

A Timeline of Kenai Peninsula History

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Late 1600s and 1700s Russia expanded eastward across the Urals, Siberia and to the Far East. The purpose of the expansion was largely the sable fur trade. Sable were a "fur of choice" in Europe. As the sable pelts passed through European Russia they were taxed and the money for sale brought a favorable cash flow to Russia. Peter the Great particularly encouraged the sable trade which, through taxes, paid for as much as 10% of his budget. Conservation measures were not practiced and sable trappers had to move further and further east. Russian culture (traders, missionaries, fugitives, army) followed and indigenous peoples (Tungus, Buryat, Itelmen, Chuckchi etc.) were subjugated.

1728: Peter the Great commissioned Vitus Bering and Aleksei Chirikof to determine the eastern extent of the Asian continent, and identify a marine (or overland) route to Alaska. Bering sailed north from the Kamchatka Peninsula through the Bering Straits where he sighted the Alaskan coast. Bering is often credited with the first European "discovery" of Alaska, but a report discovered later clearly established Simon Dezhnev (late 1600s) as the first European to determine that Asia and North America were separated.

1741: A second Bering/Chirikof expedition was commissioned to identify a maritime route to Alaska and to claim North Pacific territory to prevent Spain from expanding northward from Mexico. Vitus Bering and Aleksei Chirikof in two boats, the *St. Peter* and *St. Paul*, sailed from the Kamchatka Peninsula (Petrapavlovsk) across the North Pacific. The second voyage brought back information about large populations of sea otter and, as a result, initiated the Russian based maritime fur trade with the furs going primarily to China.

1740s to 1780s Temporary Russian companies were formed to harvest sea otter from the Aleutians. Aleuts were conscripted to hunt sea otter and in the process about 85-90% of the original Aleut population of 15,000 died of battles, punishment, suicide or malnutrition.

1762 Alutiiq attack the first Russian ship to attempt sea otter trade on Kodiak (Glotov) . Koniag devised thick, wooden screens bound with kelp to move within arrow shot distance of the Glotov ship which they kept captive for several months with loss of life.

1778 James Cook and James Clerke command a British expedition seeking a Northwest Passage by which to effectively exploit North Pacific sea otter and other resources. They spend 12 days in Cook Inlet and Cook declares it a waste of time, ("Hence we have to turn again") after taking possession in a ceremony at Point Possession.

1779: Unaware that Captain Cook had explored and claimed Cook Inlet the year before, Ignacio Aretga and Bodega y Quadra sailed as far north as 60 degrees north latitude in 1779. They entered Cook Inlet on August 1, 1779 naming it "Ensenada do la Nuestra de la Regla," (Inlet of Our Lady of the Rule). They anchored in Port Chatham naming nearby Elizabeth Island, "San Ancieto." Thinking the larger land was an island, they named the Kenai Peninsula, "Isla de la Regla (Island of the Rule). On August 2, 1779 a large party went ashore, built a rock cairn, erected a cross, and a priest held a mass. In this way Artega and Bodega took possession of the land for Spain.

1783 The Pan'kov trading ship was attacked by Alutiiq in Prince William Sound as was a ship captained by Potap Zaikov.

1784 Shelikhov established the first permanent settlement in Alaska on Kodiak Island naming it for his ship the *Three Saints (Tri Sviatitelia)*. Upon arrival Shelikhov engaged in several major battles with the Alutiiq culminating with Shelikhov's bombardment of Alutiiq on Refuge Rock. Up to 4,000 Koniag were killed and Shelikhov gained control of Kodiak. The indiscriminate use of cannons made this conquest possible.

1785: A combined force of Alutiiq and Dena'ina (possibly numbering in the thousands) attack and destroy a Shelikhov Company outpost on Shuyak Island in the northern Kodiak Archipelago.

1786: Shelikhov sent a party under Vasilli Malakhov to attack the Kenai Peninsula Dena'ina in Cook Inlet in retaliation for their part in the Shuyak battle. Malakhov established Alexander Redoubt at English Bay, now called Nanwalek in Kachemak Bay.

By the 1790s a satellite trading post (zimov'e) was established at Iliamna

1786: In 1786 Nathaniel Portlock in the *King George* and George Dixon in the *Queen Charlotte* spent the summer trading in Cook Inlet. Portlock and Dixon traded with the Dena'ina while anchored in Trading Bay. A Dena'ina Qeshqa tried to ally with the British against the Russians, but the British declined to become involved.

1787: Peter Kolomin (foreman) and 38 Russians and 10 Kamchedal (Itlemen) on the ship *St. Paul (Sv. Pavel)* established St. George Redoubt at the mouth of the Kasilof River for the Lebedev Company. They landed on July 1, 1787. The finished fort consisted of two large log buildings surrounded by a stockade.

1788: Esteban Jose Martinez in the *Princesa Real* and Gonzalo Lopes de Haro in the packetboat *San Carlos* sailed up the coast from California, along the Kenai Peninsula, as far as Unalaska planting bottles and crosses and taking possession for Spain.

1788-1789: G. Izmailov and D. Bocharov of the Shelikhov Company explored Prince William Sound and buried metal plates with Imperial Crests in the ground (or in some cases affixed them to trees) claiming the territory for Russia. In 1789 Izmailov entered Cook Inlet placing a crest at Nanwalek (English Bay).

1790: Salvadore Fidalgo visited Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet on a spy reconnaissance for Spain. His journal describes in detail the Russian settlements in English Bay and the only known description of the Redoubt St. George at Kasilof. Fidalgo stopped in Port Graham, which he named Port Revillagigedo, where he buried a bottle and erected a cross claiming (again) the land for Spain. Fidalgo's pilot visited St. George Redoubt and reported the recent killing of Russians by the Dena'ina.

1791: Grigor Konovalov, Amos Balushin, and 62 men of the Lebedev Company establish St. Nicholas Redoubt at the mouth of the Kenai River. The party had sailed on the ship *St. George the Victorious*, piloted by Stephan Zaikov. They did not join forces with the Lebedev Company post at Kasilof but established a second post only twelve miles north at the mouth of the Kenai River on, or shortly after, August 20, 1791 (Old Style) (September 2, 1791 New Style).

A satellite trading post (zimov'e) was established at Tyonek about this time.

1791: Alexander Baranov replaced Delarov as company manager for the Shelikhov Company. The Three Saints post is destroyed by an earthquake/tsunami and the post is moved to modern Kodiak and called St. Paul Redoubt

1792: Shelikhov Company built a ship-building at the site of modern Seward called *Voskresensk Gavan* or Resurrection(Sunday) Harbor. Under extreme conditions the ship *Phoenix* was built.

1792: During the spring of 1792, Konovalov received additional supplies and men from Lebedev-Lastochkin and established a post near the mouth of the Copper River in Prince William Sound. It was named *Konstantinovsk* Redoubt, or Fort Konstantin and Amos Balushin was placed in charge.

1791 to 1796: The two Russian Companies engage in "industrial terrorism" against each other. For fur trading, the Russians ally themselves with various Dena'ina Qeshqa. The Qeshqa trade furs obtained by the ukilqa to the Russians for metal goods, cloth, and beads. These they redistribute to their ukilqa for more furs.

The rival companies target qeshqa for terrorism capturing, beating, torturing, or killing qeshqa or their wives in an effort to disrupt the other company's trade activities. Additionally Kamchedal are targeted for terrorism using the same tactics. Russian seldom if ever attacked Russian.

In addition, by European standards Dena'ina women were considered the "most beautiful" thus

Russians targeted Dena'ina women as concubines. This practice upset Dena'ina social structure particularly establishing alliances through marriage.

1794: Britisher's George Vancouver and Peter Puget returned to Cook Inlet and Prince William Sound to resolve geographical questions raised by Cook (one last look for the Northwest Passage) and gain information about Russian activities. Vancouver was in

Cook Inlet a month and a half and his journal is rich in its description of the land and people. (If you only read one explorer journal, read Vancouver's.)

- Vancouver's naturalist, Archibald Menzies also has a published journal account although very little on the Dena'ina. Portions of Peter Puget's unpublished journal also exist.
- Vancouver reports many harmonious, enjoyable trade encounters with the Dena'ina.
- Vancouver and Menzies visit St. Nicholas Redoubt (Kenai) and give the best description of the fort. He described the conditions as despicable.
- Included in Vancouver's description are many huts within the fort walls occupied by Dena'ina women, concubines of the Russians.

1794-1796 Father Juvenal arrived in Kodiak in 1794 with a contingent of Orthodox monks from Valaam monastery and was assigned the Prince William Sound and Kenai Peninsula areas to carry out missionary activities. In 1795 Father Juvenal baptized 900 Chugach natives in Prince William Sound. In 1796 he traveled to Kenai where he baptized "all" of the natives and spent the winter. During the spring of 1796 he crossed Cook Inlet conducting missionary activities in the Lake Iliamna area. He was killed by Yupik Eskimos that same year.

Bancroft's *History of Alaska* has an account describing Father Juvenal's murder adding that before he was killed, he had a sexual encounter with a Dena'ina woman. The account is attributed to a diary which is now believed to be a forgery perpetrated by Ivan Petroff, one of Bancroft's researchers and author of the 1880 United States Census for Alaska.

1794: Father Ioasaf, head of the missionary contingent investigated criminal charges against Konovalov and exonerated him. Father Ioasaf implicates Baranov as equally to blame in cruelty, murder, and concubine taking but Shelikhov suppressed the report.

1795. Konstantin Samoilov led a Lebedev Company party on a raid of an Ahtna village north of Fort Konstantin. The purpose of the raid was to "pacify" the natives and to capture women for concubines. The Ahtna aided by the Russian's Dena'ina guide, C'uket Ta', followed Samoilov and his men back to Prince William Sound where all thirteen Russians were killed. According to Davydov, Samoilov was castrated, blinded, crucified, and then killed.

Ca. 1792-1796 The following events took place sometime between 1792 and 1796 and are part of Dena'ina oral tradition.

- Soonondra a Dena'ina village in Kachemak Bay is attacked by Russians and all the women are taken presumably as concubines.
- Jaydecuoyouth incident. Approximately 20 Dena'ina are killed in an attack on St. Nicholas Redoubt. Jaydecuoyouth kills approximately the same number of Russians.
- According to Dena'ina tradition, the Russians enticed men of Iliamna into their post where they were executed and the women taken as concubines.
- Russians mistreated Dena'ina children playing near the Iliamna (or Tyonek?) post and the infuriated Dena'ina killed the Russians stationed there. The Dena'ina qeshqa spared a Russian boy who was a playmate of his son.

- A dispute during a trading session led to Russians killing several Dena'ina. The Dena'ina retreated and later attacked the Russian party, killing them all.

1795: In a 1795 letter to Shelikhov, Baranov wrote that the Chugach Alutiiq attacked a Lebedev Company party killing ten men. Father Ioasf later reported that Baranov incited the Alutiiq attack on the Lebedev Company.

1795 About 1795 Amos Balushin and Peter Kolomin left the colonies apparently subject to criminal charges. Fort St. George at Kasilof was closed about that date and the men were moved to Fort St. Nicholas at Kenai where Stephan Zaikov was now in charge.

1797. In July Grigor Konovalov and the Lebedev men abandoned Fort Konstantin and sailed back to the Russian far east. Baranov occupied the post and turned it over to Ivan Kuskov to operate.

Ca. 1797 The Dena'ina burned the posts at Iliamna and Tyonek and killed twenty-one (Tikhmenev account,) or forty (Stefev account) Russians. In addition about 100 Dena'ina sympathetic to the Russians were killed. Dena'ina oral tradition records a "shaman battle" between the two factions.

Ca. 1797 In retaliation for the Tyonek attack, the Lebedev Russians lined 9 Dena'ina men up, presumably at Kenai, and shot them through the temple with a single musket.

1797 The Dena'ina attack Redoubt St. Nicholas in the Battle of Kenai. No first-hand accounts exist. Two reports are as follows:

Davydov writing from information gathered 1802 in Kodiak gives these details:

" The Lebedev Company collapsed...all its settlements were destroyed one after another and the settlers killed. In Kenai Bay [Cook Inlet] the savages gathered near the fort and asked to be allowed in to trade with the animal skins they had brought with them. Once inside the fort they sat on the ground as was the custom. When they saw that the Russians were not armed, at a signal from the chief they suddenly leapt on them and stabbed them all with daggers they had hidden under their cloaks," (Davydov 1977: 188).

Khlebnikov wrote:

"The Lebedev-Lastochkin Company remained in Kenai...up to 1797. The bad behavior of the leaders of these detachments was not only contrary to the good intentions of the partners, but also antagonized the natives and the hunters of other companies. At first they controlled the Kenaitsy [Kenai Dena'ina] by force, [and] irritated them to such an extent that they killed more than 25 Russians in various places and would have vanquished all of them if...Malakhov had not arrived in time to give assistance to the besieged fort and to disperse the savages," (Khlebnikov 1994:41).

1798 In May, 1798 Stephan Zaikov and the 60 men remaining at Kenai boarded *the Ioann Bogoslov* [St. John the Divine] and sailed for Kamchatka (Tikhmenev 1978:46). They made it as far as an isolated settlement on Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula called

Nizhne-Kamchatsk where their ship broke up. There they found the remains of the crew from Fort Konstantin who had left a year earlier and whose boat had met the same fate.

Baranov occupied Fort St. Nicholas at Kenai and placed Malakhov in charge.

1798 Dena'ina retaliation against the Shelikhov Company.

Baranov wrote in 1802:

I sailed in July [1798] first to Kenai Bay to quiet the people who were in a state of revolt after Lebedev's occupation. They killed over one hundred men among themselves and gangs of robbers were increasing in many places. Many were threatening our establishment on the Kenai River (St. Nicholas Redoubt) which we took over from Lebedev's Company. Luckily even before my arrival the rebel leaders were caught by the men who did not want war and most of them were exterminated. Several hostages were given to our leader Vasilii Malakhov, but in remote places there are still many who were made bold by the success they had and they think about robbery and raids," (Pierce and Donnelly 1979:107).

1799 Russian American Company formed from the Shelikhov Company.

- The Russian America Company continues Shelikhov's policy of establishing a mainland capitol. Baranov is given charge of the site decision. He has two choices: the Kenai Peninsula or Southeast Alaska. He chooses southeast Alaska and established a capitol at Sitka in part because of the recent aggression of the Dena'ina.
- Kenai becomes a minor part of Russian America. Only a handful of Russians occupied St. Nicholas until American purchase in 1867.

1817 Fort Ross established in California. Qadanalchin accompanied the first expedition. Returned to Cook Inlet in 1820 after about 4 years where, to resolve intra-tribal disputes, founds Kalifornsky Village.

1835 Ninilchik was founded as a Russian agricultural settlement. Neither it, nor Russia's Fort Ross in California are productive, and the Russian America company has to ship food from the Far East to sustain itself.

1838 A smallpox epidemic devastated the Kenai Peninsula Dena'ina. Despite vaccination efforts by the Russian America Company, about 50% of the Cook Inlet Dena'ina died. After that tragedy, a sustained vaccination effort was carried out by Orthodox priests.

1840s Russian scientist Ilia Vosnessensky explored the Kenai Peninsula gathering biological samples and making scientific observations. The results were published in German by Russian scientist Constantin Grewink.

1841 The first Russian Orthodox Chapel was built in Kenai. It was transformed into a complete church in 1844 when the first resident priest, Father Nicholas, arrived. The adoption of Orthodoxy by Kenai Peninsula Dena'ina was in direct response to the difficulty of explaining smallpox in the traditional cosmology.

1848 and 1850 Because of Vosnessensky's earlier reconnaissance, Peter Doroshin, a Russian mining engineer, explored the Kenai River drainage and Kachemak Bay. He noted the presence of gold and examined coal deposits. The Russian America company apparently suppressed information about gold on the Kenai Peninsula fearing an American gold rush similar to what occurred in California. With only about 800 Russians in Russian America, thousands of American miners would have made sovereign control difficult if not impossible. This, in part, led to the sale of Russian America.

1855 The Russian American Company began mining coal in Port Graham shipping it to California. This lasted approximately a decade when coal discoveries in British Columbia made the venture unprofitable.

1864 Father Nicholas started the first school on the Kenai Peninsula sometime before 1864. Instruction is, of course, in Russian with an emphasis on literacy, mathematics, and Russian history and culture.

1867 Russia sold Alaska to the United States. The Hutchinson, Kohl & Company of San Francisco, later reorganized as the Alaska Commercial Company, bought the assets of the Russian-American Company and continued the fur trade. They did not, however, continue to practice sustained yield harvesting.

1869 Battery F of the Second U.S. Army Artillery took over Fort Kenai as the official United States Government presence. It was commanded by Captain John McGilvray. The Fort was closed in 1870 because the troops were needed for the Indian Wars of the American west.

1879 The Western Fur and Trading Company, predecessor to the Alaska Commercial Company, established the first saltery in Cook Inlet at the mouth of the Kasilof River. In 1882 the Alaska Packing Association started the first cannery in Cook Inlet also at the mouth of the Kasilof River. This initiated the commercial fishing industry.

1883 A major forest fire swept the Kenai Peninsula and numerous fires occurred in subsequent years. Some were natural and some were said to have been intentionally set by prospectors to clear vegetation for prospecting and to destroy breeding grounds for mosquitoes and flies. The fires contributed to the demise of the fur trade and are thought to have contributed to the extinction of caribou on the Kenai Peninsula.

1889 Coal was mined in the Homer area by the Alaska Coal Company and later by the North Pacific Mining and Transportation Company. Both operations ceased about 1897. In 1899 the Cook Inlet Coal Fields Company began operations. The company built Homer as a company town and built a railroad to haul coal from the Coal Creek mines to the spit. The company closed in 1902. Sporadic coal mining continued in Kachemak Bay until about 1920 (Klein 1981)

1896 Gold was discovered at Sixmile Creek near Hope in 1895 and the following year a small gold rush caused the town of Sunrise City to spring up. For a short time 7,000 people lived in the Hope/Sunrise area. The gold rush was quickly over as the Klondike gold strikes lured the wealth seekers north.

1896 Fur prices plummet and the fur trade on the Kenai Peninsula collapsed.

1918 A worldwide influenza epidemic reached the Kenai Peninsula. It had a particularly devastating affect on the native population. Because of the number of deaths the Dena'ina villages of Skiliakh, Ski'tuk, Kalifornsky, Kasilof, Nikishka, and Point Possession were eventually abandoned. The survivors moved to Kenai, Tyonek, and Eklutna.

1923 The Alaska Railroad was completed with Seward as the southern railhead. Seward became the major city on the eastern side of the Kenai Peninsula while Seldovia was the major town on the western side.

1923 Nellie Lawing (Alaska Nellie) established the first tourist facility, a lodge on the eastern shore of Kenai Lake. Outside tourists came by steamship to Seward and then took the railroad to Lawing. Sport hunting and fishing began during this time.

1941 The Kenai National Moose Range was established to protect wildlife, primarily moose, habitat. The first manager wasn't hired until 1948. Extensive forest fires around the turn of the century had changed the Peninsula's ecology from one suitable for caribou to one suitable for moose (willow browse that grew up after the fires). Eastern and European Sport hunters "discovered" the Kenai Peninsula moose and lobbied for a moose range to protect the habitat which supported the large moose. As the years passed the browse changed to spruce forest and the Kenai National Moose Range began setting fires as habitat management to keep the moose population high.

1946 Though homesteading had been possible since 1920, there was little activity until after World War II when veterans could acquire a patent in seven months with no requirement that the land be cultivated. Soldotna (1947/1948) becomes the last town established in the United States on the basis of a land-taking/homesteading tradition.

1951 The Sterling Highway between Homer and Anchorage was completed for public travel (a cat trail had been pushed through in 1949). The city of Soldotna grew up at the "Y" where the Sterling Highway intersects the Spur Highway.

1957 Oil was discovered on July 23rd at the Swanson River field. Later, two petroleum refineries, an LNG plant and a fertilizer plant were built to process the oil and gas.

1958 Alaska became the 49th State. The statehood issue was essentially one of control of oil and fish resources.

- Oil companies felt a development oriented state would promote their interests better than the federal government.
- The salmon industry was dominated by Seattle/San Francisco canneries which owned federal government licensed traps effectively disenfranchising Alaskan fishermen. The first act of the first Alaska legislature was to make fish traps illegal thereby generating a drift/or seine industry operated by individual fishermen.

1962 Kenaitze Indian Tribe I.R.A. established

1964 An immense earthquake and several tsunamis destroyed part of Seward. Major damage occurred in all Kenai Peninsula communities, but particularly in Whittier and Seward.

1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSCA) public lands legislation validated native claims to traditional territory. This legislation cleared the way for building of the trans-Alaskan pipeline which was completed in 1977.

As a result several new national parks were established including the Kenai Fjords National Park and the "Moose Range" became the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge.

- With the passage of this act, the homesteading/land-taking tradition of the frontier ended.
- Ten regional corporations and numerous village corporations are established based on a corporate model of decision-making. Cook Inlet Region, Inc. eventually became one of the major economic powers in the state.

1972 The Russian Old Believers establish an ethnic fishing/agricultural community at Nikaeovlsk.

1973 A limited entry quota system was established for commercial fishing. By the late 1970s it had created a body of full-time commercial fisherman. By limiting the number of fishermen the number of fish caught per fisherman went up to the point where it was possible for a single drift net or set netter to exist economically on fishing alone. Up to this time, commercial fishing was largely a supplemental wage engaged in by oil field workers, teachers, and others whose main income came from wages.

1977 Completion of the Trans-Alaskan Pipeline generated large public wealth. According to the state constitution, resources whether on public or private land are publicly owned and depletion of those resources is subject to tax in return for the privilege of using the resource. State treasury is substantially increased by oil taxes.

1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) passed by the Federal Government establishing a subsistence priority for Alaska Natives. In 1978 the State of Alaska had already established a subsistence priority by vote of the people. The ANILCA legislation based the priority on a determination of urban (no subsistence rights) and rural (potential subsistence rights) leaving unanswered how to make the rural/urban determination. Litigation continues into 2001.

mid 1980s A guided sport fishing industry fishing for salmon in the Kenai River and for halibut out of Ninilchik and Homer emerged as a major economic force. Some guides were local public school teachers/administrators or oil industry workers who supplemented an existing wage, others were professional guides who moved about the world guiding according to the fish in season.