Alaska Native Land Claims

by

Robert D. Arnold

with

Janet Archibald
Margie Bauman
Nancy Yaw Davis
Robert A. Frederick
Paul Gaskin
John Havelock
Gary Holthaus
Chris McNeil
Thomas Richards, Jr.
Howard Rock
Rosita Worl

With a Foreword by Emil Notti
and
A New Introduction to the 1978 Edition

THE ALASKA NATIVE FOUNDATION
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

1978, 2nd ed.

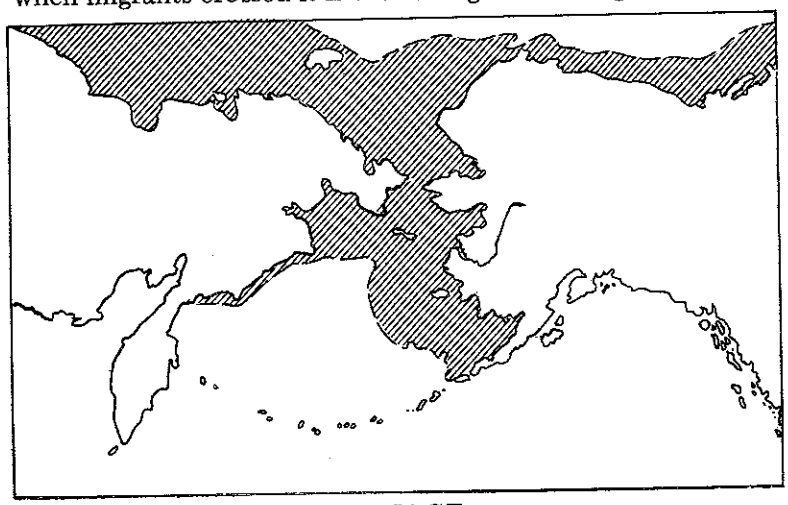
The story of Alaska Native land claims begins in the distant past with migrations of people from Asia into what was an uninhabited land. Use and occupation of the land by these migrants and their descendants preceded the arrival of others by more than 11,000 years.

But discovery of Alaska by a Russian expedition in 1741 was to lead — beginning in 1766 — to claims of ownership by Russia. Then, after a century of exploitation but limited settlement, Russia was to sell what it called its possessions in America to the United States.

Alaska's First Settlers — Chapter 1

It is not known for certain when man first entered the western hemisphere from Asia. Scientists are in general agreement, however, that his earliest route was through Alaska when America and Asia were joined by land. Based on this conclusion, and evidences of ancient occupation, it is generally believed that the first migrations took place 25,000 to 40,000 years ago.

What is today known as the Bering Sea was — for thousands of years at a time — a tundra plain. Today's St. Lawrence, Nunivak, Diomede, and Pribilof Islands are the tops of mountains of that plain. The name given to the plain when migrants crossed it is the Bering Land Bridge.



MAP 1 BERING LAND BRIDGE

The Land Bridge existed during periods in which the earth's climate cooled. Because much of its water was locked up on land as ice, the sea level fell by more than 300 feet. One such period began more than 40,000 years ago and lasted for perhaps 15,000 years. After several thousand years the Land Bridge was formed again, then flooded again, and it has been a sea for at least 10,000 years.

Although much of the continent was covered by glaciers, there was an ice-free corridor across Alaska and through Canada. Many of the earliest migrants from Asia apparently continued southward along this corridor. Over thousands of years, their descendants developed physical and cultural differences as they spread across the continents of North and South America. These migrants — these first Americans — were the ancestors of the peoples who would become known to the world later as American Indians.

But not all of these early peoples turned southward. At Old Crow Flats in the Yukon Territory, just to the east of the Alaska boundary in an area never glaciated, there is evidence that man was present between 25,000 and 30,000 years ago or more.

The migrants who travelled eastward across the Land Bridge and settled in Alaska over several thousands of years — the first Alaskans — were the ancestors of today's Eskimos, Indians, and Aleuts.

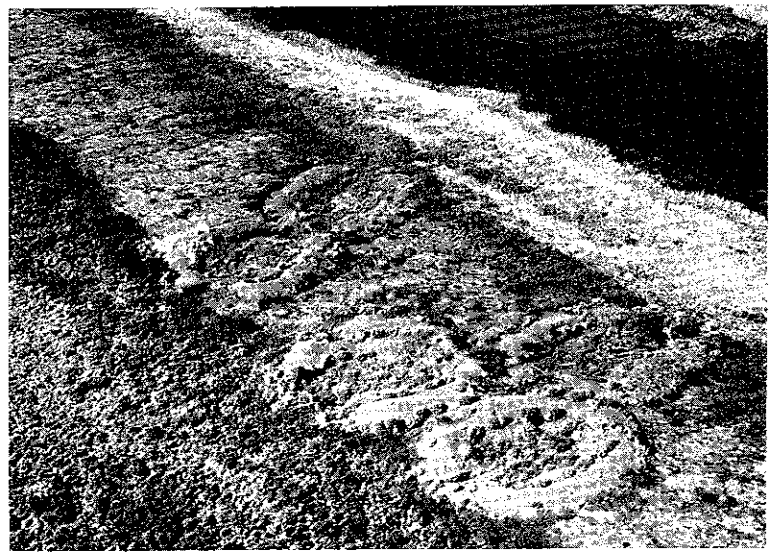
Antiquity of settlement

Evidence of human occupation of Alaska is not as ancient as elsewhere on the American continent. In the southwestern parts of the United States scrapers and other crude tools have been uncovered that are estimated to date back 35,000 years. In Alaska the oldest evidence dates to about 11,000 years ago.

Extent of early settlement

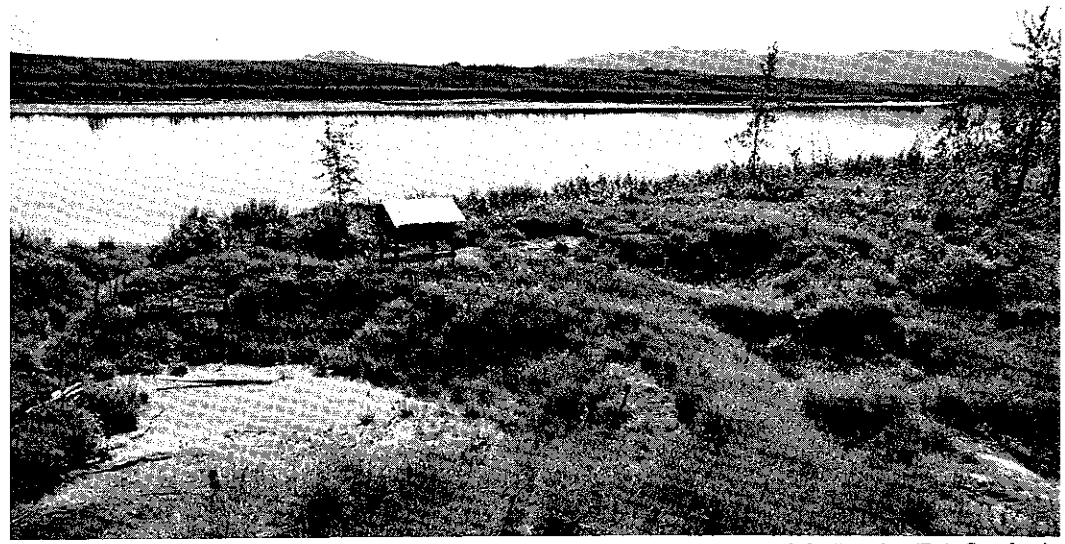
More than 2,700 archaeological sites have been identified in Alaska. The age of most of them has not been determined and may not ever be because of the costs of such field work and analysis.

Portrayal of a few of the ancient sites suggests the wide distribution of some of Alaska's first settlers.



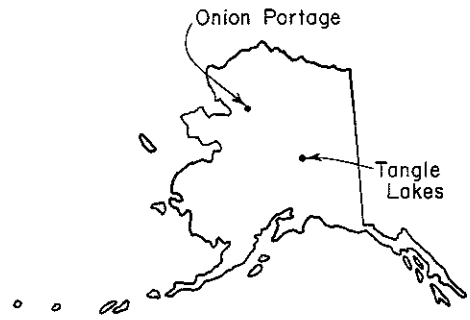
National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior (Keith Trexler)

House pits at Cape Krusenstern



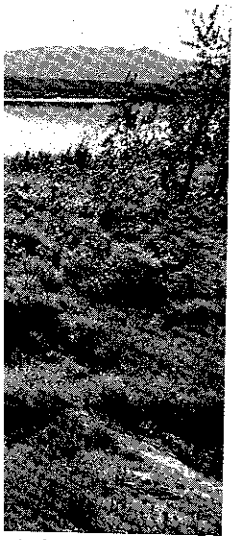
National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior (Pete Sanchez)

Onion Portage. Located on a bend of the Kobuk River, 125 miles east of Kotzebue, is a site occupied successively by different peoples over the last 10,000 years. This site, named for its abundance of wild onions, is Onion Portage. Located on the forest-tundra boundary with an abundance of fish and caribou, this site was an attractive and desirable home for man over a very long period of time. It was still being used in the 1970's as a hunting camp. The early investigations at this site were carried out by J. Louis Giddings of Brown University.



Tangle Lakes. Some of the oldest sites in Alaska are in the interior. One cluster, located 130 miles southeast of Fairbanks, has been designated the Tangle Lakes Archaeological District. More than 150 sites dating back perhaps 10,500 years, have been located in this district. Field work at the sites, largely carried out by Frederick Hadleigh-West of Alaska Methodist University, has resulted in the recovery of artifacts resembling those of Central Siberia.

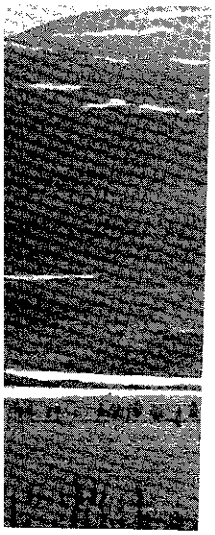
Doug Reger



nterior (Pete Sanchez)

)f Kotzebue, is a site
site, named for its
ı boundary with an
for man over a very
ıg camp. The early
ersity.

ldest sites in Alaska
located 130 miles
en designated the
ict. More than 150
) years, have been
at the sites, largely
gh-West of Alaska
in the recovery of
ıl Siberia.

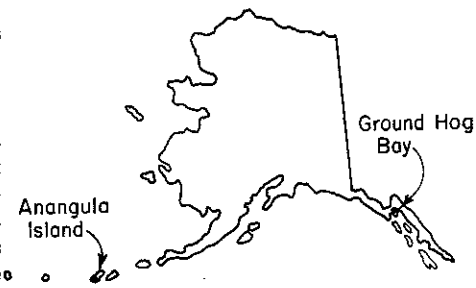


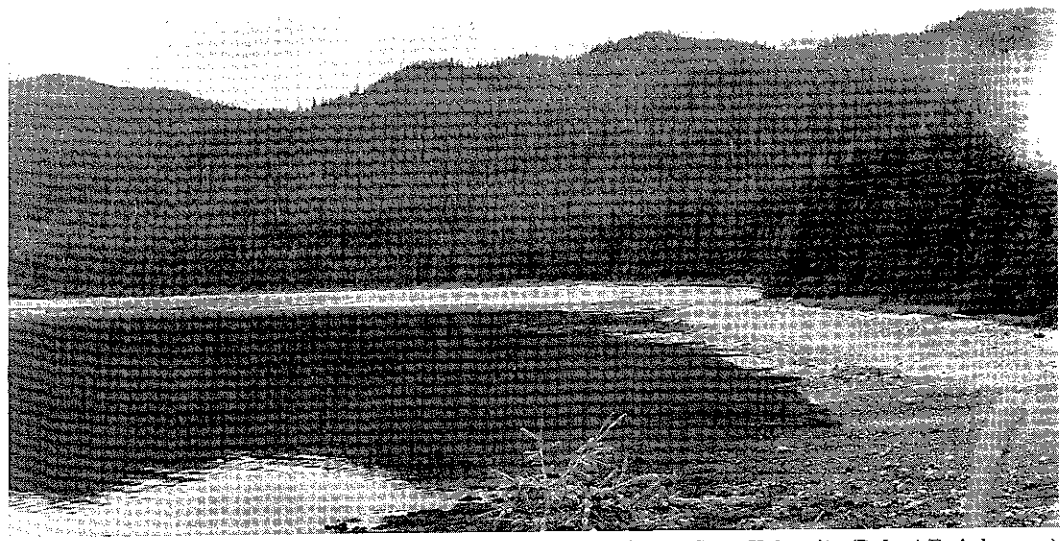
Doug Reger

Doug Reger

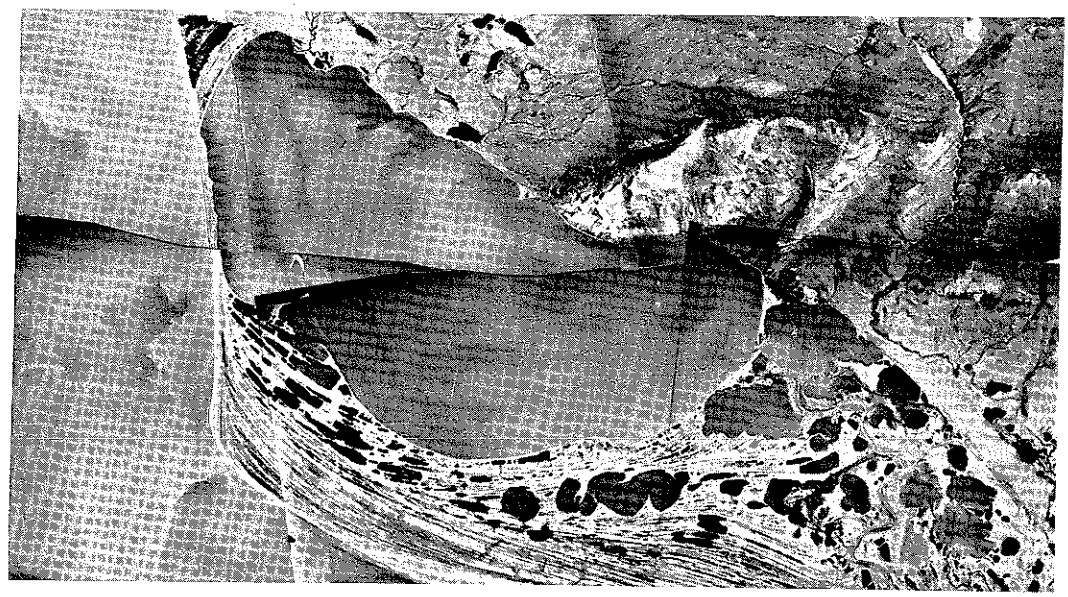
Anangula Island. The oldest Aleut village site yet discovered is on Anangula Island, an island a mile and half long in Nikolski Bay off Umnak Island. Based on scientific analysis, the site is estimated to be about 9,000 years old. More than 30,000 stone scrapers and other tools have been recovered. In August, 1974, a team of Soviet and American archaeologists announced that several kinds of tool blades unearthed on Anangula matched other blades previously discovered in Siberia. The head of the U. S. group, archaeologist, W. S. Laughlin of the University of Connecticut declared, "This is the first direct link we've had that Aleuts came to (Alaska) . . . via the Bering Land Bridge . . ."

Ground Hog Bay. Only a few prehistoric sites have been located in Southeastern Alaska where towering rain forests and heavy undergrowth obscure most of the places where early man probably lived. One of these sites is at Ground Hog Bay on Icy Strait opposite Hoonah. Excavations made at locations back from the shore by Robert E. Ackerman of Washington State University have revealed occupation at several different periods. Cores and chopping tools dating back 9,000 years have been found here. The site is the oldest so far discovered in southeastern Alaska.

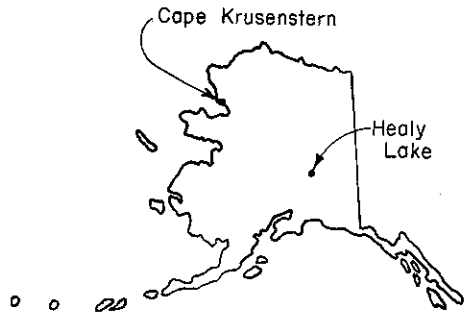




Washington State University (Robert E. Ackerman)



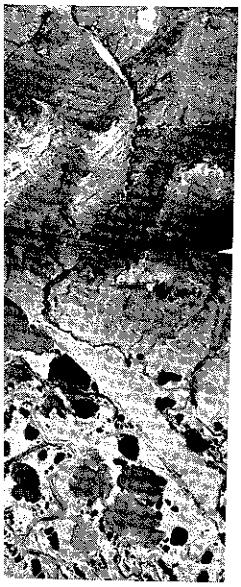
Geological Survey, U. S. Department of the Interior



Cape Krusenstern. At Cape Krusenstern, 35 miles northwest of Kotzebue, are 114 beach ridges formed over thousands of years as the shoreline changed. Groups of ridges reveal different periods of settlement: the latest sites are near the current beach; the oldest sites — 5,000 years old — are further back. Beyond the lagoon are sites that are much older. Investigations of J. Louis Giddings produced evidence that the ridges showed a succession of all the major prehistoric cultures of the Arctic.

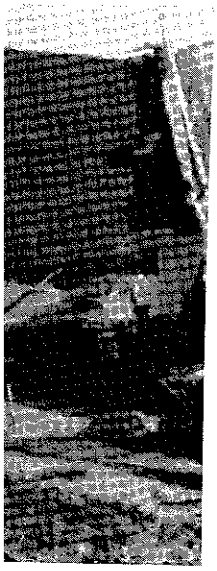
Healy Lake. Another site in interior Alaska is Healy Lake, about 115 miles southeast of Fairbanks. Artifacts recovered from the top two inches at the site are about 1,200 years old; a piece of bone from the lower levels dates to the ancient past — about 11,000 years ago. Most of the work at Healy Lake was carried out by John P. Cook of the University of Alaska.

Doug Reger

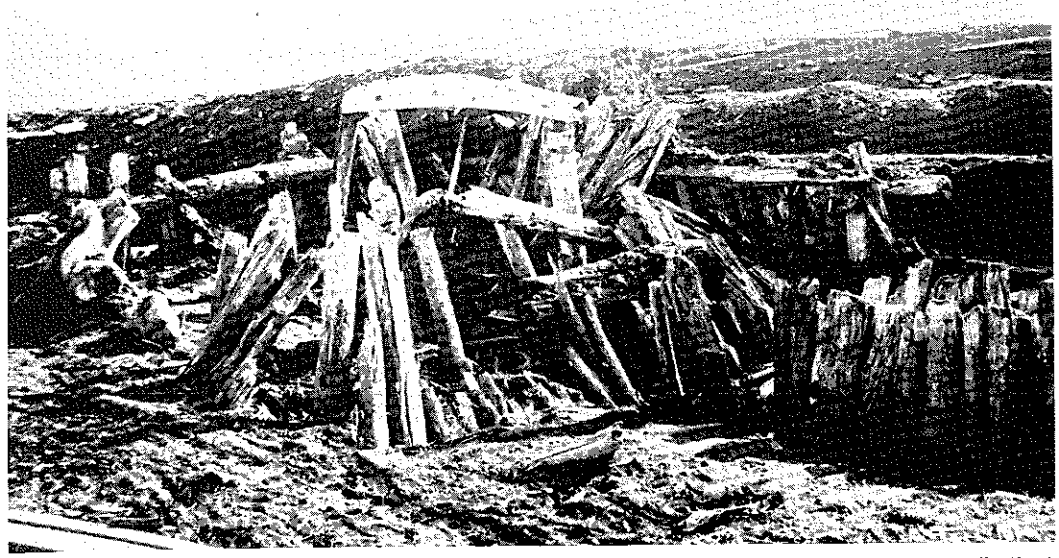


partment of the Interior
Krusenstern, 35 miles
beach ridges formed
shoreline changed.
nt periods of settle-
e current beach; the
— are further back.
at are much older.
s produced evidence
ion of all the major

miles southeast of
1,200 years old; a
years ago. Most of
laska.

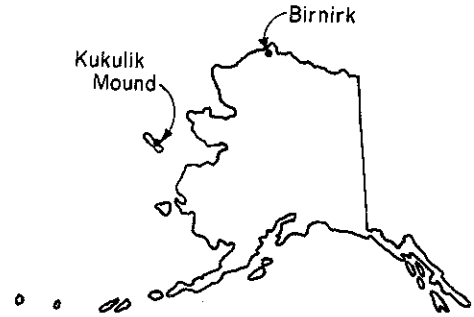


Doug Reger



University of Alaska Archives (Otto Geist Collection)

Kukulik Mound. Kukulik Mound, near Savoonga on St. Lawrence Island, is a prehistoric site which was occupied from about 2,000 years ago until about 100 years ago, when the people died of disease. The huge mound (800 feet long and 140 feet wide) was first investigated by Otto William Geist of the University of Alaska. Elaborately carved artifacts recovered from the site included those of the Old Bering Sea Culture (1,500 to 2,000 years ago) and the later Punuk culture (900 years ago or more).



Birnirk. Another relatively recent site is Birnirk, near Barrow, which represents a culture which began to develop about 1,500 years ago. Excavations carried out in the 1950's by James A. Ford produced thousands of artifacts, including hunting and fishing gear, utensils, musical instruments, and remains of kayaks and sleds. The dwellings were situated below the ground, were rectangular, and had sod roofs.

National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior

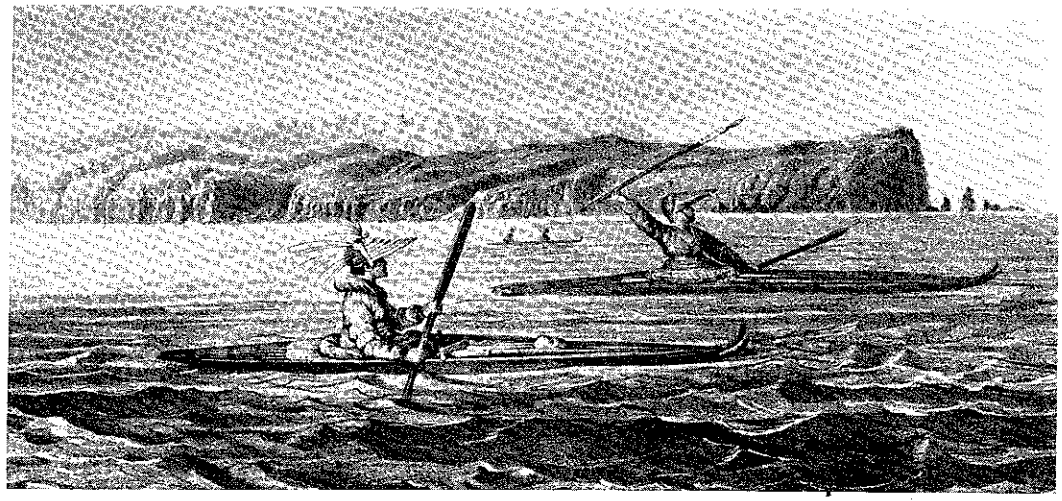
Eighteenth Century Territories

Chapter 2

The world first learned of the existence of northwestern America as the result of the voyage of Vitus Bering in 1741. Over the next 50 years its coastline was more fully defined, and names were applied by explorers and navigators to its harbors, bays, and other features. Much of the interior was to remain unknown to the world for another hundred years.

Geographic features of the land were already known and named, of course, by people who would in time become known as Alaska's Eskimos, Indians, and Aleuts. It was — and had been for thousands of years — their homeland.

But the world's knowledge of these Americans — as they were appropriately called by their first foreign visitors — was but slowly acquired. Their existence and their lifeways became known to the world only through the eyes of foreign voyagers, fur trappers, miners, missionaries, and others. It is necessary to draw upon their observations gathered over a century and a half, together with later research, to portray the people of Alaska before the arrival of the first Russians in the mid-1700's.



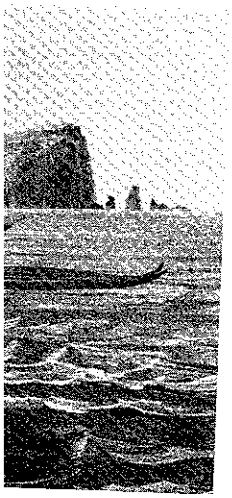
Alaska State Museum, Juneau (Lutke's Voyages)

Aleut hunters in kayaks, 1820's

Alaska was then the home (according to James Mooney) of an estimated 74,000 Eskimos, Indians, and Aleuts. They belonged to one or another of several dozen linguistic and cultural groups. Each group lived in identifiable geographic regions. To varying degrees, the groups' territories were recognized and respected by others. To the extent they could support life, the accessible lands and waters were used and occupied by these native inhabitants.

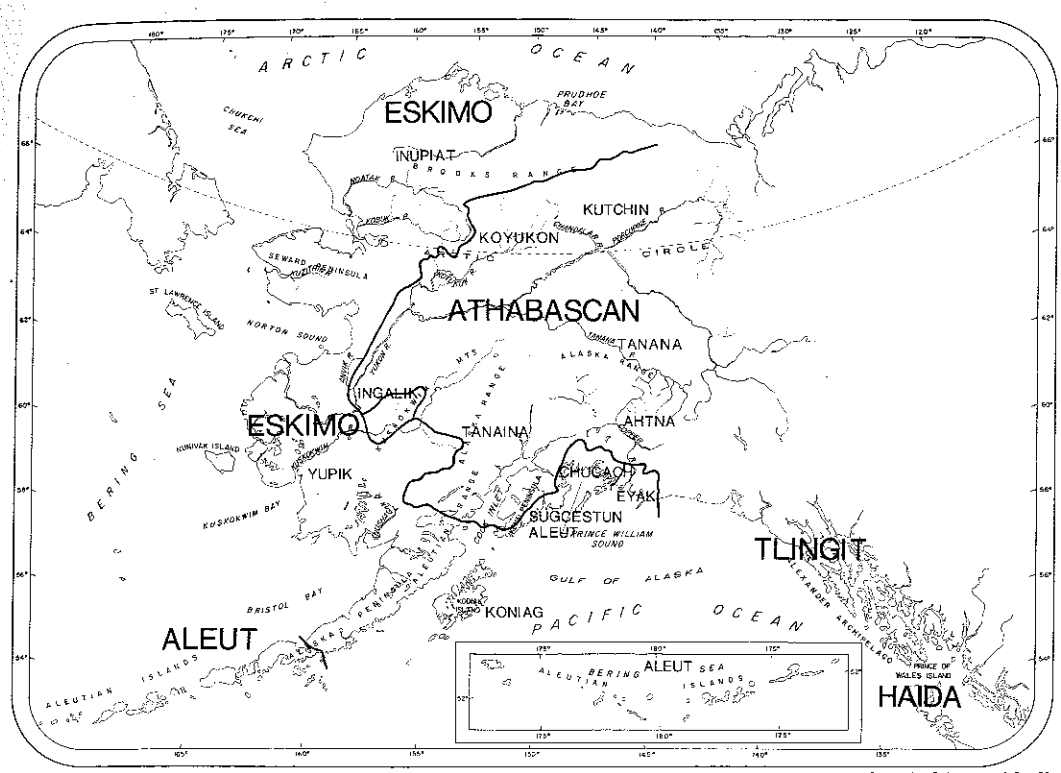
Chapter 2

nce of northwestern
/itus Bering in 1741.
more fully defined,
nd navigators to its
f the interior was to
hundred years.
already known and
ld in time become
Aleuts. It was — and
omeland.
Americans — as they
reign visitors — was
and their lifeways
the eyes of foreign
es, and others. It is
ns gathered over a
esearch, to portray
he first Russians in



eau (Lutke's Voyages)

James Mooney)
nd Aleuts. They
en linguistic and
liable geographic
territories were
xtent they could
s were used and



Wendell Oswalt, Alaskan Eskimos, 1967

MAP 2 GENERALIZED GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF ESKIMOS, INDIANS AND ALEUTS IN ALASKA

Aleuts

Most Aleuts lived in coastal villages on islands named after them stretching 1,000 miles across the North Pacific. Some few lived at the lower end of the Alaska Peninsula.

The population of about 15,000 Aleuts lived in numerous small villages, most of which were located on the Bering Sea side of the islands. One island, Umnak, once had 16 villages. A typical village was made up of six or seven houses; each household consisted of 20 to 30 people who were related to one another. Their houses were half underground and covered with a warm dome of sod.

Every village with its cluster of houses had its own sea hunting areas, which had to be respected by other villages. Use of these areas without permission meant war.

Adult men hunted seals, sea lions, and whales in the open sea from kayaks, perhaps the most seaworthy of watercraft. Roots, berries, birds, and eggs were available on the land. The food resources of the Aleuts were so abundant that anyone who could walk, young or old, could survive by gathering food from the beaches and the reefs.

The material culture of the Aleuts included 30 kinds of different harpoon heads and a great variety of nets and darts. Rainproof clothes made of sea mammal gut and wooden hats (often highly decorated) were useful in this rainy and foggy territory. Baskets of finely woven grasses were used for many purposes.

Dentalium and amber were so highly prized for ornamental purposes the Aleuts used them in trade. Their trade took them great distances — and there was always risk, for they might run into enemies on the way.

The Aleuts also had considerable knowledge of the human body. They had surgeons who could perform operations, and they skillfully embalmed the dead before respectfully burying them in caves.

Sarychev's Voyages

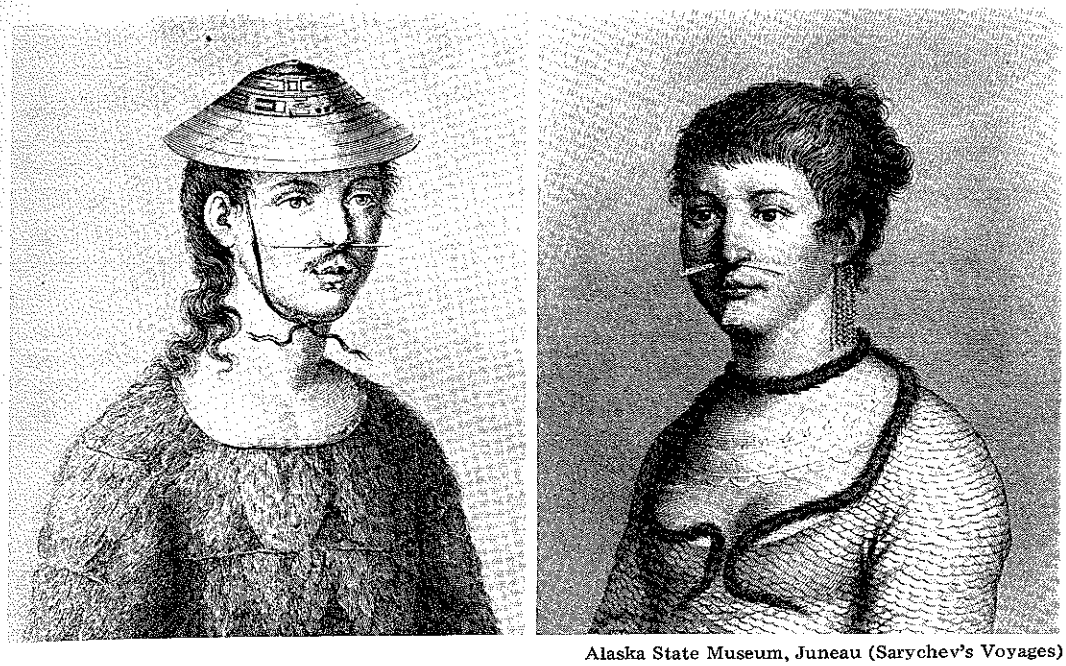
Man and woman of Unalaska, 1780's

Aleuts spoke three distinct dialects which were remotely related to the Eskimo language. Aleuts and Eskimos may have spoken the same language a few thousand years earlier but isolation from one another led to differences in languages and cultures over time.

According to anthropologist J. Ellis Ransom, the Aleut word "Alaxaxaq" is the origin of the word "Alaska." Its meaning was the mainland — "the object toward which the action of the sea is directed."

Koniags and others

The people of Kodiak Island, the southern Kenai Peninsula, and the Prince William Sound area were similar to Aleuts in their general lifeways and in their reliance upon sea mammals. These people — the Koniag, the Sugcestun, and the Chugach — were to consider themselves in the 20th century as Aleuts. In language and physical type they showed a clear relationship to Eskimos.



Alaska State Museum, Juneau (Sarychev's Voyages)

Russian portraits of Koniag man and woman, 1780's

By far the largest of these groups was the Koniag. According to anthropologist Wendell Oswalt, most of the 6,500 Koniag people lived on Kodiak Island, but some lived opposite the island on the Alaska Peninsula. Their population density may have been the greatest of any group in Alaska. Both the Chugach of Prince William Sound and the Sugcestun Aleuts on the Kenai Peninsula appear to have been far fewer in number.

Tlingits and Haidas

Two major groups of Indians lived along the Gulf of Alaska, on the islands of the Alexander Archipelago, and on the mainland bordering Canada. Most of this territory — from Controller Bay southward — was the home of the Tlingits. Haidas lived principally on Prince of Wales Island (and on Canada's Queen Charlotte Island to the south).

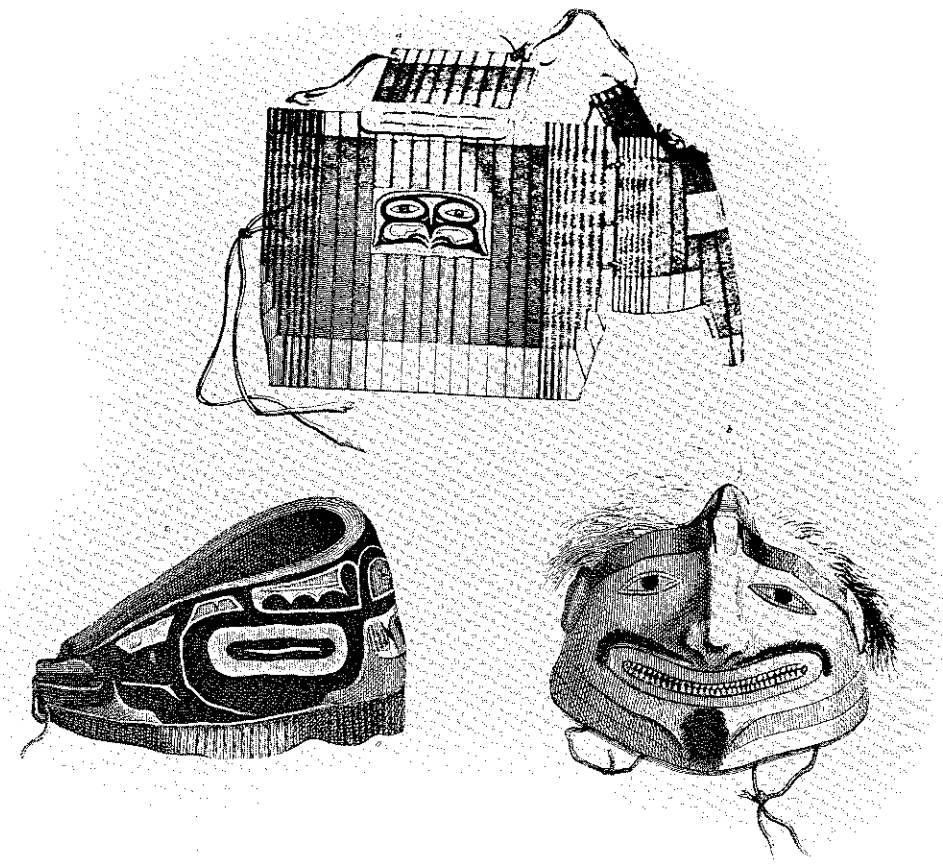
Tlingits and Haidas spoke different languages and each culture had unique features, but there were many similarities. The economy of both was based primarily on the harvesting of fish. At least a dozen species of saltwater fish were caught, including salmon, halibut, cod, and candle fish. Shellfish and sea mammals were also harvested. Unlike Aleuts, they did not pursue the whale. Many species of land plants were named and utilized. No famines are known to have existed in this richly endowed, wooded, warm and rainy area.

Because of the abundant resources available, large villages were possible. An estimated 10,000 Tlingits lived in 14 major territories. Winter villages sometimes included as many as 700 persons.

Because their area was so rich in resources which could readily be obtained, a surplus could be acquired. This allowed

time for extensive art work, large competitive potlatches, and long trading expeditions.

Their material culture included much wood working, large houses, fish traps, and wrap-around clothing. Their art style included the display of both sides of an animal figure on a flat surface. The head and face of the animal were often emphasized in size.



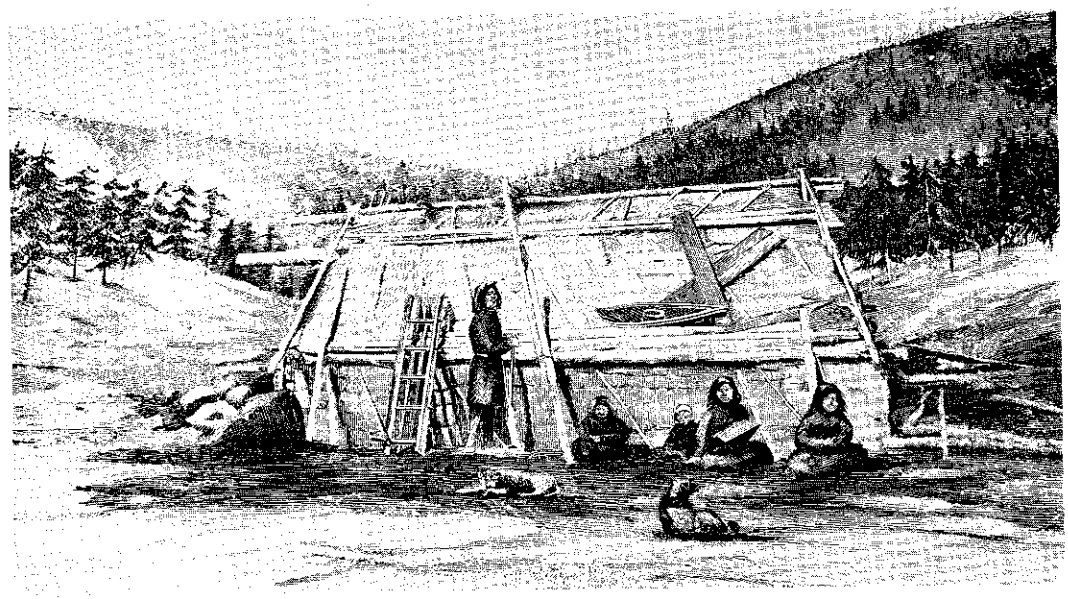
Tlingit armor and masks, 1805 Lisianski's Voyages

Trading occurred up and down the coast as far south as California and through passes into the interior of Alaska and Canada. Some of the goods obtained on these expeditions and much of the stored surplus food were given away at potlatches — competitive festive occasions given for many purposes such as honoring the dead, establishing prestige and reputation, changing a name, absolving an insult, avoiding open conflict, or completing a house.

Both groups of Indians had many subdivisions. Within Tlingit villages there were clans and these were further subdivided. Generally speaking, clans owned names, songs, crests, berry patches, clam beaches, fishing areas, and trade routes. Violation of these rights could and did lead to warfare.

The vast interior of Alaska in the 18th century was the home of several thousand Athabascans. They lived along the rivers, generally in or near wooded areas, but their territories included a variety of landscape and terrain. Only three were located near and along the coast.

Among the major groups of Athabascans were the Kutchin, Tanana, Koyukon, Ingalik, Ahtna, and Tanaina. The Kutchin lived in the northeastern interior along the Yukon, Chandalar, and Porcupine rivers and their tributaries. To their south lived the Tanana, principally along the river of the same name. To the west lived the Koyukon, along the Yukon and Koyukuk rivers, and the Ingalik, in a small area along the Yukon and Anvik rivers. The Ahtna lived along the Copper River, including at its mouth. The Tanaina lived in the area surrounding Cook Inlet north of Kachemak Bay.



Allen's Explorations

Copper River Athabascans at Taral, 1885

One very small group of Athabascan-related peoples lived on the coast between the territory of the Chugach and the Tlingit. These were the Eyak. Their culture was a blend of Chugach and interior Athabascan.

Each of these groups was made up of people who spoke one or another of several Athabascan languages and who occupied a common territory. The groups were not organized as tribes.

For most Athabascans the village was the basic social unit. This was often only a winter village. In the summer, bands of people who were related to one another would separate to move to fishing camps. Depending upon the game resources available, they might also separate into smaller groups for hunting.

Athabascans hunting moose, Yukon River, 1867

Whymper's Travels

All Athabascans hunted, fished, and gathered, but there was variety among the groups depending upon their locations. The Ingalik, for instance, relied heavily for subsistence upon the seasonal run of salmon in their rivers; hunting moose and small game animals was supplementary. The Kutchin, on the other hand, depended principally upon moose, caribou, bear, goats, and sheep; fishing, for them, was supplementary. The Tanaina, the only Athabascans along the coast, were hunters of the beluga whale and seal, as well as land animals. They were also fishermen.

To the extent that Athabascans depended upon large land animals, they faced an uncertainty of subsistence. There were periods of serious shortage of food and even famine. Generally speaking, the food resources of the interior were far less abundant than along the coastal areas.

Athabascans had many kinds of tools for river fishing — nets, traps, lures, and hooks. They had a variety of techniques for obtaining game animals including construction of snares and pits.

Some fishing sites and hunting areas were owned by individuals, but sometimes they were owned by the band. For example, among the Kutchin, hunting territories and fishing sites were common property of the bands, but caribou fences were individually owned. Boundaries between groups were understood and protected.

Whymper's Travels

ered, but there
pon their loca-
for subsistence
rivers; hunting
ementary. The
incipally upon
, for them, was
scans along the
seal, as well as

ıpon large land
ce. There were
mine. General-
ır were far less

river fishing —
ariety of tech-
onstruction of

ere owned by
by the band.
erritories and
ls, but caribou
etween groups

Western and northern Alaska was the home of most Eskimos. Lands they inhabited stretched from the Bristol Bay region around the coast and across northern Canada. In addition, as noted earlier, there were the Koniag, Sugcestun, and Chugach along the northern Gulf of Alaska.

Most of the estimated 40,000 Eskimos spoke one of two languages — Inupiat or Yupik (or a dialect of Yupik). The linguistic boundary was in the Norton Sound area. Inupiat speakers lived to the north; Yupik speakers lived to the south.

Alaska State Museum, Juneau (Beechey's Voyages)

Eskimos of the Cape Thompson area, 1826

Permanent winter villages were the pattern among both northern and southern Eskimos. The larger villages were generally in the north, and of these, the largest was Wales with 500 persons.

Although the village was the basic unit of organization, villagers identified themselves with other villagers as part of a larger group. According to Oswalt, there were 21 groups (including those of the Gulf of Alaska) each of which occupied a recognized area, and each of which had a sense of shared identity.

Describing northwest Alaska, anthropologist Dorothy Jean Ray wrote:

> The Eskimos were extremely conscious of their tribal affiliations, extent of their territory, and relations with foreign groups. Inhabitants of the smaller villages felt a strong tie with members of the larger capital. Wherever they went they identified themselves as belonging to the specific larger group and were acutely aware of their crossing over into other tribal territory.

There was much similarity in the material culture of Eskimos, insofar as they depended upon the same resources — the use of kayaks, harpoons, and spears by seal hunters, for example. But because there was much variety in resources available, there was also much diversity.

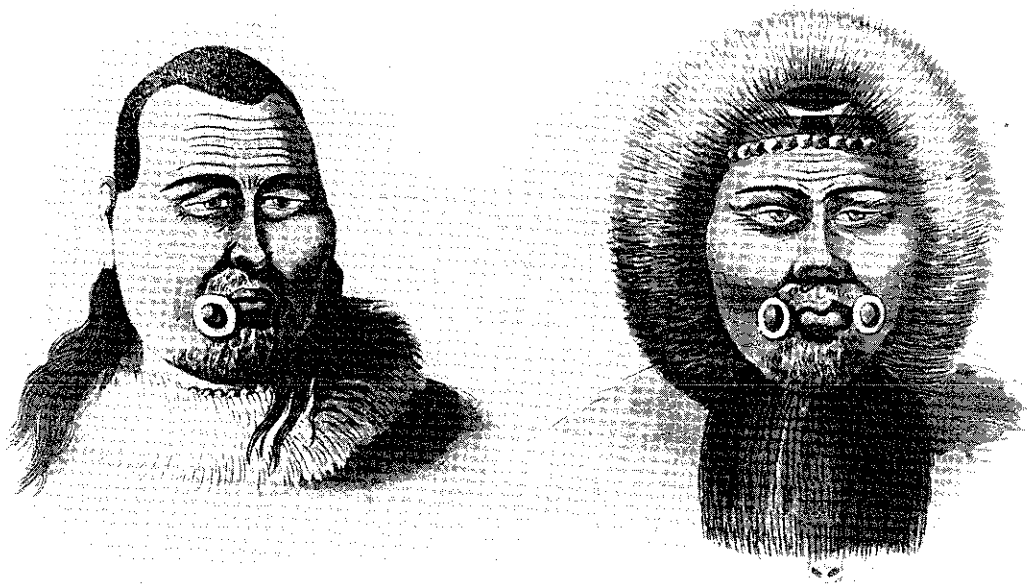
Eskimos engaged extensively in trade, especially the Inupiat speakers from the coast, who traded with those who

lived inland. Coastal Eskimos exchanged seal oil, walrus and seal skins, ivory, and other products for caribou and wolverine skins. Coastal Eskimos also traded with the Chukchi of Siberia. There was some trade between northern Eskimos and Athabascans but it was very limited, partly because of hostility that existed between them. Less extensive trading took place among Yupik Eskimos, but there was some; seal oil from the coast was an important commodity to inland Eskimos. There was also some trade between Yupik Eskimos and neighboring Athabascan groups.

Northern Eskimos

Northern Eskimos lived on the Seward Peninsula and on the lands bordering the Chukchi Sea and the Arctic Ocean. If they were not on the coast, they typically lived along rivers, including the Kobuk, Noatak, and Kuzitrin rivers. Only one group — the Nunamiut — lived almost entirely inland.

The Inupiat Eskimos living along the northern coasts were hunters of the enormous bowhead whale, walrus and seal. They supplemented their sea-based activities by hunting on land, fishing in inland waters, and gathering plants and berries.



Alaska State Museum, Juneau (Kotzebue's Voyages)

Kotzebue Sound Eskimos, 1820's

Along the rivers flowing into the area of Kotzebue Sound, Eskimos relied less on sea mammals and more upon land animals and river fishing. At the northwestern tip of the Seward Peninsula lived Eskimos who — like those of the northern coast — were principally whalers. Others on the Seward Peninsula depended largely upon caribou, as did the people of the upper Noatak and Kobuk rivers, and of the Brooks Range.

seal oil, walrus and
or caribou and wol-
with the Chukchi of
orthern Eskimos and
partly because of
ss extensive trading
here was some; seal
mmodity to inland
veen Yupik Eskimos

d Peninsula and on
the Arctic Ocean. If
y lived along rivers,
in rivers. Only one
rely inland.
he northern coasts
whale, walrus and
ctivities by hunting
thering plants and

au (Kotzebue's Voyages)

area of Kotzebue
ds and more upon
western tip of the
like those of the
rs. Others on the
aribou, as did the
rivers, and of the

Southern Eskimos

Most southern Eskimos lived along the Bering Sea coast from Norton Sound to the Bristol Bay region and along the rivers flowing into the Bering Sea. These Yupik-speaking people were primarily hunters of the bearded seal along the southwestern coast, and salmon fishermen along the Yukon, Kuskokwim, Nushagak, and other rivers. Over a wide area they were also hunters of caribou and small game animals.

The other speakers of a Yupik dialect were on St. Lawrence Island, where they pursued the great whale and walrus; on Nunivak Island where they were seal and beluga whale hunters and fishermen; and in the earlier-noted Gulf of Alaska areas, where they were sea mammal hunters.

Whymper's Travels

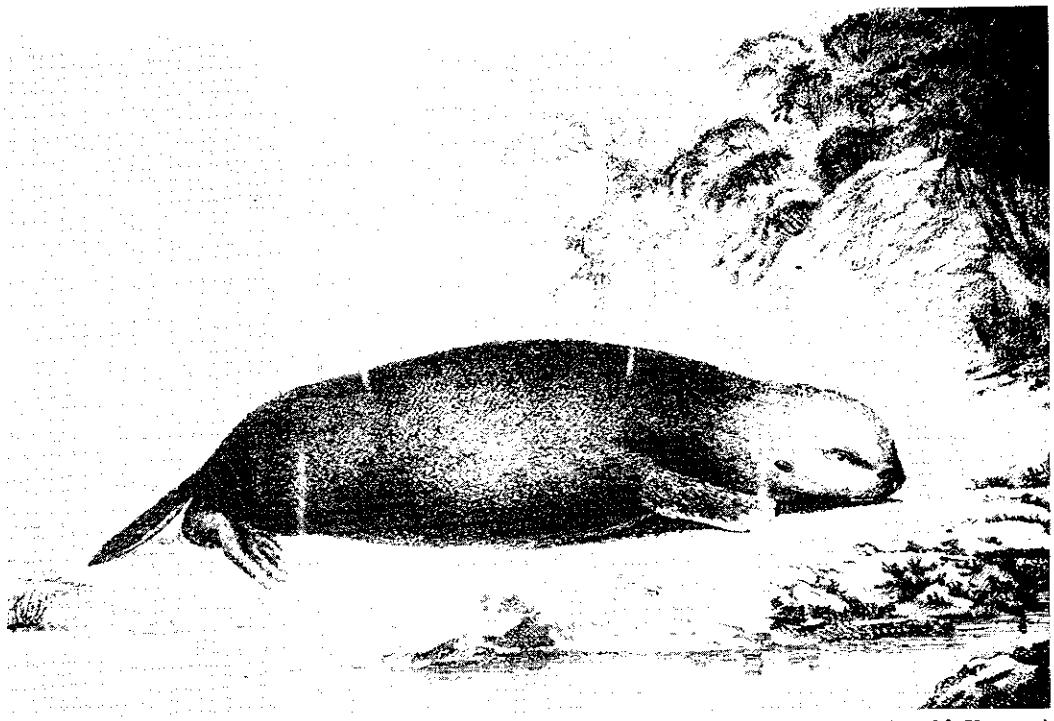
Eskimo from the Unalakleet area, 1867

Summary

Alaska was a populated country thousands of years before Russians were to claim it on the basis of Bering's voyage. The native inhabitants extensively used and occupied the land. The intensity of use of any specific area depended upon the availability of resources. Though boundaries were not constant or precisely fixed, recognizable boundaries did exist among groups of Eskimos, Indians, and Aleuts.

"I was a boy of nine or ten years," the old man of Kodiak Island recalled, "when the first Russian ship with two masts appeared . . ." The man, Arsenti Aminak, was looking back many years on the arrival of the first Russians in 1762. In his recollection (reported by historian Hubert H. Bancroft), Aminak said, "his people had traded with Tanainas and others, but "ships and white men we did not know at all." He said most of his people were afraid upon sighting the ship, but,

> Among our people there was a brave warrior named Ishinik, who was so bold he feared nothing in the world; he undertook to visit the ship and came back with presents in his hand, a red shirt, an Aleut hood, and some glass beads. He said there was nothing to fear, 'they only wish to buy our sea-otter skins and to give us glass beads and other riches for them.'



Alaska State Museum, Juneau (Cook's Voyages)

A sea otter

A council of the old and wise urged caution in dealing with the strangers, but the islanders were "dazzled by the sight of such quantities of goods." Once trading began, Aminak related, the Russians set upon the islanders, killing 30 of them and taking their sea-otter skins.

Chapter 3

' the old man of
sian ship with two
ıinak, was looking
Russians in 1762.
ɔrian Hubert H.
had traded with
e men we did not
were afraid upon

ve warrior
he feared
ɔk to visit
ents in his
and some
ng to fear,
' skins and
riches for

eau (Cook's Voyages)

ıution in dealing
'dazzled by the
trading began,
islanders, killing

The attack upon Kodiak Islanders was a continuation of what had begun with the arrival of Russian fur hunters in the Aleutian Islands about 20 years earlier. The Aleuts had suffered terrible cruelties and mass killing at the hands of the Russian hunters. Because the Aleuts were skilled hunters of the highly valued sea otter, the Russians wanted their services. When they resisted becoming slaves, the Russians killed them in order that those remaining could be forced to submit.

As the sea otter and other fur bearers became more scarce the Russians moved further eastward along the Gulf of Alaska. Before 1800 their vessels had traveled into Cook Inlet, Prince William Sound, Yakutat Bay, and Sitka Sound. Like the Aleuts and Koniags, the Tanainas and Chugach had only spears and bows and arrows, which were not very effective against the firearms of the Russians. Tlingits, who were of fierce reputation, had traded with other foreigners for guns and were a continuing menace to the Russians even into the 1850's.

During these years of eastward expansion a few trading companies took the place of the independent fur hunters.

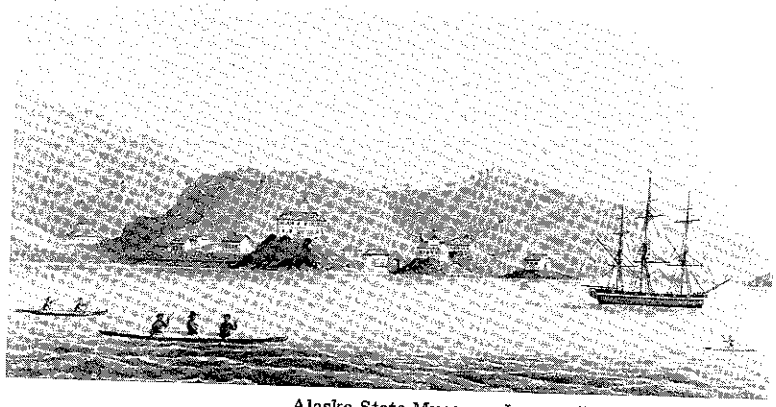
SHELIKHOV'S CONCLUSION

On one of his voyages to Alaska waters, trader Gregory Shelikhov successfully traded strands of blue glass beads at a number of coastal villages for a large quantity of beaver and otter furs. He also buried at each location small copper plates inscribed "Land of the Russian Crown." A later report from the Russian Ministry of Marine told of Shelikhov's reaction to the 1788 voyage:

> "On examining the stock of furs obtained by way of exchange, Shelikhov found that its value amounted to half a million of rubles, and was astonished not so much at the great benefit obtained, as at the subjection to the Russian Crown of so many tribes, by such easy and simple means. On sound reflection he understood that all that occurred so by God's will, deigning to favor the elevation of Russia to glory, because everywhere Russia's name has been pronounced, there the populations with eager readiness obeyed and recognized subjection."

Source: Memorandum from the Russian Ministry of Marine, quoted in *Alaska Boundary Tribunal.*

Then, in 1799 one firm — the Russian-American Company — was granted a royal charter giving it exclusive hunting and trading privileges in what was becoming known as Russian-America. It was owned by fur-trading companies, merchants, and by Russia's royal family. It was both a commercial enterprise and an arm of the Russian government. Subject to the provisions of its charter, the company was the administrator of colonial affairs in the North Pacific.

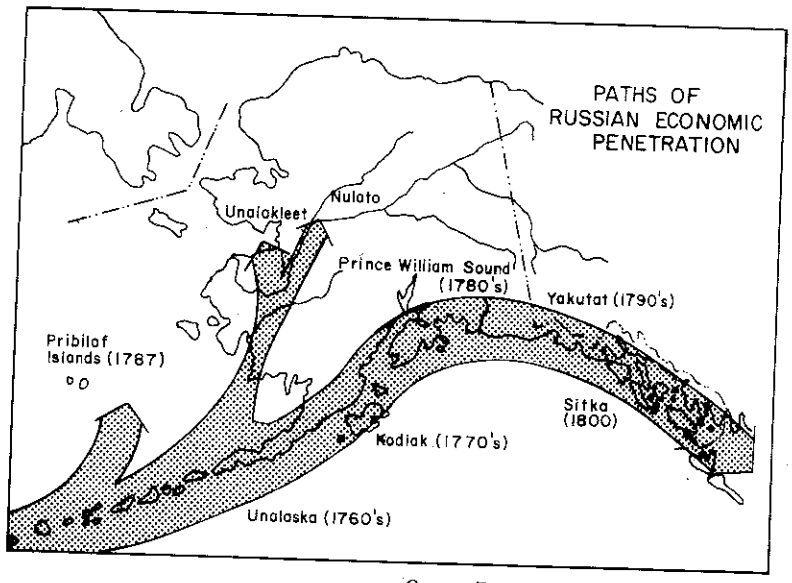


Alaska State Museum, Juneau (Lisianski's Voyages)

Russian-American Company headquarters at Kodiak, 1805

Russian settlement

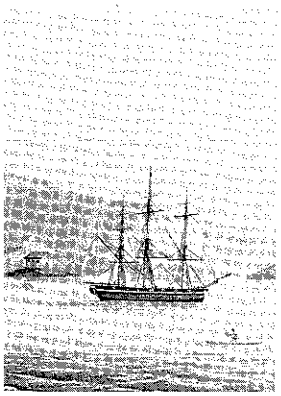
Colonization of Russian-America by Russians was very limited. During the years 1799-1867, the number of Russians averaged 550 persons. There were never more than 823 Russians in the colony. Apart from Kodiak and Sitka, permanent settlements were very small, often including as few as a dozen Russians. Most locations were simply trading posts, often manned by one or two Russians.



George Rogers, Change in Alaska, 1970

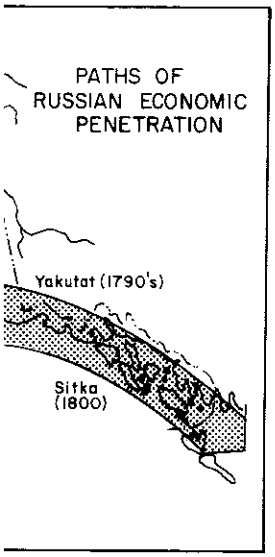
MAP 3 PATHS OF RUSSIAN ECONOMIC PENETRATION

American Company —
exclusive hunting and
ng known as Russian-
ompanies, merchants,
s both a commercial
overnment. Subject to
ıy was the administra-
ic.



Juneau (Lisianski's Voyages)
rs at Kodiak, 1805

oy Russians was very
e number of Russians
ever more than 823
ı Kodiak and Sitka,
ll, often including as
s were simply trading
ians.



ers, Change in Alaska, 1970
MIC PENETRATION

ALEUTS COMPLAIN TO THE CZAR, 1799

"The Russians are coming to America and to our Fox Islands and Andreanof Island to hunt sea and land animals." We receive them in friendly fashion, but they act like barbarians with us. They seize our wives and children as hostages, they send us early in the spring, against our will, five hundred versts [about 330 miles] away to hunt otters, and they keep us there until fall, and at home they leave the lame, the sick, the blind, and these, too, they force to process fish for the Company and to do other Company work without receiving any pay . . . The remaining women are sent out on Company labor and are beaten to death. They are removed by force to desert islands, and the children are taken away from those who walk with crutches, and there is no one to feed them."

Source: *The Russian-American Company*, S.B. Okun, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1951.

Until about 1819, Russian settlement and activity was largely confined to the Aleutians, the Pribilofs, Kodiak Island, and to scattered coastal locations on the mainland. With the continuing decline in the numbers of sea-mammals, Russians began moving into the western mainland — along the Nushagak, Kuskokwim, and Yukon rivers. They established trading posts as far north as Unalakleet and Nulato.

Status of Natives

By the 1820's, the cruelty and mass killing of natives in Alaska was ending. The long-time chief manager of the company, Alexander Baranov, had been replaced by an officer of the Russian navy. Hostile encounters between Russians and natives continued to take place, however, at scattered locations.

The Russian government classified natives for purposes of their law as "dependent," "not wholly dependent," and "independent." As the labels imply, it was primarily the "dependent" natives who were subject to Russian laws and requirements.

The "dependent" or "settled" groups were the Aleuts, Koniags, Chugach people, and perhaps a few Tanainas. Considered Russian subjects, these people were required to supply half of their male population between the ages of 18 to 50 as hunters for the Russians. These men held such compulsory employment for three years. During this period, the company supplied all equipment and clothing and paid a

Alaska State Museum, Juneau (Lutke's Voyages)

View of Russian Settlement at Sitka, 1820's

small salary. Although they could hold private property, they could not sell furs to any other buyer than the Company.

The other two classes of natives were generally beyond control of the Russian authorities. Some of them, like the Tlingits, were in continuing contact with the Russians, but were considered independent. Others who were classed as independent were Athabascans and Eskimos with whom the Russians had no contact. Some southwestern Eskimos (classed as not wholly dependent) simply engaged in trade with the Russians.

The children of Russian and native parents were not considered to be natives, but were classified as a separate class they called "creoles." They had no compulsory service or other obligations to the Company unless they had been educated at Company expense.

Land use

Since the Russians were engaged in fur gathering, not agriculture, and they were few in number, taking land was not necessary. While the Company's Charter (1821) did not provide for deeds or titles to land, it appeared to respect the natives' right to land used:

> The Company shall be obligated to leave at the disposal of [the dependent tribes] as much land as is necessary for all their needs, at the places where they are settled or will be settled . . .

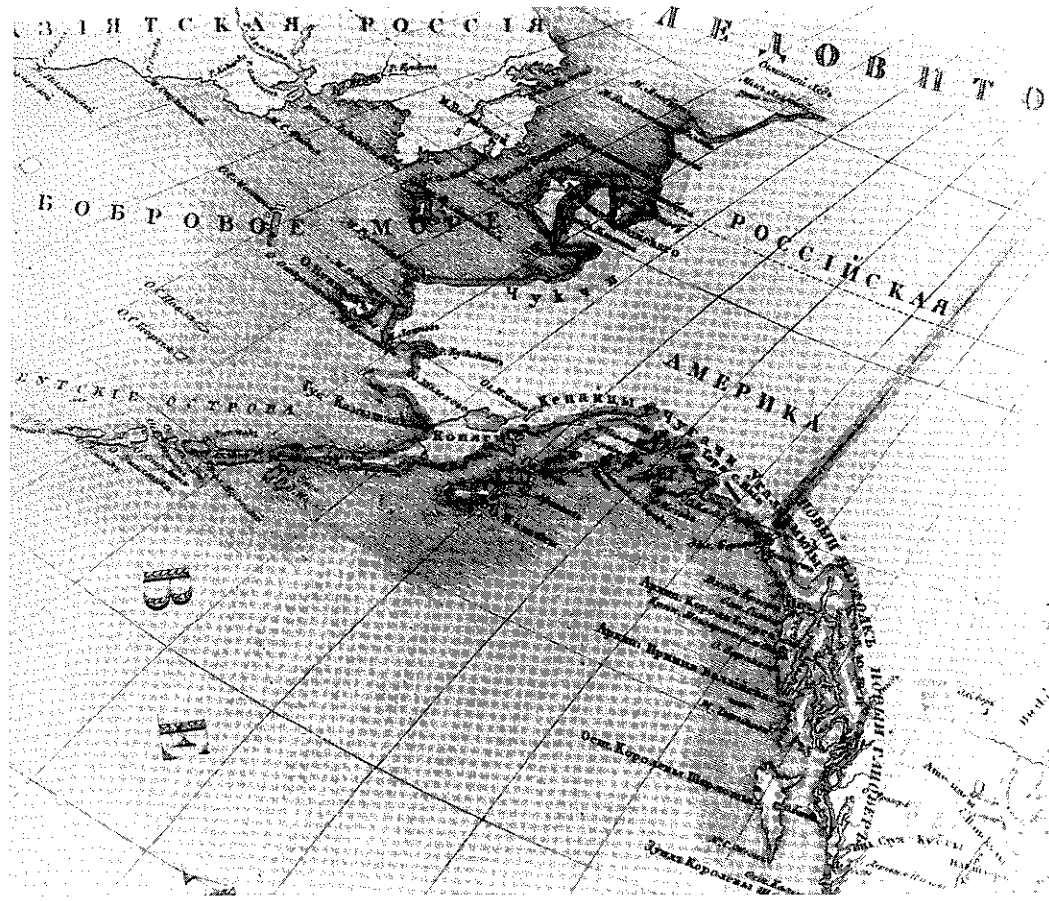
Juneau (Lutke's Voyages)

ivate property, they
n the Company.
re generally beyond
e of them, like the
h the Russians, but
ho were classed as
nos with whom the
tern Eskimos (class-
ed in trade with the

parents were not
sified as a separate
compulsory service
less they had been

fur gathering, not
er, taking land was
ter (1821) did not
eared to respect the

to leave at
tribes] as
heir needs,
d or will be



Atlas of All Five Parts of the World

MAP 4 RUSSIAN AMERICA, 1827

Although the lives of thousands of natives were affected by the Russians, their lands were not taken. This was made clear in a memorandum prepared by the Russian government shortly after its sale of Alaska. The memorandum, written by Kostlivtzov, summarized the situation area by area:

> Northern islands: '. . . neither the imperial government nor the Company ever had any influence upon the mode of division of lands between said Natives, who to the present time, use such lands in perfect freedom, without any foreign interference or restrictions.'
>
> Aleutians: '. . . The division of lands between the Aleutian settlements was established at a time anterior to the Russian occupation and continues to be inviolably preserved . . .'
>
> Other regions: '. . . no attempts were ever made and no necessity ever occurred to introduce a system of land ownership.'

Michaelovski (Fort St. Michael's), 1867

Whymper's Travels

"PERMITTED"? "ENTITLED"?

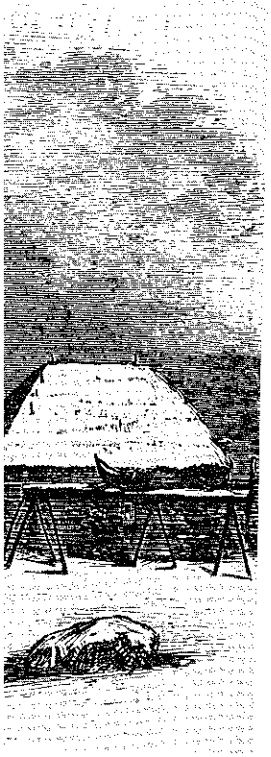
"The natives not employed by the Company are permitted to enjoy fishing along the shores where they live . . . in order to procure food for themselves and their families . . . They are entitled also to catch the sea animals and wild beasts on these islands and places where they are living . . ."

Source: Sec. 56 of the second charter of the Russian-American Company (1821).

Purchase by the United States

By the 1860's Russia had good reason to consider selling Russian-America. Russia's recent war with the British in Crimea had drained the government's treasury. Its experiences in the war suggested that the government would be powerless to defend its possession against other nations. There was increased American and British trading along the coasts. Furthermore, the Russian-American Company was no longer financially profitable.

Once launched, negotiations with the United States were quickly concluded. The Treaty of Cession was signed on March 30, 1867. Russian-America was formally transferred to



Whymper's Travels

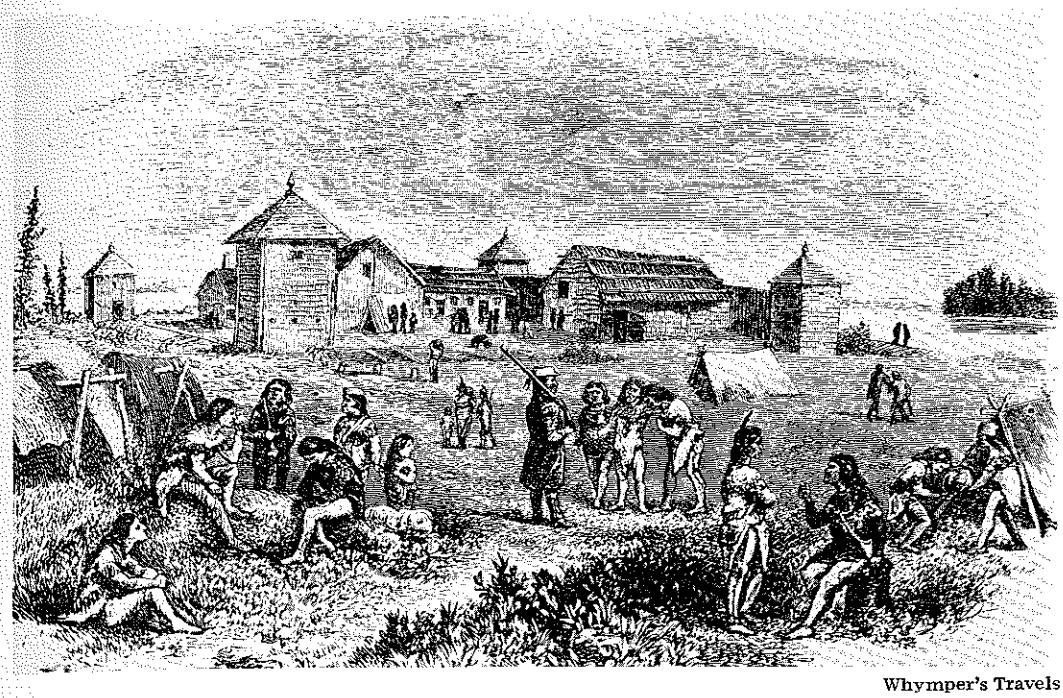
ED"?

the Company
ng the shores
cure food for
ey are entitled
vild beasts on
are living . . ."

e Russian-Ameri-

n to consider selling
/ith the British in
reasury. Its experi-
/ernment would be
inst other nations.
h trading along the
in Company was no

United States were
ion was signed on
nally transferred to



Whymper's Travels

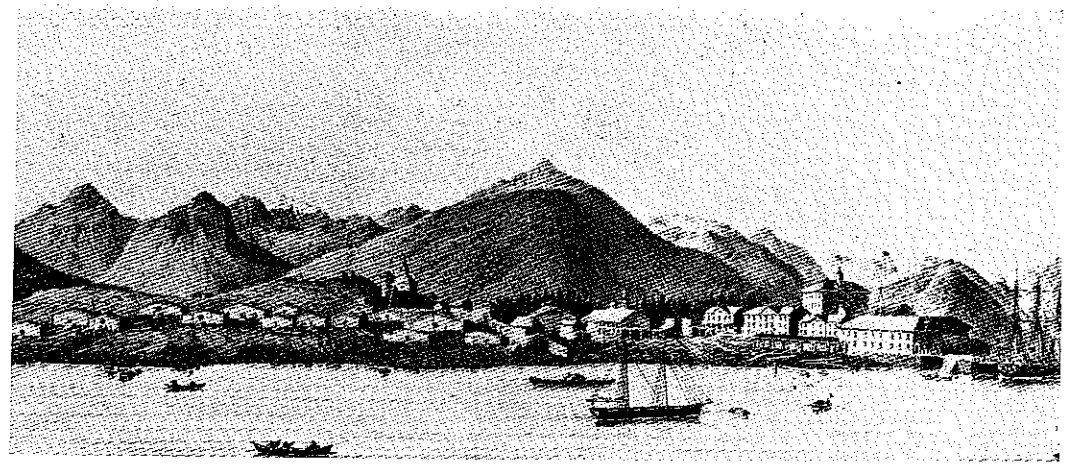
Fort Yukon, a Hudson's Bay Company post within the boundaries of Russian-America, 1867

the United States on October 18 of the same year with the lowering of the Russian flag at Sitka and the raising of the American flag. "Thus, without further ceremony," wrote historian Bancroft, "this vast area of land, belonging by right to neither, was transferred from one European race to the offshoot of another."

Treaty of Cession

Negotiations were conducted with such speed that the treaty itself was hastily drawn. It failed to define clearly the status of natives, their rights, or matters of land ownership. Only one paragraph (part of Article III) was devoted to the inhabitants of Russian-America:

> The inhabitants of the ceded territory, according to their choice, reserving their natural allegiance, may return to Russia within three years; but if they should prefer to remain in the ceded territory, they with the exception of uncivilized native tribes, shall be admitted to the enjoyment of all rights, advantages and immunities of citizens of the United States, and shall be maintained and protected in the free enjoyment of their liberty, property and religion. The uncivilized tribes will be subject to such laws and regulations as the United States may, from time to time, adopt in regard to aboriginal tribes in that country.



Alaska Coast Pilot

Stockade separates Tlingit and Russian settlements at Sitka, 1860's

It was clear that Russians were free to return to Russia or to remain within the United States. Further, if they chose to remain, they were to be accorded the full rights of citizenship. But what about natives?

Almost 30 years later a court held that creoles and "dependent" tribes — being Russian subjects — should have been entitled to citizenship under the treaty. Nonetheless, from the time of the transfer, the United States apparently viewed all natives as uncivilized and therefore falling under the final sentence:

> The uncivilized tribes will be subject to such laws and regulations as the United States may, from time to time, adopt in regard to aboriginal tribes in that country.

Natives, then, would be subject to policies adopted for "aboriginal tribes" by the United States. Their futures would be linked to those of the American Indians. Given that fact, it is necessary to turn aside from Alaska to look at the situation of American Indians in the years surrounding 1867 and the policies that had been pursued to that time.