

# A CHRONOLOGY OF RUSSIAN HISTORY OF ALASKA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE KUSKOKWIM and YUKON RIVER

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- 1728 Aug. 8<sup>th</sup> - Vitus Bering, Danish born sea captain in service of Imperial Russia, sailed from Kamchatka in Siberia to determine whether Asia and North America were connected by land or separated by sea. He discovered the entrance to the present Bering Strait. Due to bad weather he could not see the Alaska side and thus did not realize the significance of his discovery.
- 1741 Bering's second expedition with two ships. St. Paul – July 15 he sighted the southern coast of Alaska. Alexie Chirikov logged the discovery of coast near Cape Muzon in extreme SE Alaska. Subsequently, he discovered the coast near Mt. St. Elias. After cursory observations, the expedition wandered through the western Aleutian Islands. Bering was shipwrecked in the Commander Islands off Kamchatka where he died. Survivors wintered over and took back reports of islands being rich in fur-bearing.
- 1743 Attracted by indications of great fur resources, an expedition under Emil Bassof and other “promyshleniki” (traders) began voyages to the Aleutians, exploiting the fur resources and the Aleuts.
- 1774 The Spanish viceroy of Mexico, concerned about the news of Russian expansion to the north ordered a series of expeditions to extend northward the Spanish claims to the west coast of North America.
- 1778 Captain Cook systematically surveyed the coastline from Sitka through the Bering Straights confirming the separation of Siberia and North America. He explored the head of Cook Inlet at this time. (see Sherwood, [Cook Inlet Collection](#))
- 1781 Siberian merchants formed a trading company headed by Gregory Shelekhov to develop regular trade with Alaskan natives.
- 1783 Shelekov sails with 3 ships and 192 men to establish the first permanent settlement in Alaska near present city of Kodiak.
- 1786 The English ships – King George under Captain Portlock and the Queen Charlotte under Captain Dixon – visited Cook Inlet on trading expeditions. Captain Meares entered the mouth of the Cook Inlet and traded unrought iron with the Tanaina. The Russians who had been hovering in the area

settled at St. George, now know as Kasilof on the Kenai Peninsula. (see Osgood's Ethnology of Tanaina)

- 1788 Shelekhov Company was given exclusive jurisdiction over all territory they discovered by edict of the Czar. Captain Douglas, commanding the Iphigenia of the Meares Expedition, exchanged some iron for skins n the lower Cook Inlet near Kachimak Bay.
- 1791 Russians erected a redoubt at St. Nicholas, the modern village of Kenai. Both of these settlements were founded by the Lebedev-Laitochkin Company (Sherwood)
- 1793 Baranoff brought 30 convicts to teach the people agriculture. (Osgood 1937)
- 1794 Russian Orthodox missionaries began to work among the Tanaina. There was almost constant tension and hostility between the Russians and the Tanaina during this period which led to several Russian massacres.
- 1796 Father Juvenati was killed at Iliamna when he attempted to suppress polygamy.
- 1799 After a decade of fighting between the Shelekhov Company and other Siberian groups, Czar Paul granted a charter to the Russian American Company under 20 year renewable terms. This company was a reorganization of the Shelekhov Company. They were given control of all the coast of America on the Pacific north of lat. 55 degrees north. They were to organize settlements; to promote agriculture, commerce, discovery, and the propagation of the Greek Catholic faith; and to extend Russian territory and influence on the Pacific as far as they could without trespassing on the territory of any foreign power. (Dall, 1870) Baranoff began construction of Fort Archangel Gabriel at Sitka.
- 1800 Fort finished at Sitka.
- 1802 English challenge Russians by establishing a trading post near Sitka where they expected to merge the overland and coastal activities of the Canadian fur trade. Tlingets attack and over run Fort Archangel Gabriel, killing all officers and 30 men
- 1804 New fort built at Sitka. The fort was called New Archangel Michael and the settlement came to be called New Archangel.
- 1811 English were ousted from settlement near Sitka as the Russians expanded down the coast.

## **EXPLORATION OF THE INTERIOR**

For many years the Russians paid scant attention to the interior and when they did make attempts they were often thwarted by the native populations especially on the Copper River. The Russians probably turned their attention to the vast unknown region of Interior Alaska because they were thwarted in their expansion into California and the Hawaiian Islands. The supply of fur-bearing animals in the Aleutians and in Southeast Alaska were diminishing even in Baranov's time. They also had a vital interest in extending their claims to areas of Alaska other than those they had traditionally occupied. (Zagokin 1967 pxi.)

## **COPPER RIVER**

- ? Trader Patochkin sent by Baranov "to explore those places and what was in them."
- 1805 Detachment of trader Brazhenov walked along the river for over 300 verst. (198 miles)
- 1819 Andrey Klimovskiy (a creole) explored same area (Copper River).
- 1820s State Chancellor Rumyantsev proposed expedition to explore from Icy Cape to mouth of McKinzie River. (this fell through)
- 1823 Romanov wanted to ascend Copper River and explore Arctic coast overland between Alaskan coast and Hudson's Bay. (never took place)

## **KUSKOKWIM, YUKON RIVERS**

- Early Aleksey Ivanov, leader of group of traders of Lebedev-Lastochkin Co.
- 1790 explored northward from the shores of Shelikhov Lake (Lake Iliamna) for 3 months from Christmas to Easter. Crossed two large streams, Tutna and Balsanda (?). He apparently went up the Nushagak, crossed over to the Holitna and descended to the Kuskokwim (Tutna). He then went downriver as far as Ukhagmak (Ukhagmyut) from which he could portage to the Yukon (Balsanda). The origin of the name Balsanda is not clear.
- 1818 Peter Korsakovskiy was sent by Baranov to establish a post on the Nushagak. He traveled from Cook Inlet to Iliamna Lake, and then along the shore of Bristol Bay. He explored the coast as far as the Kuskokwim River which he ascended. With him were Fedor Kolmakov, Creole Klimovskiy and 20 local people. On this trip he stayed in the house of Jeremy Radionov who was already carrying on trade with the Kuskokwim people. Fort Alexander was built on the Nushagak and Fedor Kolmakov was appointed the commander.
- 1829 Pilot I.F. Vasilev ascended the Nushagak, exploring and mapping but did not cross to the Yukon.

- 1830 Vasilev again left Alexander Redoubt with Fedor Kolmakov and Semen Lukin (who had been the interpreter at the Fort since 1819.) They were reluctantly accompanied by 11 Kuskokwim people (either Georgetown Ingalik or Eskimos). They ascended the Nushagak and descended the Holitna.
- 1832 Kolmankov established a post at the mouth of the Holitna left Lukin in charge and explored the Kuskokwim for 150 km. (93 miles) upstream. This post was only a cabin used seasonally.
- 1833 Kolmakov and Lukin returned and set up a new post at the mouth of the Kwik River. Tebenov established a post at St. Michael's on Norton Sound at the direction of Baron Wrangell.
- 1834 Susitna River explored by Malakov. In January Andrey Glazunov traveled overland from Fort St. Michael in an attempt to reach Cook Inlet by way of the Anvik River. He reached the Yukon. From the Yukon he portaged to the Kuskokwim where he met Lukin who attempted to discourage him from traveling at that time of year (February). Glazanov went on ascending the Kuskokwim and the Stony until they found the travel conditions insurmountable and they had to turn back and retrace their steps to St. Michael's. (Van Stone 1978 p. 3)
- 1836 Glazanov founded the post at Ikogmiut (Russian Mission). During this time Lukin continued his exploration up the Kuskokwim from his post on the Lower Kuskokwim. The Eskimos attacked St. Michaels' but were driven off. (Zagokin p. 10)
- 1838 Malakhov left St. Michael's in February and was the first Russian to cross the Unalakleet portage. Earlier Glazanov had been directed by the Eskimos to use the longer Anvik River portage as they did not want the shorter route known. He ascended the Yukon to Nulato and then in March went on up to the mouth of the Koyukuk. After breakup he descended the Yukon to Fort St. Michael thus was the first to sail from Nulato to the sea. (Loyen's 1970 p. 18)
- 1839 Peter Kolmakov, son of Fedor Kolmokov (Fort Alexander factor), ascended the Kuskokwim, and the Takotna and portaged over to the Tlegon (Upper Innoko) River in the fall. He descended the Innoko until the approximate vicinity of Dementi where he learned that Ikogmiut had been attacked and destroyed that spring by Eskimos. This may have been due to the small pox which struck the area in 38-39 which was blamed on the Russians. Kolmakov therefore had to turn back and retrace his route to the Kuskokwim. (Van Stone 1978 p. 4)

- 1840 Malakhov repeated his earlier journey and established a post at Nulato. The Unalakleet post was founded.
- 1841 The Kuskokwim post was moved for the 3<sup>rd</sup> and last time diagonally across the river from its 1833 location and renamed Kolmakov Redoubt in honor of Fedor Kolmakov who died in 1840. Nulato post was rebuilt by Derabin who remained in command. (Oswalt 1963, p. 13, Dall 1870, p. 341)
- 1842-44 Zagoskin was sent to explore the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers. The Russian American Company was concerned that Alaskan furs were being traded by the interior Indians to the coastal Eskimos who then traded with the Chukchis. Thus the company was being bypassed and losing needed revenues on both trade goods and furs. Zagoskin was to determine the trade routes in the interior and how this flow of furs might be stopped and redirected to the company. Zagoskin traveled up the Yukon above the mouth of the Nowitna, up the Koyukuk and partway through the Kateel River portage, through the Yukon Kuskokwim portage between Russian Mission and Kalskag and up the Kuskokwim as far as the mouth of the Takotna. He also traveled up the Innoko River to the next settlement above Holikachuck possibly the current site of Dementi. His journal contains extensive Ethnographic material. (Zagoskin 1967)
- 1844 Gregoriev renewed the attempt to explore the Copper River. Kashevarof continued his exploration of the Bering seacoast. (Dall, 1870 p. 341)
- 1845 Etolin (Commander-in-Chief of Russian American CO.) issued strict orders on treatment of natives by employees. No servant of the Company was allowed to strike a native except in defense of his life. (Dall, 1870, p. 341)
- 1847 McMurray descended the Porcupine River and built Fort Yukon near its mouth. The British government sent three expeditions to search for Sir John Franklin who had not been heard from since July 25, 1845 while on a search for the Northwest Passage.
- 1848 The American ship Superior under Captian Roys was the first whaler to visit the Bering Strait and soon filled his ship. Word of his success spread and he was followed by 154 American Whalers. (Dall, 1870, p. 345)
- 1850 Barnard accompanied Derabin from St. Michael to Nulato. He was seeking information on the lost Franklin Expedition. (Dall 1870, p. 345)
- 1851 Barnard and Derabin were massacred at Nulato in February along with a number of Indian residents by Koyukuk River Indians. Fort Selkirk established by Robert Cambell on the Upper Yukon was attacked by Tlinget Indians from the coast and destroyed. The inmates were not harmed however. Both of these attacks were related to trade in that these interior

- posts interrupted traditional native trade monopolies and were resented. Barnard may have also insulted the Koyukuk Indians by his insensitive summoning of native leaders for information on Franklin. (Dall, 1870, p. 50 Wickersham, 1938 p. 5-6)
- 1859 A new fort was built at Nulato on the old site. (Dall, 1870, p. 349)
- 1860 Robert Kennicott passed the winter at Fort Yukon. (Dall 1870)
- 1864 The Western Union Telegraph expedition was organized to build a line from San Francisco to the Bering Strait which would be crossed by a cable and then connect with the Russian government telegraph at the mouth of the Amoor River. (Dall 1870)
- 1865 The work commenced under various officers. Robert Kennicott was appointed Chief of the Scientific Corps. Frederick Whymper was the expedition artist. This whole project was brought about by the failures to lay a transatlantic cable.
- 1866 Robert Kennicott died at Nulato. Ivan Simonsen Lukeen carried out Kennicott's plans and explored the Yukon from Nulato to Fort Yukon. William H. Dall was sent to Nulato to replace Kennicott. (Dall, 1870)
- 1867 Western Union Telegraph Co. abandoned its project after having spent \$3,000,000m upon finding that a successful Atlantic Cable had been laid.
- 1867 On May 13 a treaty of sale was agreed upon. This was ratified on May 28<sup>th</sup>. The president proclaimed the purchase on June 28<sup>th</sup> and on October 18<sup>th</sup> the territory was formally surrendered at Sitka to General Lovell H. Rousseau. (Dall 1870 and others)