstan, 56, 67, 78, 102
 Kerry, John, 42
 Khaan Bank, 75–78, 91, 94, 96, 97, 138
 Khaan Quest, 107–8, 112
 Khalkin-Gol, Battle of, 22–23
 Khanui Valley, 129
 Kharkorin, 58, 82
 Khutukhtu, Dilowa Gegen, 119
 Kissinger, Henry, 27, 143
 Knox, Thomas, 3–4
 Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 64
 Korea, North, 53–54, 102, 143
 Korea, South, 46, 51, 53–54, 69, 81, 92, 99, 102, 107, 119, 144
 Krusekopf, Charles, 134
 Kumar, Suresh, 98
 Kuwait, 45, 53
 Kyatka, 3
 Kyrgyzstan, 31, 49, 54, 56, 67, 102
- Lake, Joseph, 30, 34, 35, 38, 39, 41, 63, 64, 89, 90, 136
 “Lama of the Gobi,” 129
Land of the Lamas, 5
 LaPorta, Al, 24, 30, 35

- Larson, Frans August, 8–9, 19, 20, 88–89
- Latin alphabet adopted, 6
- Lattimore, Owen, 13–14, 26, 119
- Lau, Jonathan, 102, 105
- Leaders Engaged in New Democracies (LEND), viii, 48, 55
- Leeds University, 14, 26
- Lehigh University, 122
- Lehman, David, 133
- Lessem, “Dino Dan,” 135
- Library of Congress, 2, 5
- Lincoln, Abraham, 2
- Living History*, 47
- Lkhagvasuren (general), 23
- Locke, Gary, 98, 142
- Los Angeles, 147
- Lotus Center, 118
- Louisiana State University, 126
- Lugar, Richard, 42
- Luvсанжав (first Mongolian employee at US Embassy), 33
- “Mad Baron,” 19, 20
- Manchu script, 2
- Manchuria, 12
- Mann, Steve, 32, 33
- Mansfield, Mike, 23, 24, 28
- MarketWatch*, 74
- Marshall Center, 101, 109
- Massachusetts, 142
- Mays, Wallace, 91
- McCarthy, Joseph, 13
- McDermott, Jim, 41
- MCS Coca Cola, 123
- Mencher, Melvin, 133
- Mend-Oyoo (poet), 133
- Menin, Franche, 87
- Mercy Corps, 52, 78, 84, 139
- Meyer and Larson, 89
- MIAT Mongolian Airlines, 98
- Michigan State University, 122
- Millennium Challenge Corporation, 62, 80–84, 138, 144
- Millie’s Café, 9
- Ministry of Defense, 109
- Ministry of Finance, 62, 85
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 27, 28, 29, 31, 34, 35, 47, 58, 87, 98, 106, 109
- Minton, Mark, 129, 130, 133
- missionaries, 4, 8, 19, 93, 118
- Mongol Bank, 125
- Mongolia Society, 15, 30, 87, 119
- Mongolian Academy of Science, 14, 129
- Mongolian-American Chamber of Commerce, 96
- Mongolian Community Center (Oakland, California), 120
- Mongolian Monasteries Documentation Project, 130
- Mongolian National Archives, 2, 17, 26, 87
- Mongolian National Democratic Party, 57
- Mongolian National University, 48
- Mongolian People’s Party, 21, 57
- Mongolian People’s Republic, The*, 27
- Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party, 26, 38, 55, 57
- Mongolian Post Office, 32, 34
- Mongolian Railways, 94
- Mongolian School of Foreign Service, 123
- Mongolian School of the National Capital Area, Inc., 120
- Mongolian Survey*, 15
- Mongolian Trading Company, 87
- Mongolian University for Health Sciences, 82
- Mongolian University of Science and Technology, 113
- Mongolians living in the United States, 97, 119–21, 138–39, 141
- Mongolians studying in the United States, 121–27, 148

- Mongolian Studies: Journal of the Mongolia Society*, 15
- Mongol Journeys*, 13
- Mongols of Manchuria*, 13
- Mongols of the Twentieth Century*, 27
- Montana, 23
- Montclair State University, 122
- Morrow, Peter, 75–76, 77, 91, 96
- Mullen, Michael, 142
- Munkhbat, A., 125
- Murkowski, Lisa, 42
- Museum of Modern Art (Ulaanbaatar), 129–30
- Nathanson, Alynn, 26
- Nation, The*, 20
- National Center against Violence, 46
- National Center for State Courts, 79
- National Democratic Institute, 40, 50
- National Emergency Management Agency, 80, 109
- National Endowment for Democracy, 40, 50, 142
- National Endowment for the Humanities, 15
- National Geographic*, 10, 11, 14, 147
- National Institutes of Health, 62
- National Park Service, 79
- National Public Radio, 132
- National Science Foundation, 62
- National University of Mongolia, 123
- NATO, 32, 104, 106
- Nature Conservancy, 124
- Navajo tribe, 132
- Nebraska, 4
- Nef, Ed, 91
- Netherlands, 17
- Newcom, 94
- New Conquest of Central Asia*, 10
- New Hampshire, 3
- New Jersey, 120
- New York, 6, 7, 11, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 30, 31, 33, 120, 132, 139, 141
- New York Herald*, 3
- New York Times*, 14, 24, 26, 27, 31, 147
- New Zealand, 65
- Nist, Sally, 34
- Nist, Theodore, 33, 34
- Nixon, Richard, 27
- Nomadic Expeditions, 91, 94
- Nomads and Commissars: Mongolia Revisited*, 13
- North American-Mongolian Business Council, 96
- North Carolina, 135
- Norway, 66, 71
- Nuclear Energy Agency, 114
- Nuclear issues, discussions on, 44, 53, 114–15
- Nuland, Victoria, 32, 33
- Nyamdoo (ambassador), 29, 30, 31
- Oakland, 120
- Obama, Barack, 42, 95, 141
- Ochirbat, Gombojav (president), 38, 47, 90, 141
- O'Connor, Sandra Day, 79
- Ohio, 7, 11
- Oidov, Badruun, 124
- Oidov, Enkhtuya, 124
- Omnogobi, 108, 136
- On the Trail of Ancient Man*, 11
- Open Society Forum, 40, 64, 127, 134
- Oregon, 126
- Orkhon, 112, 136
- Orthodox Church, 4
- Ottoman Empire, 5
- Otunbaeva, Roza, 49
- Oval Office, 42, 48, 141
- Overland through Asia*, 3
- Overseas Private Investment Corporation, 97
- Ovorhangai, 58, 136

- Oya Tolgoi, 93
 Oyun (member of parliament), 59, 125
 Oyungerel (member of parliament), 125
 Ozomotli, 132
- Pacific Angel, 108
 Peabody (mining company), 93
 Peabody Museum, 11
 Peace Avenue, 4, 12
 Peace Corps, 33, 35, 136–39
 Peljee (deputy chairman), 33
 Pennsylvania, 120
 Perestroika, 37
 Philharmonic Hall (Ulaanbaatar), 131
 Pitts, Joe, 41
 Poland, 22, 37, 54, 65, 104
Politics of Diplomacy, The, 45
 Poppe, Nicholas, 14
Porgy and Bess, 125
 Price, David, 42
- Qing Empire, 1
- Ragchaa, Gur, 103
 Ramada Hotel, 9
 Reciprocal Investment Agreement, 90
 Rice, Condoleezza, 43, 44, 50
 Richmond, Michael, 95
 Rinchin (foreign minister), 26
Robert's Rules of Order, 39
 Rockhill, William Woodville, 5–6
 Roerich, Nicholas, 12
 Rogers, Jim, 143
 Rogers, Mary, 8
 Roland, Ari, 131–32
 Romanov Dynasty, 19
 Roosevelt, Franklin D., 13
 Roy, J. Stapleton, 25, 29, 31
 Rumsfeld, Donald, 50
 Rupen, Robert, 27
 Russell, McKinney, 117
Rural Business News, 74
- Russia, 1, 3, 4, 5, 20, 45, 46, 56, 63, 65, 67, 68, 78, 79, 81, 87, 88, 98, 101, 102, 103, 107, 119, 134, 135, 146
- Sacher's Café, 91
 Sainshand, 81, 82, 127, 129
 Salisbury, Harrison, 14, 24
 Salkhit Mountain, 83, 94
 Samaritan's Purse, 124
 Samuu-Yondon (sergeant), 50, 104, 142
 San Francisco, 120, 141
 Saruul, B., 127
 Saunders, Steve, 96
 Scalapino, Robert, 27
 Schlomm, Boris, 90
 Schwab, Matthew, 102
 Schwarz, Henry, 14
 Seattle, 25, 29, 53, 120, 134
 Second Line of Defense Radiation Portal Monitoring Program, 114–15
 Second World War, 22
 Selbe River, 23, 34, 35, 135
 Selenge, 136
 Senate, 24, 41, 42, 142
 Senko, Dita, 34
 Senko, Michael, 33, 34
 Seoul, 147
 Severinghaus, Shel, 39
 Sheldon, Walter, 24, 30
 Shevardnadze, Eduard, 29
 "Shock Therapy," 66–68
 Shultz, George P., 30
 Siberia, 2, 3, 8, 11, 12, 13, 19, 22
 Singapore, 22, 25, 107
 Sinor, Denis, 14
 Sitzman, Barbara, 9
 Skoda, Millie, 91
 Slutz, Pamela, 112, 132
 Smithsonian Institution, 129
 Snow Leopard Trust, 118
 Sodontogos, E., 125
 Sokobin, Samuel, 18, 20, 21

- Solidarity Movement (Poland), 37
 Solomon, Richard, 25
 South Gobi province, 10, 93
Soviet Asia Mission, 13
 Soviet Union, 12, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25,
 27, 28, 32, 33, 37, 63, 66, 67, 68, 69,
 70, 102, 144
 Spiers, Ronald, 30
SS Manchuria, 6
SS Mongolia, 6–8
 Stalin, Joseph, 22
 Standard Oil, 18
 Stanford University, 27, 122, 124, 127,
 141
 Stanton, Edwin, 20
 State University of New York, 122
 St. John's College, 121
 St. Petersburg (Russia), 3, 19
 Stillwell, Joseph, 11
 Story, Ed, 91
 Sukhbaatar (Revolutionary), 20, 39
 Sukhbaatar Square, 12, 35, 37, 93, 102,
 111, 132
 Sulzberger, C. L., 26
 Sumati (pollster and political analyst), 70
 Syracuse University, 122
 Sweden, 8, 9, 19
 Syria, 53

 Taipei, 25
 Tampa, 120
 Tatman, David, 102
 Tavan Tolgoi, 93
 TenGer Financial Group, 123
 Tepliz, Alaina, 95
 Terelj Hotel, 94
 Terelj National Park, 48–49
 Texas, 135
 Texas A&M, 122
 Thailand, 26
 Thanksgiving celebrations, 34
 Third National Hospital, 124

 “Third Neighbor” policy, 46, 57, 106, 146
 Tianjin, 89
 Tibet, 5, 11, 119, 144
 Tibetan Mongolian Buddhist Center
 (Indiana), 120
Time magazine, 26
 Tokyo, 28, 147
 Topping, Seymour, 27
 Tov, 58
 Trade and Development Agency, 97, 98
 Trade and Development Bank, 75, 97
 Trafficking in Persons, 51
 Transparency Agreement, 44, 99
 Transparency International, 56, 72, 147
 Trans-Siberian Railway, 5
 Triados, 78
 Tschetter, Ron, 137
 Tsedenbal (prime minister), 26
 Tsetserleg, 58, 136
 Tsontsengel, 118
 Tuul River, 4

 Ude, 11
 Ulaanbaatar Airport (Genghis Khan
 Airport), 12, 34, 44
 Ulaanbaatar Hotel, 29, 32, 34
 Ulaanbaatar United Football Club, 121
 Uliasti, 87
 Ungern-Sternberg, Roman Nikolai
 Maximilian von (*see* “Mad Baron”)
 United Kingdom, 6, 7, 17, 25, 34, 56, 102
 United Nations, 24, 25, 29, 30, 46, 53, 64,
 69, 91, 103, 106, 117, 140
 United Nations Commission on Human
 Rights, 53
 United Nations Development Program,
 72, 78
 United Nations Peacekeeping, Mongolian
 participation in, 102, 103, 106–7,
 142, 146
 United Press International (UPI), 26

- United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 24, 40, 50, 52, 61–66, 69–80, 84, 85, 91, 121, 124–25, 138, 144
 cash transfers, 61, 63
 funding levels, 61–62
 Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, 79–80
- University of Alaska, 112
 University of California, 14, 27, 122
 University of Colorado, 141
 University of Illinois, 122
 University of Iowa, 122
 University of Nebraska, 122
 University of North Carolina, 27
 University of Pittsburgh, 122
 University of Science and Technology (Ulaanbaatar), 134
 University of Washington, 14, 25, 29
 University of Wisconsin, 134
 University of Wyoming, 126
 Urubshurow, Jalsa, 91
 Uvs, 102, 114
 US Civil War, 2, 3
- Vance, Stephen, 78
 Vanchigdorjit (herder), 46
 Vanderbilt University, 124
Vanished Kingdoms, 11
 Vienna, 53
 Vietnam War, 26
 Virginia, 120, 121
 “Visa Lottery” program, 121
 Voice of America, 132
 Voluntary Visitors Program, 125
- Wagenlander, Jim, 135
 Wagner-Asia, 92–93, 95
 Wallace, Henry A., 12–13, 14, 43, 44
 Walter Reed Hospital, 142
 Walters, Vernon, 29, 33
Wandering in Northern China, 11
 Wang Yusuo, 143
 Washington Area Mongolian Community Association, 120
 Washington, D.C., 18, 31, 53, 80, 121, 132, 141
WeatherWatch, 74
 Webb, James H., Jr, 42
 Western Folklife Center, 132
 Western Washington University, 14, 122, 134
 West Point, first Mongolian to attend, 127
 Wildlife Conservation Society, 79
 Wilhelm, Tom, 102
 Williams College, 124
 Williams, Richard, 31, 32, 33
 Wind Bird, 52
 Winter Palace, 12
 Wisconsin, 9
 Women’s Leadership Forum, 48, 49, 55
 Wood, Helen, 7
 World Bank, 62, 69, 72, 73, 91
 World Trade Organization, 91
 World Vision, 69, 118
 World War I, 5, 7, 11, 19, 89
 World War II, 11, 22, 23
 Wulsin, Frederick, 11
 Wulsin, Janet Elliott, 11
 Wutaishan, 5
 Wyoming, 126
- XacBank, 75, 78, 94
- Yale University, 127
 Yarmag Denj, 44
Years of Adventure, 1
 Young, Stephen (diplomat), 31
 Young, Steve (musician), 131
- Zaisan, 35
 Zamiin-Uud, 115
 Zanabazar Museum, 129

- Zandanshatar (foreign minister), 48
- Zavkhan, 118
- Zhangjiakou (*see* Kalgan)
- Zhukov, Marshal, 22, 23
- Zorig (activist), 59
- Zorig Foundation, 124
- Zuni tribe, 132

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Jonathan S. Addleton served as a US Foreign Service officer in Mongolia twice, first as USAID mission director (2001–04) and then as ambassador (2009–12). Other assignments include development counselor at the US Mission to the European Union in Brussels; USAID mission director in Pakistan and Cambodia; and USAID program officer in Jordan, Kazakhstan, South Africa, and Yemen. He has written a number of articles on Asia as well as two previous books, *Undermining the Center* (Oxford University Press, 1992) and *Some Far and Distant Place* (University of Georgia Press, 1997). In July 2012, he was awarded the Polar Star, Mongolia's highest civilian honor conferred on foreign citizens, for his role in strengthening ties between the United States and Mongolia.