



IVAN KUSKOV'S 1820 CENSUS AT FORT ROSS

Total population is 260 people. (179 male, 81 female)

Russians	— 38 people, all male
Creoles	— 17 people, 8 male and 9 female
Kodiak	— 126 people, 108 male and 18 female
Chugach	— 7 people, 6 male and 1 female
Aleuts	— 3 people, all female
Yakuts	— 5 people, all male
Hawaiian	— 4 people, all male
Tlingit	— 2 people, 1 male and 1 female
Kenai	— 1 person, a male
California Indians	— 56 people, 8 male and 48 female
Unknown ethnic origin	— 1 person, a female

Image Credits:

- *View of the island of St Paul in the sea of Kamchatka* by Louis Choris.
- *Umnak Island Ulax*. Photo by Tanya Lestenkof for the Nikolski IRA Council. Unger, S., & Aleutian/Pribilof Islands Association,. (2014). *Qaqamiiġuġ: Traditional foods and recipes from the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands : nourishing our mind, body and spirit for generations*.
- A woman wears a decorated birdskin parka with feathers turned to the outside. Unalaska, 1790. Gawrila Sarytschew, *Account of a Voyage of Discovery to the North-East of Siberia, the Frozen Ocean, and the North-East Sea*; courtesy of the Göttingen State and University Library, sarytschew29. http://alaska.si.edu/media.asp?id=353&object_id=169
- From the *Carte de Possessions Russes, dressee par Pierron, d'apres la carte de Mr. Brue, 1825*. Historical Atlas of the Pacific Northwest by Derek Hayes , Sasquatch Books, 1999.
- Cover: *Sea Otter Dart* by Bill Holm



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ALASKA NATIVES AT FORT ROSS

The Russian American Company (RAC) established Fort Ross and worked with many diverse people to build and operate the settlement.

Fort Ross' first manager, Ivan Kuskov, chose 25 Russian craftsmen and 80 Alaska Native sea hunters to accompany him on the 1812 voyage that would establish Fort Ross. Russians collectively called Alaskan workers at Fort Ross *Aleuts* but they actually came from many Alaskan tribes. Most men on this first trip were from Kodiak Island, but over the next 30 years they would come from the Aleutian Islands and Alaskan Peninsula. RAC also brought native people from Hawaii to Fort Ross, making it a truly multicultural settlement.



The Kashaya Pomo called the Alaskans *Underwater People* because their boats sat so low in the water it seemed as if they were coming out of the sea. The iqyan (kayak) they developed is still studied today and its design is incorporated into modern shipbuilding. The Russians called these skin boats *baidarkas*.

The Alaskans were expert sea hunters. They honed their skill over thousands of years while living on isolated islands and waterways. RAC sent Alaska Natives along the coast to hunt for otter and fur seal pelts. They traveled great distances by kayak, including the Farallon Islands 35 miles southwest of Fort Ross across the rough open ocean, where the Alaskans stayed for months at a time. Alaska Natives used a spear with a detachable point tied with sinew to an air bladder made from a sea mammal's stomach. After the animal is speared,

hunters track the floating bladder, waiting for the animal to come up for air. This traditional method is more productive than using modern weapons like a musket because when a sea mammal is shot, it sinks and the valuable pelt and food is lost.

At Fort Ross the Alaskans took on other work like felling trees to build the settlement, blacksmithing, ship building, and of course hunting.

THE ALASKA NATIVE VILLAGE

Alaska Natives made their home on the windswept bluff between the fort stockade and the Pacific Ocean where they could watch ocean conditions and gain quick access to the water. While this site is windy and barren, it resembled the treeless Aleutian and South Kodiak Islands that were familiar to the Alaska Natives. This area was home to single Alaska Native men and Alaska Native families. Inter-marriage between Alaskan men and Kashaya and Coast Miwok women was common, and these families would join the Alaska Native village.



Their homes were most likely similar to those in Alaska: semi-submerged sod homes, called *Ulax*, held up by local redwood or driftwood. Submerging part of the home offered protection from wind and winter storms. At Ross the homes might have had windows, a split door, and a wood burning stove, amenities introduced by the Russians.

NATIVE WOMEN AT FORT ROSS

Fort Ross farmed and ranched food to feed its own colony, but also supplied food to the Russian colonies in Alaska. Food was prepared communally by the few women that lived in the village. In Alaska the Russians ate separately, consuming a diet of meat, vegetables, and starch, whereas the Alaska Native diet came mostly from the ocean. Unbeknownst to the Russians, seafood is a good source of vitamin A, B, C, D, and E; those in Alaska who did not adopt the native diet were badly affected by starvation and scurvy.



In addition to their daily chores, women were expected to make specialized clothing for sea hunters, such as a *kamleika*, a long, hooded, waterproof shirt made by sewing together sea lion, walrus, or whale intestine. They also made beautiful bird parkas to take advantage of feathers' water resistant and insulating qualities.

CREOLES

If an Alaska Native woman married a Russian or Creole (a person of mixed native and Russian blood), she would join the Creole class. This allowed her to move into the Russian's house and no longer be subject to the imposed sewing and gathering chores required by RAC. Mixed Russian/Alaskan or Russian/Californian Creole boys would be apprenticed in trade or sent to Russia for education; in exchange for their education, the boys would pledge ten or more years work with RAC. Many Fort Ross craftsmen were Creole. RAC employed skilled Creole scribes, doctors' assistants, and engineers.