



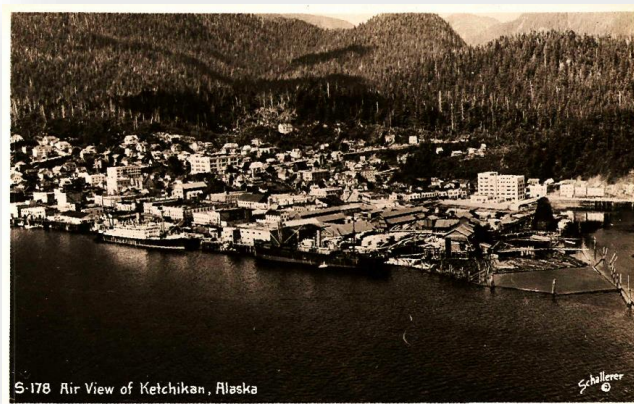
# Alaska Resources

## Family History Sources in the Last Frontier

### Alaska History

The land we know as Alaska has been home to numerous cultures for thousands of years. Major groups of native Alaskans include the Aleut, Alutiiq, Gwich'in, Haida, Tlingit, and Tsmshian.

Russia was the first European power to control Alaska. In 1728 Vitus Bering, a Danish explorer sailing under the Russian flag, discovered the strait that now bears his name. He made several expeditions through the region. In 1741, he and his expedition landed at present-day Kayak Island. The first permanent Russian settlement in Alaska was founded in 1784 on Kodiak Island.



Spain also explored Alaska, as it asserted its claim along the western coast of North America. Spain never had a large presence in Alaska, but did establish several settlements, including Valdez and Cordova.

Alaska's natural resources have been key to its development. In the earliest days, the fur trade was predominant; in 1799, the Russian-American Company gained exclusive rights to the Alaskan fur trade. Fishing was a prime industry, along with the associated canneries.

The collapse of the fur trade, along with mounting debts from the Crimean War, prompted Russia to negotiate the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867. U.S. Secretary of State William H. Seward championed the purchase. Though the final price was roughly 2 cents per acre – \$7.2 million total – the purchase was ridiculed in the press and was soon dubbed "Seward's Folly."

The Yukon Gold Rush (actually a series of discoveries) put Alaska in the spotlight in the late 1800s and spurred a wave of prospectors, all hoping to strike it rich. The discovery of oil in 1896 at Cook Inlet and in 1968 at Prudhoe Bay brought even more settlers and development.

Alaska has had a series of governments. Russia governed through the Russia-America Company from 1799-1861 and through the Russian Imperial Administration from 1861-1867. The U.S. War Department, and the Treasury Department Administration for Customs governed from 1867-1877. The Treasury Department Administration governed from 1877-1884. Alaska was a U.S. district from 1884-1912 and a territory from 1912-1959. It became the 49<sup>th</sup> state in 1959.

Alaska does not have counties. Instead, it has 19 boroughs plus one "unorganized borough." There are also six city-county governments (Anchorage, Haines, Juneau, Sitka, Wrangell and Yakutat).



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### Alaska Censuses

Although Alaskan villages were included in the 1880 U.S. census, those schedules have not survived.

Alaska is included in the 1900 through 1940 U.S. census.

There was a partial territorial census done in 1907. That schedule and some census substitutes, are included in:

- [Alaska, Compiled Census and Census Substitutes Index, 1870-1907](#)

In 1929, the Bureau of the Census took a special agricultural census in Alaska. This has been microfilmed and is available as National Archives microfilm publication M1871.

There are no state censuses for Alaska.

### Significant Dates (through 1968)

**1728** – Vitus Bering discovers the Bering Strait.

**1741** – Vitus Bering and a Russian expedition lands at present day Kayak Island.

**Late 1700s** – Russia gain control of the Alaska region.

**1778** – James Cook explores the coast of Alaska, discovers the Cook Inlet. British and Russians make contact.

**1784** – First permanent Russian settlement in Alaska on present-day Kodiak Island.

**1795** – Russian Orthodox Church established at Kodiak.

**1799** – Russian-American Company gains exclusive rights to Alaskan fur trade.

**1820** – Czar Alexander closes Alaskan waters to non-Russians.

**1821** – England and Russia reaches agreement on trade in Alaska.

**1824** – Treaty establishes southern border of "Russian America" at 54°40'.

**1849** – Gold and coal discovered on the Kenai Peninsula.

**1867** – United States purchases the 375 million acre Alaskan territory from Russia for \$7.2 million.

Purchase becomes known as "Seward's Folly" and "Seward's Icebox," in reference to U.S. Secretary of State William H. Seward who championed the purchase. Though the purchase price worked out to approximately two cents per acre, it was not popular with the public or the press.

**1872** – Gold discovered near Sitka.

**1880** – Gold discovered at Juneau.

**1882** – Salmon canneries open in central Alaska.

**1884** – District of Alaska is formed.

**1896** – Oil discovered at Cook Inlet.

<b>Population</b>	
<b>1880</b>	<b>33,426</b>
<b>1890</b>	<b>32,052</b>
<b>1900</b>	<b>63,592</b>
<b>1910</b>	<b>64,356</b>
<b>1920</b>	<b>55,036</b>
<b>1930</b>	<b>59,278</b>
<b>1940</b>	<b>72,524</b>
<b>1950</b>	<b>128,643</b>
<b>1960</b>	<b>226,167</b>
<b>1970</b>	<b>300,382</b>
<b>1980</b>	<b>401,851</b>
<b>1990</b>	<b>550,043</b>



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**1897-1900** – Klondike Gold Rush brings more than 100,000 prospectors to Alaska. The fields were near Dawson City. Skagway grows as a supply town.

**1898** – Homestead Act amended to include the District of Alaska; homesteaders allowed to claim 160 acres of public land. Construction begins on the White Pass and Yukon Railroad, connecting Skagway and the Yukon.

**1899** – Nome founded.

**1900** – Capital moves from Sitka to Juneau. White Pass and Yukon Railroad is completed.

**1902** – Fairbanks founded.

**1903** – Boundary established between District of Alaska and Canada.

**1904** – Construction begins on the Washington Alaska Military Cable and Telegraphy System, which would link Sitka, Valdez and Seattle.

**1906** – Fire destroys much of downtown Fairbanks.

**1911** – Fire destroys much of Douglas.

**1912** – Alaska becomes a U.S. territory.

**1915** – Anchorage founded as the headquarters of the Alaska Railroad.

**1925** – Diphtheria epidemic hits Nome. Dog sled teams carrying medicine cross the 674 miles between Nenana and Nome in just 5 days. This trek is commemorated every year in the Iditarod Sled Dog Race.

**1939** – U.S. begins building naval bases in Sitka, Kodiak, and Dutch Harbor to defend against the Japanese using an Alaskan route to reach the west coast of the United States.

**1942** – Japan invades Attu and Kiska islands.

**1943** – U.S. forces re-take the Aleutian Islands.

**1959** – Alaska becomes the 49th state.

**1964** – Massive earthquake destroys Valdez and heavily damages Seward and Anchorage.

**1968** – Oil is discovered at Prudhoe Bay on the North Slope.

### Alaska Vital Records

Civil birth, death, and marriage records began in 1913, although general compliance did not occur until the 1940s.

### Alaska Vital Records on Ancestry.com

- [Web: Alaska Find A Grave Index, 1841-2012](#)

### Other State Resources

- [Alaska GenWeb Project](#)
- [Alaska Historical Society](#)
- [Alaska State Archives](#)
- [Alaska State Library](#)
- [Anchorage Genealogical Society](#)
- [Fairbanks Genealogical Society](#)



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the Last Frontier

## Special Collections

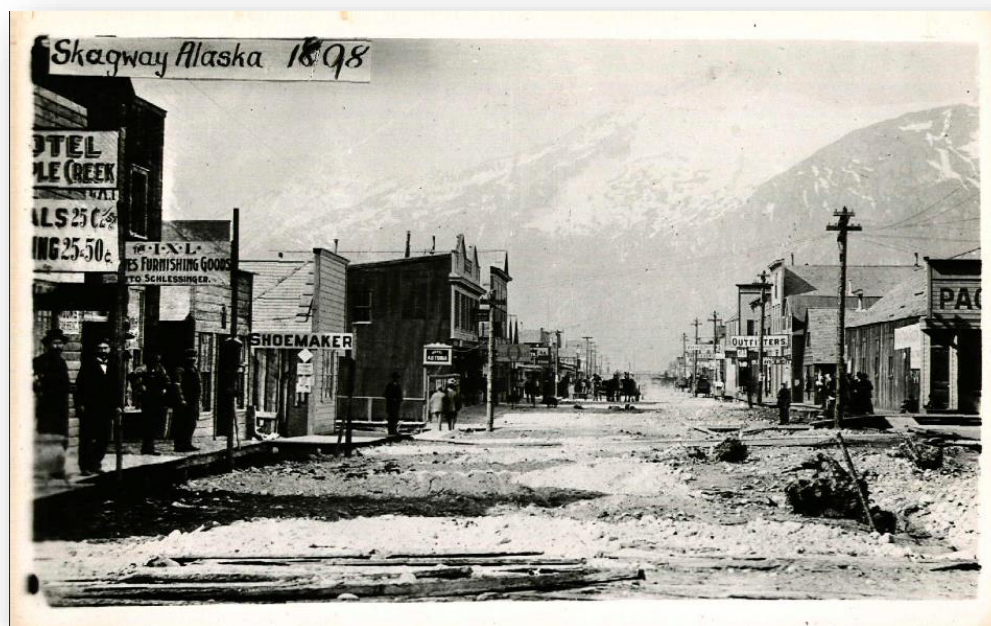
### Other Collections

- [Alaska Alien Arrivals, 1906-1956](#)
- [Alaska Newspapers & Publications](#)
- [Polk's 1923-24 Alaska-Yukon Gazetteer and Business Directory](#)

### Help and Advice

- [Alaska Family History Research](#)
- [Alaska Immigration](#)
- [Native Alaskans](#)

[View all Alaska collections on Ancestry.com](#)



"Skagway Alaska" from "U.S., Historical Postcards"