**FROM THE LAND CALLED BERINGIA**

**Origins of Alaska’s Native Groups**

No one knows exactly when people first found the land that would be called Alaska.

Some anthropologists believe that people migrated from Asia to North America as long as 40,000 years ago. Others argue it was as recent as 15,000 years ago.

Whenever, the consensus is that they came from Asia by way of a northern land bridge that once connected Siberia and Alaska.

That land bridge, now recalled as Beringia, was the first gateway to Alaska. But these first visitors were hardly tourists intent on exploring new worlds. Rather they were simply pursuing their subsistence way of life as they followed great herds of grazing mammals across the grassy tundra and gentle steppes of Beringia.

They came sporadically through many millennia.. in waves of different ethnic backgrounds/generations of people and animals..hunters and hunted. As the Ice Age drew to an end and the seas claimed the land, these people moved to higher and drier places--the land that, as the continents drifted apart, would become Alaska.

Some groups settled in the Arctic. Others traversed the mountain passes to other parts of Alaska. While still others migrated through Alaska, continuing on to distant lands--perhaps as far as South America!

Those who made Alaska their permanent home make up the state’s four major anthropological group: Eskimos, Aleuts, Athabascans, and Northwest Coast Indians.

While all four groups shared certain basic similarities--all hunted, fished and gathered food--they developed distinctive cultures and sets of skills.

**The Eskimos:Flexible Residents of the Arctic**

The Eskimos were primarily a coastal people, setting along the shores of the Arctic and Bering seas.

For millennia they lived a simple, subsistence life--much as they still do today--by harvesting the fish and mammals of the seas, the fruits and game of the land. Somehow they learned how to thrive despite the demanding conditions of the Arcitc.

Their sense of direction was keen, almost uncanny. Traveling in a straight line, sometimes through snowstorms and whiteouts, they found their way around the mostly featureless terrain by noting wind direction, the position of the stars, the shape and size of a snowdrift.

And they were resourceful. In a land where the summer sun stays at eye-level for weeks on end, never setting below the horizon, the Eskimos fashioned the first sun-visor--which also doubled as a snowmask to protect their eyes from the wind-driven snow!

**The Athabascans: Nomads of the Interior**

Like the Eskimos, the Athabascans were skillful hunters, but they depended more on large land mammals for their subsistence--tracking moose and migrating caribou.

When it came to fishing, the Athabascans were absolutely ingenious, snaring fish with hooks, lures, traps and nets that are the fascination of modern day anglers who visit their camps.

Generally nomadic, they lived in small, simply organized bands of a few families, and whenever possible pitched their camps in the sheltered white spruce forests of the Interior. Some adventurous tribes, however, wandered all the way to the Southwest United States to become kin to the Navajos and Apaches.

**Aleuts: Born of the Sea**

For the Aleuts, life centered around the sea as they distributed themselves among the 70-some islands in the Aleutian chain across the North Pacfic.

Life here was somewhat more benign that in the Arctic, though wind storms were sometimes strong enough to blow rocks around!

Since their food supply was rich, varied and readily available, the Aleuts had time to develop a complex culture. Evidence indicates that they practiced surgery and that their elaborate burial rituals included embalming. Instruments. utensils, even their boats (baidars) were made with amazing beauty and exact symmetry. And everything was fashioned for a specific purpose--the Aleuts used 30 different kinds of harpoon heads for different species of game!

Skilled navigators and sailors, the Aleuts had the dubious distinction of being the first to encounter the white man...Russian fur traders who took them as slaves to harvest the fur seals in the Pribilofs.

**The Northwest Coast Indians: High Society of Alaska’s Southeast**

The milder, more temperate climate and an unlimited supply of salmon and other seafood’s enabled the Northwest Coast Indians to evolve a way of life quite different from the Eskimos, Aleuts and Athabascans.

They settled in year-round permanent villages, took slaves, gave lavish potlatches, and lived their lives according to the strict rules, rituals, and regulations of their respective clans. Their artwork was nothing less than masterful...beautiful blankets, finely woven cedarbark and spruceroot baskets magnificent totem creations.

From the Russian Empire to the United States of America

Treaty of Cession 15 Stat. 539 Treaty concerning the Cession of the Russian Possessions in North America by his Majesty the Emperor of all the Russias to the United States of America; Concluded March 30, 1867; Ratified by the United States May 28, 1867; Exchanged June 20, 1867; Proclaimed by the United States June 20, 1867. BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA A PROCLAMATION Whereas, a treaty between the United States of America and his Majesty the Emperor of all the Russias was concluded and signed by their respective plenipotentiaries at the city of Washington, on the thirtieth day of March, last, which treaty, being in the English and French languages, is, word for word, as follows: The United States of America and his Majesty the Emperor of all the Russias, being desirous of strengthening, if possible, the good understanding which exists between them, have, for that purpose, appointed as their Plenipotentiaries: the President of the United States, William H. Seward, Secretary of State; and His Majesty the Emperor of all the Russias, the Privy Councillor Edward de Stoeckl his Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the United States. And the said Plenipotentiaries, having exchanged their full powers, which were found to be in due form, have agreed upon and signed the following articles: ARTICLE I His Majesty the Emperor of all the Russias agrees to cede to the United States, by this convention, immediately upon the exchange of the ratifications thereof, all the territory and dominion now possessed by his said Majesty on the continent of America and in the adjacent islands, the same being contained within the geographical limits herein set forth, to wit: The eastern limit is the line of demarcation between the Russian and the British possessions in North America, as established by the convention between Russia and Great Britain, of February 28 - 16, 1825, and described in Articles III and IV of said convention, in the following terms: III. "Commencing from the southernmost point of the island called Prince of Wales Island, which point lies in the parallel of 54 degrees 40 minutes north latitude, and between the 131st and the 133d degree of west longitude (meridian of Greenwich,) the said line shall ascend to the north along the channel called Portland channel, as far as the point of the continent where it strikes the 56th degree of north latitude; from this last-mentioned point, the line of demarcation shall follow the summit of the mountains situated parallel to the coast as far as the point of intersection of the 141st degree of west longitude (of the same meridian;) and finally, from the said point of intersection, the said meridian line of the 141st degree, in its prolongation as far as the Frozen ocean. IV. "With reference to the line of demarcation laid down in the preceding article, it is understood - "1st. That the island called Prince of Wales Island shall belong wholly to Russia," (now, by this cession, to the United States.) "2nd. That whenever the summit of the mountains which extend in a direction parallel to the coast from the 56th degree of north latitude to the point of intersection of the 141st degree of west longitude shall prove to be at the distance of more than ten marine leagues from the ocean, the limit between the British possessions and the line of coast which is to belong to Russia as above mentioned (that is to say, the limit to the possessions ceded by this convention) shall be formed by a line parallel to the winding of the coast, and which shall never exceed the distance of ten marine leagues therefrom." The western limit within which the territories and dominion conveyed, are contained, passes through a point in Behring's straits on the parallel of sixty-five degrees thirty minutes north latitude, at its intersection by the meridian which passes midway between the islands of Krusenstern, or Inaglook, and the island of Ratmanoff, or Noonarbook, and proceeds due north, without limitation, into the same Frozen ocean. The same western limit, beginning at the same initial point, proceeds thence in a course nearly southwest through Behring's straits and Behring's sea, so as to pass midway between the northwest point of the island of St. Lawrence and the southeast point of Cape Choukotski, to the meridian of one hundred and seventy-two west longitude; thence, from the intersection of that meridian, in a southwesterly direction, so as to pass midway between the island of Attou and the Copper island of the Kormandorski couplet or group in the North Pacific ocean, to the meridian of one hundred and ninety-three degrees west longitude, so as to include in the territory conveyed the whole of the Aleutian islands east of that meridian. ARTICLE II In the cession of territory and dominion made by the preceding article are included the right of property in all public lots and squares, vacant lands, and all public buildings, fortifications, barracks, and other edifices which are not private individual property. It is, however, understood and agreed, that the churches which have been built in the ceded territory by the Russian government, shall remain the property of such members of the Greek Oriental Church resident in the territory, as may choose to worship therein. Any government archives, papers and documents relative to the territory and dominion aforesaid, which may be now existing there, will be left in the possession of the agent of the United States; but an authenticated copy of such of them as may be required, will be, at all times, given by the United States to the Russian government, or to such Russian officers or subjects as they may apply for. ARTICLE III 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 the 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 of that country. ARTICLE IV His Majesty the Emperor of all the Russias shall appoint, with convenient despatch, an agent or agents for the purpose of formally delivering to a similar agent or agents appointed on behalf of the United States, the territory, dominion, property, dependencies and appurtenances which are ceded as above, and for doing any other act which may be necessary in regard thereto. But the cession, with the right of immediate possession, is nevertheless to be deemed complete and absolute on the exchange of ratifications, without waiting for such formal delivery. ARTICLE V Immediately after the exchange of the ratifications of this convention, any fortifications or military posts which may be in the ceded territory shall be delivered to the agent of the United States, and any Russian troops which may be in the territory shall be withdrawn as soon as may be reasonably and conveniently practicable. ARTICLE VI In consideration of the cession aforesaid, the United States agree to pay at the treasury in Washington, within ten months after the exchange of the ratifications of this convention, to the diplomatic representative or other agent of his Majesty the Emperor of all the Russias, duly authorized to receive the same, seven million two hundred thousand dollars in gold. The cession of territory and dominion herein made is hereby declared to be free and unencumbered by any reservations, privileges, franchises, grants, or possessions, by any associated companies, whether corporate or incorporate, Russian or any other, or by any parties, except merely private individual property holders; and the cession hereby made, conveys all the rights, franchises, and privileges now belonging to Russia in the said territory or dominion, and appurtenances thereto. ARTICLE VII When this convention shall have been duly ratified by the President of the United States, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, on the one part, and on the other by his Majesty the Emperor of all the Russias, the ratifications shall be exchanged at Washington within three months from the date hereof, or sooner if possible. In faith whereof, the respective plenipotentiaries have signed this convention, and thereto affixed the seals of their arms. Done at Washington, the thirtieth day of March, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-seven. [SEAL] WILLIAM H. SEWARD [SEAL] EDOUARD DE STOECKL And whereas the said Treaty has been duly ratified on both parts, and the respective ratifications of the same were exchanged at Washington on this twentieth day of June, by William H. Seward, Secretary of State of the United States, and the Privy Counsellor Edward de Stoeckl, the Envoy Extraordinary of His Majesty the Emperor of all the Russias, on the part of their respective governments, Now, therefore, be it known that I, Andrew Johnson, President of the United States of America, have caused the said Treaty to be made public, to the end that the same and every clause and article thereof may be observed and fulfilled with good faith by the United States and the citizens thereof. In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand, and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed. Done at the city of Washington, this twentieth day of June in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-seven, and of the Independence of the United States the ninety-first. [SEAL] ANDREW JOHNSON By the President:

WILLIAM H. SEWARD, Secretary of State

**The most important dates in the history of Alaska**

January 3

- in 1959, Alaska became the 49th State.

January 23

- in 1971, the temperature at Prospect Creek, Alaska, dropped to 80 degrees below zero, the lowest temperature ever recorded in the United States.

February 3

- in 1988, PL 100-241, the Alaska Native Claim Settlement Act Amendments, were signed by President Regan. The amendments gave more flexibilty to the corporations managing Settlement lands.

February 14

- in 1973, the Yukon Native Brotherhood presented a Statement of Claim to the federal government, stating their position on land claims, self-goverment and other issues which had been published in January in "Together Today For Our Children Tomorrow".

February 16

- in 1944, the final weld on the Canol pipeline laid on by Bob Shivel, 20 months after the project began.

February 22

- in 1951, after 3 years of rumours, the federal government approved moving the capital of the Yukon from Dawson City to Whitehorse. A new Federal Building was constructed in 1952, and the Territorial Council chambers were moved the following year, with the first meeting held in Whitehorse in April.

February 24

- in 1924, Carl Ben Eielson made Alaska's first Air Mail flight.

March (day unknown)

- in 1812, the Russian American Company establishes a post at Fort Ross, California to grow crops for their Alaska operations.

March 12

- in 1914, a bill authorizing the construction of the government-financed Alaska Railroad was signed by President Wilson. Construction started in 1915, and some sections were opened as they were completed, but the entire line, running from Seward to Fairbanks, was not completed until July 15, 1923.

March 24

- in 1989, the oil tanker Exxon Valdez went aground on Bligh Reef, pouring almost 11 million gallons of oil into Prince William Sound.

March 27

- in 1964, an earthquake with a magnitude of 8.4 on the Richter Scale hits the Anchorage area, killing 115 people and destroying hundreds of homes.

- in 1975, the first section of pipe for the Trans-Alaska Pipeline from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez was laid. By August, 21,600 people were working on the project. The first oil was put through the 800-mile line on June 20, 1977.

March 30

- in 1867, the United States purchased Alaska for $7,200,000

April 1

- in 1951, the Alaska Highway was turned over to Canada, in a ceremony at Whitehorse.

April 3

- in 1898, a series of 5 avalanches in the Chilkoot Pass between 2:00 AM and noon killed over 70 people.

- in 1919, the Yukon finally allowed women to vote in Territorial elections. Manitoba had been the first province to enfranchise women, in 1916, and federal enfranchisement was passed in May 1918.

May (day unknown)

- in 1904, the first commercial wireless communication facility in the U.S. opened, between Nome and St. Michael.

May 7

- in 1906, the Alaska Delegate Act was passed by Congress, giving the territory's 40,000 people the right to elect a non-voting delegate to Congress.

May 12

- in 1778, Captain James Cook entered Prince William Sound.

May 26

- in 1778, Captain James Cook entered Cook Inlet.

- in 1894, a resolution of the Privy Council authorizes the North-West Mounted Police into the Yukon "in the interests of peace and good government, in the interests also of the public revenue." By June 26, Inspector Charles Constantine and Staff-Sergeant Charles Brown were at Juneau, heading for the goldfields of the British Yukon.

- in 1900, Congress authorized a massive telegraph construction project in Alaska.

May 28

- in 1898, the ice broke on Lake Bennett; within the next few weeks, 7,080 boats carrying 28,000 people passed the NWMP post at Tagish.

May 29

- in 1993, the Umbrella Final Agreement is signed by representatives of the Council for Yukon Indians and the Yukon and federal governemnts, establishing the basic format for all 14 Yukon First Nations land claims agreements.

June 3

- in 1942, a large carrier-based Japanese force attacked Dutch Harbour.

June 7

- in 1942, the Japanese landed almost 2,500 troops on the Aleutian islands of Attu and Kiska. It took a huge Allied force until August 15, 1943 to regain control - the final invasion force numbered 34,426 troops.

June 13

- in 1898, the Yukon Territory is created.

June 20

- in 197, the first oil was pumped throught the 800-mile Trans-Alaska Pipeline from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez.

July (day unknown)

- in 1786, while charting Lituya Bay, 2 small boats are swamped by rip tides, and 21 French sailors drown.

- in 1968, the oil riches of Alaska's North Slope, first reported almost 100 years ago, were confirmed by a drilling program at Prudhoe Bay. The following year, a total of $990,220,590 was bid in a one-day lease sale of those properties.

July 2

- in 1882, George Krause becomes the first white man allowed to cross the Chilkat Pass to the interior.

July 3

- in 1913, the first airplane in Alaska made a demonstration flight at Fairbanks, piloted by James V. Lilly.

July 8

- in 1799, the Russian American Company is formed by Royal Charter; they were given a 20-year monopoly on trading on the coast from 55 degrees north.

July 10

- in 1919, Louis Beauvette staked the first silver claim at Keno Hill, in the central Yukon; by 1930 this district was producing 14% of all the silver mined in Canada.

July 14

- in 1897, the Excelsior reaches San Francisco with the first large shipment of Klondike gold.

July 15

- in 1923, the Alaska Railroad was completed, following 8 years of construction.

July 16

- in 1741, Vitus Bering, on St. Elias Day, sights the Alaskan mainland. In honour of the saint, the most prominent peak was named; this was the first point on the northwest coast named by Europeans.

July 17

- in 1897, the Portland reached Seattle with a large shipment of Klondike, turning the excitement caused by the Excelsior's arrival at San Francisco into an all-out gold rush.

July 22

- in 1902, Felice Pedroni ("Felix Pedro") discovered gold in the Tanana Hills, causing a stampede which resulted in the founding of Fairbanks.

July 23

- in 1867, Alaska's first post office is authorized, to be opened at Sitka.

July 27

- in 1868, the Customs Act is amended to include Alaska.

July 29

- in 1900, the White Pass & Yukon Route railroad was completed, with the Golden Spike driven at Carcross, Yukon.

August (day not known)

- in 1876, twelve whaling ships are trapped by ice near Point Barrow; 50 men die attempting to reach safety.

August 17

- in 1896, a party consisting of George Carmack, his wife Kate, Skookum Jim, Tagish Charlie and Patsy Henderson stake placer gold claims on Rabbit Creek, and rename the creek Bonanza Creek.

August 21

- in 1732, a Russian expedition under surveyor Mikhail Gvozdev sights the Alaska mainland at Cape Prince of Wales.

- in 1852, Fort Selkirk is destroyed by a group of Tlingits who objected to the Hudson's Bay Company trying to break the Tlingit monopoly on trade with the interior tribes.

August 24

- in 1912, the Alaska Territorial Act was passed by Congress.

August 25

- in 1778, Captain James Cook turned back south, having reached Lat. 71 North, Long. 197 West.

September (day not known)

- in 1848, the Hudson's Bay Company builds Fort Selkirk, at the confluence of the Pelly and Yukon Rivers.

- in 1871, of the 41 whaling ships hunting in the Bering Sea, 32 are trapped by early ice; all of the 1,200 people on the ships escaped, but 31 of the ships were destroyed the following spring.

- in 1898 gold was discovered near the future site of Nome, triggering a stampede.

September 24

- in 1942, the Alaska Highway opened at Contact Creek, 305 miles north of Fort Nelson, B.C.

September 25

- in 1745, a Russian fur hunter, Mikhail Nevodchikov, reaches Attu in his search for sea otters.

October 2

- in 1895, the North-west Territories was divided into the Districts of Franklin, Mackenzie, Ungava and Yukon.

October 7

- in 1869, the prediction of a total solar eclipse by American scientist George Davidson so impressed Kohklux, chief of the Chilkat Indian village of Klukwan, he drew him an incredibly detailed map of a vast part of the interior of the Yukon and Alaska.

October 18

- in 1867, official ceremonies at Sitka transferred Alaska from Russia to the United States.

October 25

- in 1918, the coastal steamer Princess Sophia sunk near Juneau, killing 463 people, about 10% of the Yukon's white population.

November 6

- in 1967, Jean Gordon, the Yukon's first female member of the Territorial Council, takes her seat.

December 8

- in 1741, Vitus Bering died after his ship was wrecked on an island off the Alaskan coast.

December 18

- in 1971, the Alaska Native Claim Settlement Act (ANCSA) was signed into law by the President. Among the major provisions were the transfer of title to 40 million acres of land to native corporations, and a cash payment of $962.5 million.