



Walk through the temperate rain forest covering much of the park and see one of the finest collections of totem poles (right) in the Northwest.

TOTEM POLE—PATRICK J. ENDRES, © ALASKAPHOTOGRAPHICS; RAIN FOREST—NPS

The Russian Bishop's House also served as a seminary and school for Native children. (Right) Bald eagles and ravens thrive in the area.

RUSSIAN BISHOP'S HOUSE—BRIAN HETHERINGTON; EAGLE—DAVID GRIEBELING

Russian Orthodox missionaries built St. Michael's Cathedral in 1848. Orthodox icons fill the Russian Bishop's House chapel (left of cathedral).

CATHEDRAL, TOTEM PATH—PATRICK J. ENDRES, © ALASKAPHOTOGRAPHICS; CHAPEL—FRED HIRSCHMANN

The Tlingit living on Shee (now Baranof) Island called their village Shee At'iká, "people on the outside of Shee." Today we call it Sitka.

## When They Tell the Story of Sitka . . .

. . . they remember a land of plenty and the people drawn to its wealth. The forest shrouding the land, the rivers running through it, and the sea around it provided everything needed to sustain a vigorous human community. The Tlingit had thrived on the island they called Shee for countless generations before ambitious traders came from the west in search of new goods. Here the Tlingit and Russians met, fought, and then uneasily coexisted for a time. When the Russians departed after six decades, both groups had been changed by the encounter. The Tlingit preserved their traditions as the Americans who replaced the Russians wrought their own changes. In the 1960s, after decades of acculturation and population decline, the Tlingit began to reassert their culture. If you pay close attention to the landscape, artifacts, and artists of Sitka National Historical Park, you will hear the story of the cultures who lived, and still live, on this island.



Alaska was one of the last places in the Americas to be settled by Europeans. The Russian American Company, headquartered in Irkutsk, Siberia, took the lead. From the port of Okhotsk it expanded its fur-trading operations via the Aleutians to Alaska in the late 1700s.



Tlingit fishing canoe  
NPS / MERRILL COLLECTION



## The Tlingit People

For the Tlingit, Haida, and other groups, Southeast Alaska was a hospitable land where the warm Japanese Current moderated temperatures—and kept Sitka's natural harbor free of ice year-round. Food resources were so abundant that the Tlingit essentially harvested whatever they needed. A maritime people, they drew much of their food from the sea and the rivers flowing into it. Salmon, the nutritious staple of their diet, was available in staggering quantities during the spawning runs. The Tlingit also fished on the open sea, wrestling 5-foot-long halibut into their canoes; hunted sea mammals; and gathered shellfish and edible seaweed. They hunted land animals and supplemented their diet with berries, grasses, and roots.

Pink salmon crowd the Indian River during their spawning run. These runs peak in mid-August, but can extend from mid-July into October.

PATRICK J. ENDRES, © ALASKAPHOTOGRAPHICS



Tlingit girls at the Presbyterian mission school  
NPS / MERRILL COLLECTION  
Berry basket woven of spruce root  
NPS



Ceremonial dress for 1904 potlatch  
NPS / MERRILL COLLECTION



Russian Orthodox clergy and seminarians  
NPS / MERRILL COLLECTION



Russians with model of St. Michael's  
NPS / MERRILL COLLECTION

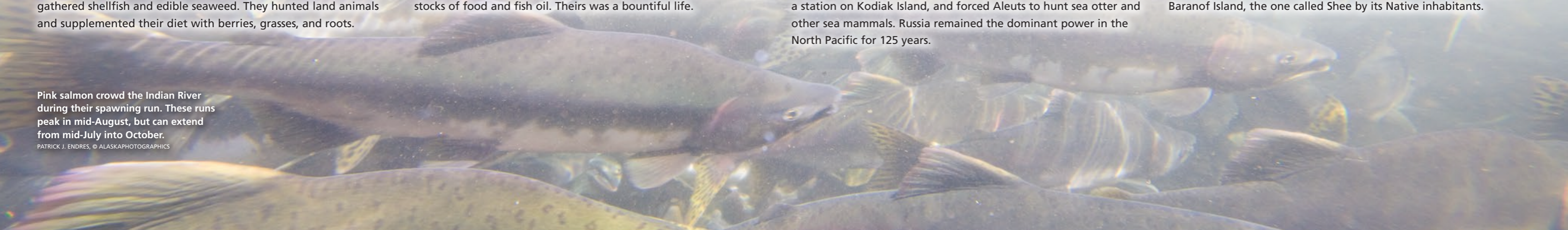


Russian Bishop's House  
NPS / MERRILL COLLECTION  
Sea otter  
© KEN SCHNEIDER

## Coming of the *Anooshi*

Vitus Bering's 1741 voyage of exploration for Russia brought the first Europeans to Alaska. The sea otter pelts they took home to show the Czar drew them back to stay, and the area was soon overrun with Russian *promyshlenniki*—free-ranging hunters and fur traders. The Russians (called *Anooshi* by the Tlingit) were likely the first European traders to encounter Alaska Natives. Through barter and coercion the *promyshlenniki* used the skills of the native Aleutians—the Aleuts—to gather the profitable pelts. By 1784 a Russian trading company employing *promyshlenniki* had established a station on Kodiak Island, and forced Aleuts to hunt sea otter and other sea mammals. Russia remained the dominant power in the North Pacific for 125 years.

Wanting to stabilize Russia's foothold in the New World, Czar Paul I in 1799 granted a monopoly to the Russian American Company, giving the company's manager Alexander Baranov the powers of a colonial governor. Baranov had already been pushing operations east and south from Kodiak Island to extend Russia's territorial claims and thwart growing competition in the fur trade from England and the United States. He also wanted to stop the British and American practice of trading guns to the Tlingit, a powerful group in Southeast Alaska. To those ends he planned to establish a fortified station on Baranof Island, the one called Shee by its Native inhabitants.



# Tlingit, Russians, and Americans

## Who Will Control These Lands?

The Russian American Company's desire to establish an outpost in Southeast Alaska inevitably led to conflict. Under the direction of company manager Alexander Baranov, a group of Russians, Alutiiq, and other Native Alaskans constructed the first non-Native settlement near Starrigavan Bay in 1799. Powerful leaders of the Kiks.ádi clan quickly grew to resent the Russian intrusion. In 1802, they attacked the Starrigavan settlement, Redoubt Saint Michael, and killed most of its Russian, Aleut, and Alutiiq inhabitants.

After the Tlingit drove the Russians from Sitka in 1802, Tlingit Shaman Stoonookw predicted the Russians would return. He urged the clans to build a new fortification strong enough to withstand cannon fire. The Kiks.ádi chose an area near present-day Indian River for their new fort (Shis'gi Noow) because it was close to food and fresh water, but out of range of ship artillery. When the Russian ships appeared at the mouth of Indian River (Kaasda Héen) on September 28, 1804, Kiks.ádi preparations were tested by a siege and multi-day bombardment.

Two fateful events worked against the Kiks.ádi—the unexpected arrival of the Russian frigate *Neva* and the loss of the canoe carrying their reserve ammunition and most seasoned warriors right before the battle. Russian forces boldly waded ashore in a frontal attack on Shis'gi Noow on October 1, 1804. They were driven back from the fort to the beach when Tlingit defenses held. Hidden behind floating logs, Kiks.ádi warriors counter-attacked. They were led by K'alyaan (Katlian) wielding the blacksmith's hammer he had won in 1802. Russian forces retreated to their ships and laid siege. After six days the Kiks.ádi withdrew from the fort and marched north to Peril Strait. There they set up a trade blockade, while continuing to hunt, fish, and gather wild food in and near Sitka Sound. Today, Sitka National Historical Park preserves and interprets the site of this battle.

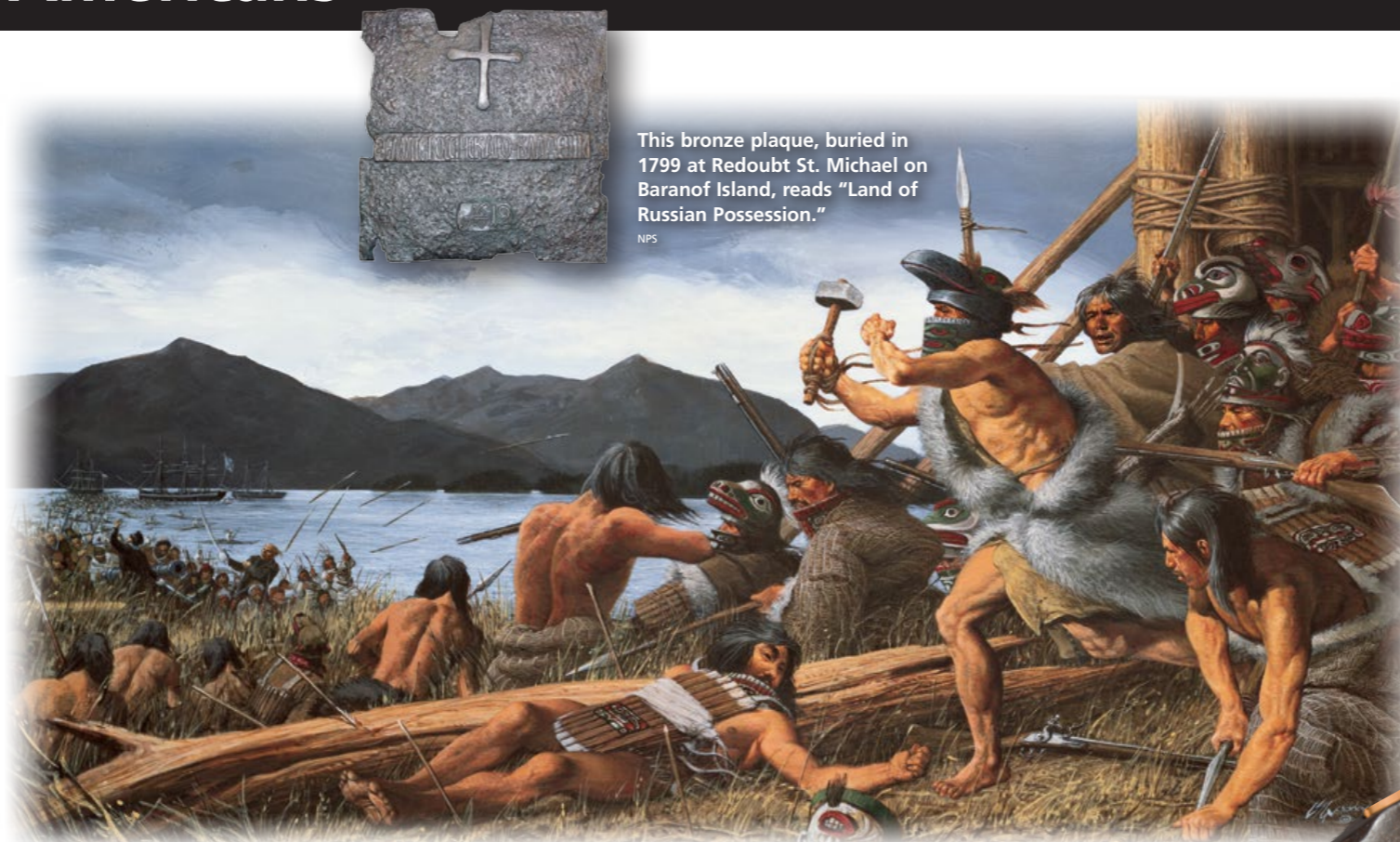


Fur trader Alexander Baranov (1746–1819) (middle) became head of the Russian American Company. He paved the way for Russian Orthodox missionaries like Ioann Veniaminov (1797–1879) (far left), who built schools for the Tlingit and created a Tlingit alphabet. In 1840 Veniaminov was named Bishop Innocent. Both men served the Russian Czar, symbolized by the double-headed eagle (left).

VENIAMINOV AND BARANOV—LIBRARY OF CONGRESS; DOUBLE-HEADED EAGLE—ALASKA STATE MUSEUM

This bronze plaque, buried in 1799 at Redoubt St. Michael on Baranof Island, reads "Land of Russian Possession."

NPS



NPS / LOUIS S. GLANZMAN

The Tlingit encountered by the Russians were a vital, complex society. The Tlingit were divided into moieties, the Eagle and Raven. (At right is the war chief K'alyaan's raven war helmet and hammer.) Clans, the basic social and economic units, controlled resources and trade routes. So abundant was food that large surpluses were created, allowing the Tlingit time to bring decorative design to every area of their lives (far right).

RAVEN WAR HELMET—© PETER METCALFE; K'ALYAAN'S HAMMER—KIKS.ADI CLAN / photo by NPS, TLINGIT GROUP—ALASKA STATE LIBRARY



## New Archangel and American Sitka

Baranov made Shee At'iká the Russian American Company's headquarters, renaming it New Archangel—though it was commonly called Sitka. On the rocky promontory now called Castle Hill he located his home and harbor fortifications. The Russians never became self-sufficient, depending on fresh food from the Tlingit who had stayed in the area. The company remained wary of them, maintaining a stockade between the communities. The Russian Orthodox mission, though, established a sympathetic relationship with the Tlingit.

By the mid-1800s the Russian government had grown disenchanted with its stake in America. When the United States offered to buy Alaska in 1867, Russia accepted and Sitka became a US territorial capital. In 1890 the US government created a federal reserve, Indian River Park, at the mouth of the river. The park was designated Sitka National Monument in 1910, then became part of the National Park System when that system was established in 1916. In 1972, with the addition of the Russian Bishop's House, it was re-designated Sitka National Historical Park.



## Who Lives Here?

The convergence of the Indian River, Pacific Ocean, and coastal rain forest creates a biologically rich habitat. This temperate rain forest ecosystem is dominated by towering Sitka spruce and Western hemlock. Brown bears, river otters, mink, and black-tailed deer frequent the area. The park's intertidal zone teems with marine invertebrates like sea stars, limpets, and barnacles. The area hosts 150 bird species, and pink salmon runs sometimes pack the Indian River with over tens of thousands of fish.



Raven

head to sea to feed on rich ocean resources. Mature salmon return to the river to spawn and die. Their carcasses provide food for bears, ravens, and eagles and add nutrients to the stream ecosystem, jump-starting a new generation of salmon.

Salmon are the ultimate recyclers: Aquatic insects, a critical food source for juvenile salmon, feed on organic nutrients in the Indian River. Salmon eventually

Sea otters (below) thrive in the waters around Sitka.

RAVEN AND OTTERS—PATRICK J. ENDRES, © ALASKAPHOTOGRAPHICS



## About Your Visit

The park visitor center houses a collection of Tlingit artifacts, many of them loaned to the National Park Service by Tlingit clans. "The Voices of Sitka" video connects the stories of Sitkans present and past. Native artists work in studios devoted to textile arts, carving, and metal work. Completed in 1843, the Russian Bishop's House was Bishop Innocent's home and the diocese administrative center.

The park visitor center is open daily, mid-May through September, 8 am to 5 pm. From October to mid-May hours vary.

The park trails are open daily mid-May through September, 6 am to 10 pm, and October to mid-May, 7 am to 8 pm. The Russian Bishop's House is open daily mid-May through September, 9 am to 5 pm. Ranger-led tours are offered every 30 minutes. From October to mid-May the house is open by appointment only. Call 907-747-0110 to schedule a tour.

**Accessibility** We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. The historical features of some locations at the park provide unique challenges to accessibility. The second floor of the Russian Bishop's House is accessed via stairs only. A video on the first floor describes the second floor features.

### More Information

Sitka National Historical Park  
103 Monastery St.  
Sitka, AK 99835  
907-747-0110  
www.nps.gov/sitk

Sitka National Historical Park is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks, visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).

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## Totem Trail

The Totem Trail is a 1-mile loop trail through temperate rain forest, where you will find a remarkable collection of totem poles carved by Tlingit and Haida artists. The poles have been part of the Sitka story since 1901, when a collection of poles donated by villages from southern Southeast Alaska were shown at national expositions in 1904 and 1905, then shipped to Sitka and erected in Indian River Park. Traditionally the poles were allowed to deteriorate naturally, and many of those you see today are replicas.

Woodcarving is a fundamental art form of Northwest American Indian cultures, and the totem pole is among their highest

achievements. These are public records, displays of identity and clan pride serving several functions: Crest poles (shown here) record the ancestry of a family; legend poles depict folklore or historical events; history poles recount a clan's story; and memorial poles commemorate an individual clan member.

The art of carving totem poles lives in Sitka: A few of the park's poles have been raised since 1976. Tribal organizations continue to carve poles that address themes like wellness and healing.

A village watchman tops the Yaadaas Crest corner pole.

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