

ALASKA

HISTORY

Alaska Native nations, Russian fur traders, gold miners, soldiers and oil workers each helped build Alaska.



The First Peoples

People have lived in Alaska for more than 10,000 years. The Inupiat and Yupik lived along the northern and western coasts. They hunted seals, walrus and whales. Athabascan peoples lived in the forests of the Interior. The Aleut, or Unangax, lived on the Aleutian Islands. The Tlingit and Haida lived in the rainy southeast. They carved totem poles from cedar. The nations traded with each other and sometimes fought.



Russian America

In 1741, a Russian ship led by Vitus Bering reached Alaska. Russian fur traders followed, looking for sea otter furs to sell in China. The traders made Aleut men hunt the otters for them. In the 1760s, Aleut fighters attacked the traders and destroyed ships. The Russians struck back and won. In 1784, Russians built the first lasting **colony** on Kodiak Island. Russian priests built churches, and many Native people joined the Orthodox church.

The Alaska Purchase

In 1867, Russia sold Alaska to the United States. William Seward, the Secretary of State, made the deal. In 1880, Joe Juneau and Richard Harris found gold with help from a Tlingit chief. The town of Juneau grew where they found it. Canneries opened along the coast to pack salmon.



Gold Rush Days

In 1896, gold was found in the Klondike, in Canada next door. Thousands of **stampeder**s landed at Skagway in 1897 and 1898. They hauled their gear over steep passes. More gold turned up at Nome in 1899 and Fairbanks in 1902. Miners built towns, roads and river docks. Juneau became the capital in 1906. Congress made Alaska a **territory** in 1912. The Alaska Railroad was finished in 1923, and Anchorage began as its tent camp.

War and Statehood

In 1942, during World War II, Japan bombed Dutch Harbor and took the islands of Attu and Kiska. American soldiers won back Attu in a hard battle in 1943. Japan left Kiska soon after. The government moved Aleut families from their islands to camps in the southeast. Soldiers also built the Alaska Highway through Canada. Alaska became the 49th state on January 3, 1959. In 1964, a huge earthquake shook Anchorage.



Oil and Native Land

Oil was found at Prudhoe Bay in 1968. A pipeline would cross land that Native groups claimed. In 1971, Congress passed a law that gave Alaska Native groups about 44 million acres and almost one billion dollars. Native-owned **corporations** run the land and money. The pipeline was finished in 1977. Alaska has more than 200 tribes today, and Native people live all across the state.

ALASKA THROUGH TIME



PEOPLE TO KNOW

Alexander Baranov	Led Russian America from Sitka.
William Seward	Made the deal to buy Alaska.
Felix Pedro	Found the gold that started Fairbanks.
Elizabeth Peratrovich	Tlingit leader for equal rights.
Susan Butcher	Won the Iditarod sled dog race four times.

WORDS TO KNOW

colony	a town ruled by a faraway country
stampeder	a person who rushed to find gold
territory	land of the United States, not yet a state
corporation	a company owned by its members