Genealogy Research in Alaska

The name "Alaska" comes from the Aleut word *Alaxsxix*, meaning "place the sea crashes against."

Indigenous People

People indigenous to the area when Europeans settled and Native Americans now living there include: **Iñupiat, Yupik, Aleut, Eyak, Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian,** and a number of **Northern Athabaskan cultures.** Ancestors of Alaska native people are believed to have migrated into the area thousands of years ago, in at least two different waves. Some are descendants of a third wave of migration in which people settled across the northern part of North America but they never migrated to southern areas. For this reason, genetic studies show they are not closely related to Native Americans in South America.

Books

Genealogical Record of Point Hope, *Wainwright, and Anaktuvuk Pass, Alaska Eskimo Families 1825-1975;* Authors are Fred Milan, Edna MacLean, Connie Bradbury – This book lists some dates and places of birth, sex, and whether full-blooded or part Indian

Genealogical Record of Barrow Eskimo Families, by Edna MacLean

Most current Native American and Inuit communities in Alaska are organized into Native villages. Each village is considered a separate tribe or entity. The twelve Alaska Native Regional Corporations are administrative groups. Each corporation administers multiple villages and small tribes living in their geographical region.

Note: Eskimo is a name given by non-native Americans to members of the Inuit, Inupiat and Yupik tribes.

Russian Settlement of Alaska:

1741: The area was discovered by Vitus Bering, a Danish explorer and officer in the Russian Navy. Russians began to trade with Alaska Natives and established settlements around them. Competition grew between Russian fur trade companies. They merged into fewer, larger and more powerful corporations, causing conflicts that aggravated the relations with the indigenous population.

1763: Catherine the Great proclaimed good will toward the Aleut and urged her subjects to treat them fairly. On some islands and parts of the Alaska Peninsula, groups of traders had relative peace with the local inhabitants. In other areas, hostility erupted between the native inhabitants and the new settlers. Indigenous families were forced to leave their villages.

1783: Russian fur traders established the first white settlement on Kodiak Island.

1790: Alexander Baranov managed the trading post for the Shelikov Company.

1799: Baranov found Redoubt Saint Michael, or "Old Sitka." He had been hired as Chief Manager of the Russian-American Company, a colonial trading company chartered by the Tsar. In effect, he served as an unofficial governor of the Russian colony in America.

British and American fur traders

1800's: British and Americans began trading in the area.

1802: A group of Tlingit destroyed "Old Sitka" and massacred most of the Russian inhabitants. Baranov was forced to levy 10,000 rubles in ransom for the safe return of the surviving settlers.

1804: Baranov returned to Sitka with a large contingent of Russians and Aleuts aboard the Russian warship Neva. The ship bombarded the natives' village, forcing the Tlingits to retreat into the surrounding forest. Following their victory at the Battle of Sitka, the Russians established a permanent settlement in the form of a fort named "Novoarkhangelsk" (or "New Archangel")

1808: With Baranov still governor, Sitka was designated the capital of Russian America.

1824-1828: In treaties with the United States and Great Britain, Russia agreed to recognize latitude 54° 40 N as Alaska's southern boundary and longitude 141° as the eastern boundary. Further boundary adjustments between Alaska and British Columbia were made in 1903.

1848: The Cathedral of St. Michael, the seat of the Bishop of Kamchatka, the Kurile and Aleutian Islands, and Alaska, was built in Sitka.

United States Government

18 October 1867: The United States purchased Alaska from Russia.
1880: First Federal Census in this territory especially enumerated.
1884: Congress passed the first Organic Act, providing a governor and federal courts for Alaska.
1896: The gold strike on Bonanza Creek started a rush to the Canadian Yukon Territory. Gold was discovered at Nome in 1899 and at Fairbanks in 1902. The gold rush brought over 50,000 persons into the region.
3 January 1959: Alaska became a state.

Alaska Church History

From the founding of Russian America in 174l, sporadic, informal attempts were made to Christianize the Natives. Russian Orthodox missionaries translated the scriptures into some of the native languages. In 1794, the Russian Orthodox Church established its first mission in North America, at Kodiak Island in southeastern Alaska. In 1799, the church appointed the first American Bishop.
Bishop Innokentii of the Russian Orthodox Church lived in Sitka after 1840. He was known for his interest in education. Parts of his house served as a schoolhouse. The Russian Bishop's House has since been restored by the National Park Service.

The Cathedral of St. Michael was the seat of the Bishop of Kamchatka, the Kurile and Aleutian Islands, and Alaska. It was built in Sitka in 1848.The original church burned to the ground in 1966, but it was restored to its original appearance, with the deliberate exception of its clockface, which is black in photographs taken prior to 1966, but white in subsequent photos.

During World War II many records of Russian Orthodox baptisms, marriages, and deaths were sent to the Library of Congress to be translated and indexed. Microfilm copies for 1816 to 1936 are on 25 films at the National Archives and at the Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics. An index of these records is online in *Alaska, Vital Records, 1816 – 1959* on *FamilySearch.org*.

Swedes and Finns were both important parts of the Russian empire, and the Sitka Lutheran Church, built in 1840, was the first Protestant church on the Pacific Coast. After the transfer of Alaska from Russia to the United States in 1867, influence of other Protestant religions increased, and St. Peter's by-the-Sea Episcopal Church was consecrated as "The Cathedral of Alaska" in 1900. Other early churches in Alaska include the Methodist, Moravian, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Note: Many church registers have been collected by the Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics and used to compile delayed birth certificates. Once the certificate has been generated, the use of the information is stipulated by the Bureau of Vital Statistics just like any other birth record.

Alaska Births

Births before 1913:
No births were recorded by any borough or by the state.
Search other records to find evidence of births before 1913:

- Church records
- Family Bibles
- Newspaper articles
- Death/Cemetery Records

Births 1913 to the Present:
The state of Alaska began recording births in 1913. Most areas of the state were fully compliant by 1945.
Obtain a copy of a birth record from the Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics. Most records at the Bureau are from 1930 to the present.
Alaska state law allows only the following to obtain a birth certificate:

- The person who was born
- Parents of the person who was born
- A legal guardian or legal representative of the family
- Someone showing proof that the certificate is needed to determine property rights.

Read how to order a birth record at http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/VitalStats/Pages/birth/default.aspx.

Delayed Birth Certificates
Many church registers have been collected by the Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics and used to compile delayed birth certificates. Once the certificate has been generated, the use of the information is stipulated by the Bureau of Vital Statistics just like any other birth record.

Alaska Marriage Records

Marriages 1890 – 1913:
A few civil records of marriages were recorded in Alaska beginning in 1890. Most were recorded after 1930**.**
Obtain a copy of a marriage record from the Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics.
People who can request a marriage record:

- The bride or groom OR a legal representative of the bride or groom

Read how to order a marriage record at http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/VitalStats/Pages/marriage/default.aspx.

Other sources of marriage information include:

- Church records
- Western States Marriage Index – currently a few Alaska marriages from 1896 – 1911 - this index is in process - http://abish.byui.edu/specialCollections/westernStates/search.cfm

Alaska Marriages 1913 to the Present:
Territorial registration of Marriages in Alaska started in January of 1913.
Obtain a copy of a marriage record 1913 to the present from The Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics.
The Bureau has few records prior to 1930. Marriage records are restricted for 50 years after the date of the marriage.
People who can get a copy of a marriage record 1913 to the present:

- Those named on the certificate
- Legal representatives of the family
- A person who can prove they are legally entitled can obtain copies

Alaska Death Records

Deaths 1804 – 1913:
A few deaths were recorded by government officials beginning in 1890.
Obtain a copy of a death record from 1804 – 1913 from the Alaska State Bureau of Vital Statistics. Access to these death records is restricted to family members and legal representatives for 50 years after the date of death. Ordering information is found at http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/VitalStats/Pages/death/default.aspx.

Deaths 1913 to the present:
Territorial registration of Death Records began in 1913 and was generally complied with by 1945.

Obtain a copy of a death record from 1913 to the present from the Alaska State Bureau of Vital Statistics. Most death records are from 1930 onward. Ordering information is found at http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/VitalStats/Pages/death/default.aspx.

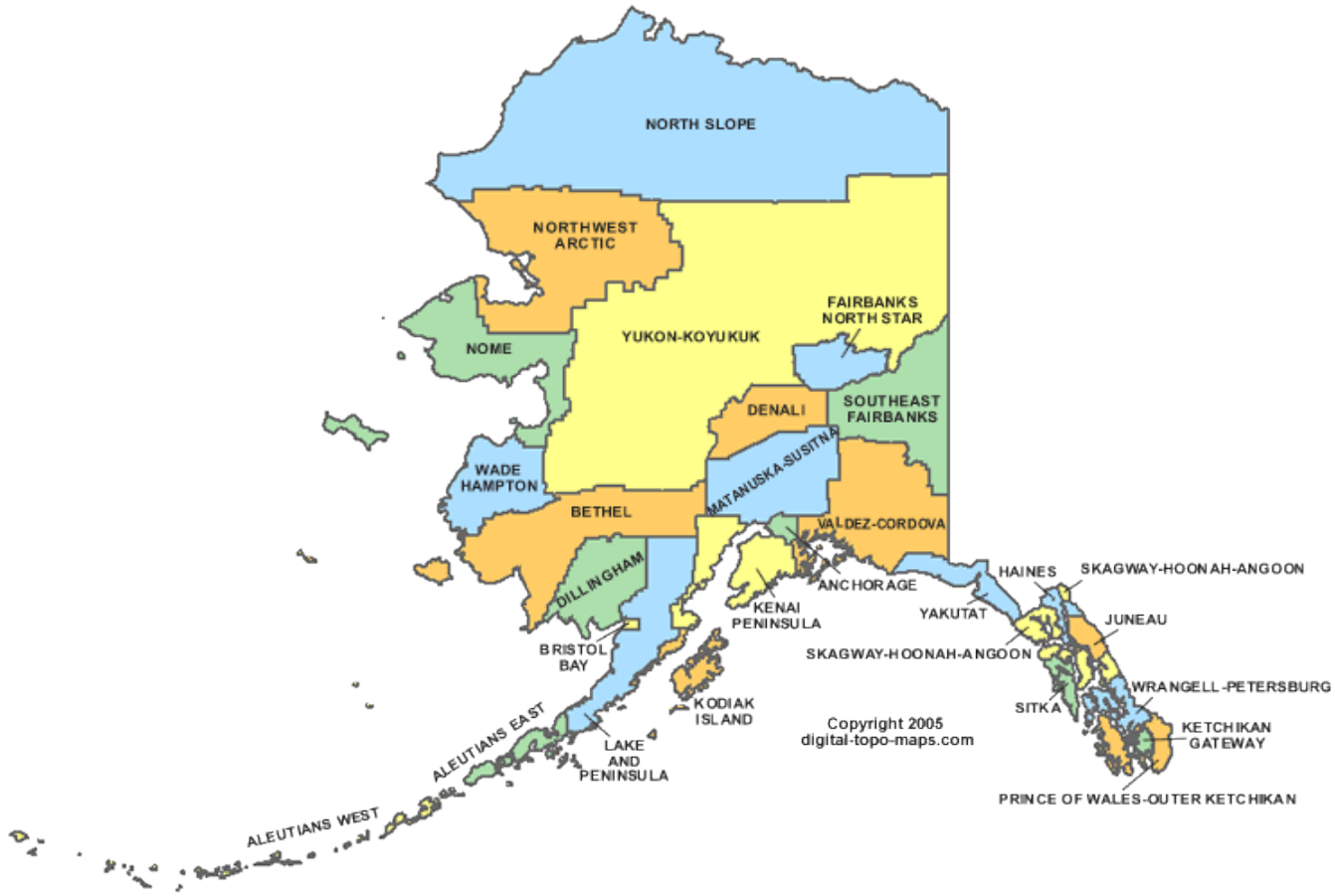
Other Sources of information about Alaska Births, Marriages, and Deaths:

- *Alaska, Vital Records, 1816 – 1959* - includes an index of Russian Orthodox church records 1845 - 1917 - https://FamilySearch.org
- Addresses of Record Repositories of other early Alaska churches can be found on *FamilySearch.org* Wiki
- Alaska Census Records – view online at *Ancestry.com* and *FamilySearch.org*
- Alaska Cemetery Burials – www.findagrave.com and www.interment.net

Alaska Genealogical/Historical Societies and Archives

- African American Historical Society of Alaska – Anchorage, AL
- Alaska Historical Society - Alaska State Archives – Alaska State Library
- Anchorage Genealogical Society - Sealaska Heritage Institute
- University of Alaska, Archives and Special Collections

Alaska Boroughs



Alaska Boroughs

Alaska is not divided into counties, as 48 other states are (Louisiana having parishes instead), but it is divided into boroughs. Many of the more densely populated parts of the state are part of Alaska's eighteen boroughs, which function somewhat similarly to counties in other states.

However, the boroughs do not cover the entire land area of the state. The area not part of any borough is referred to as the unorganized borough.
For the 1970 census, the U.S. Census Bureau, in cooperation with the state, divided the unorganized borough into 11 census areas, each roughly corresponding to an election district. However, these areas exist solely for the purposes of statistical analysis and presentation. They have no government of their own.
The Atlas of Historical County Boundaries – this interactive map outlines and explains the changing historical boundaries, names, and organization of every county from colonial times through December 31, 2000 - http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/index.html

Alaska Genealogy Research Websites

NOTE: Look online for the *GenWeb* or *Genealogy Trails* of any county in which your ancestors lived.

A Guide to the Pathfinder: A Monthly Journal of the Pioneers of Alaska, 1919-1926 – view this index that references over 1,800 members of the Alaska Pioneer Organization on the FamilySearch Catalog - https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/1854340?availability=Family%20History%20Library
Alaska Genealogy Resource Guides - http://library.alaska.gov/pub/online/akgene.html
Alaska GenWeb – links to genealogical records in counties – www.akgenweb.org
Alaska State Archives - indexes of Probate and Naturalization records, WWI veterans of Army, Navy, and Marine Corp, some vital statistics - http://www.archives.alaska.gov/genealogy/genealogy.html
Alaska State Library – in the Historical Researchers tab, choose newspapers, vital records, etc. - http://library.alaska.gov/hist/hist.html
Alaska Trails to the Past – historical information - www.alaskaweb.org
Alaska Online Historical Directories – links to websites with readable city directories - https://sites.google.com/site/onlinedirectorysite/Home/usa/ak
Yukon and Alaska Genealogy Centre – Klondike Stampeders, members of the Matanuska Colony, etc. - http://www.yukonalaska.com/pathfinder/gen/

Alaska African American Research

A few African Americans came to Alaska as seamen and miners in the mid 1800's. After the purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867, the US Army assigned a small number of African Americans to keep the peace. African Americans also worked in the Klondike gold fields in the 1890's.
AfricaMap – track the slave trade with historical overlays and geographical data - http://worldmap.harvard.edu/africamap/
AfriGeneas – slave records, death and marriage records, censuses, surnames – chat or send messages to other researchers - http://afrigeneas.com/
Alaska's Cultures – African American/Black – history of black people in Alaska - http://www.akhistorycourse.org/alaskas-cultures/african-american-blacks
Alaska State Archives, Genealogy - naturalization records, probate records index, vital records, WW1 veterans - https://archives.alaska.gov/genealogy/genealogy.html
http://consortiumlibrary.org/archives/FindingAids/hmc-0412.html.
International African American Museum - African American funeral programs, obituaries, marriage records, photos, historical documents and family histories – military records of the U.S. Colored Troops are currently being digitized - https://cfh.iaamuseum.org/records/
Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery - search thousands of "Information Wanted" advertisements taken out by former slaves in all states searching for family members lost by sale, flight, or enlistment – the collection currently includes newspapers from 1853 to 1911 - http://www.informationwanted.org/
Slave Voyages - *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* documents vessels along the Atlantic slave routes from 1514 to 1866; *Intra-American Slave Trade Database* documents vessels traveling between the Atlantic and Pacific ports ranging from the U.S. to Brazil; *African Names Database* gives names, ages, and possible origins of slaves liberated from captured slave ships between 1808 and 1862 - https://www.slavevoyages.org/

The Road to Civil Rights – WWII; The Alaska Highway – the story of the three African American Engineering Units who helped build the highway - http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/highwayhistory/road/s16.cfm

Alaska Cemetery Research

Anchorage Memorial Park Cemetery – originally called Cemetery Reserve – Click Master Burial List to search interments by last name - http://hhs.muni.org/MPCWebMap/

Alaska Military Research

Grand Army of the Republic Records Project – developing database - histories of posts, reports of officers and members if available, search by state - http://suvcw.org/garrecords/

Alaska Native American Research

Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center – student records, cemetery information, much related to one of the Sioux tribes - http://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/

NARA records of Native Americans - http://search.archives.gov/query.html?qt=Alaska+native+americans+&submit=GO&col=1arch&col=social&qc=1arch&qc=social

Native American Tribes and Languages of Alaska - http://www.native-languages.org/alaska.htm

Researching Your Aboriginal Ancestry at Library and Archives Canada –how to use the library to research your ancestor - https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/aboriginal-heritage/Pages/genealogy.aspx#e1

Newspaper Research

Alaska Newspapers Index, Alaska State Library – keyword search of numerous Fairbanks, Tanana, and Yukon newspapers - http://www.eed.state.ak.us/lam/newspapers.cfm.

Alaska Online Historical Newspapers – names, publication dates, and locations of online databases of Alaska newspapers - https://sites.google.com/site/onlinenewspapersite/Home/usa/ak

Information on these pages is compiled from information in:

- *FamilySearch.org* Wiki - *Family Tree* Magazine
- *Genealogy Gems from the Allen County Public Library; Dick Eastman Genealogy Newsletter*
- *Native American Tribes and Languages of Alaska* - http://www.native-languages.org/alaska.htm
- *Alaska Natives* - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alaska_Natives
- Family Tree Magazine