Family Mosaics:
Reconnecting Family Histories and Genealogies of the Commander Island and Alaskan Indigenous people

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Commander Bay, Bering Island

St. Peter’s crew camping site and graves of Captain Vitus Bering and several of his crew members
Commander Islands 1827:
17 Russians
13 Creole men
35 Creole women
24 “Aleut” men
21 “Aleut” women

Burdokovsky,
Golodov,
Nevzorov,
Berezin,
Pankov,
Zaikov,
Aksenov,
Sinitsin,
Snegirev and others
Project objectives:

• increase knowledge about historic connections and family ties between the people of the Commander Islands and Indigenous communities of the Aleutian Islands

• to re-energize these connections

• and to create engaging and lasting resources and mechanisms for preserving, sharing, and expanding this important cultural knowledge.
Research: Smithsonian Institution and Library of Congress in Washington DC, archival collections in Alaska
Unalaska outreach, May 2023
Community outreach Anchorage, May 2023
EXHIBIT

FAMILY MOSAICS: FAR. CLOSE. RELATED.

About 110 miles east of Kamchatka and 200 miles west of Attu, the Commander Islands were put on the map by Russian exploration in the 18th century. The Russian-American Company established Unangan communities on Bering and Copper Island in the early 19th century just as they did on St. Paul and St. George in the Pribilof Islands.

Following the rise of Russia, Bering and copper islands remained under Russian protection until the United States took over Russian territories in the 1900s.

GEOGRAPHY

The 1867 SALE OF ALASKA

In 1867, Russia sold Alaska to the United States. Bering and Copper Islands, along with other Aleutian Islands, were transferred to the United States.

RUSSIA

United States

- Alaska
- Aleutians
- Commander Islands
- Pribilof Islands

- Nome
- Anchorage
- Sitka
- Juneau
- Kodiak
- Unalaska
- Dutch Harbor
- Wrangell
- St. George
- Attu
- Unalaska
- Adak
- Unalaska
- Shumagin Islands

First Russian explorers set foot on Bering Island in 1741. Vitus Bering's ship St. Paul wrecked on Bering Island at the end of his 1741 voyage to Alaska.

FIRST RUSSIANS

After several years of hardship, Russian fur hunters founded the town of VOC (Veslatskoye Otdelenie) on the Commander Islands in 1853. The Russian-American Company established settlements on the islands to prevent Russian fur hunters from being taken over by the British.

Northern fur seals hauled out on the Commander and Pribilof islands to breed and give birth. Various conservation practices were developed by the Russian-American Company to ensure the resource continued in good health on both groups of islands.

SEAL OTTERS AND FUR SEALS

For the first half of the 19th century, men hunted seal otters with spears thrown from canoes. Later, men hunted at night, using lamps and torches, and shooting them with guns. Hunting with nets became common beginning in the 1870s with the introduction of suitable rope and continued into the 20th century. After harvesting fur seals dominated the local economy, men supplemented their income by hunting seal otters.

Northern fur seals hauled out on the Commander and Pribilof islands to breed and give birth. Various conservation practices were developed by the Russian-American Company to ensure the resource continued in good health on both groups of islands.

After the rise of Russia, the Russian-American Company was established in 1815, based in St. Petersburg. The company was the exclusive trader with the Native Americans and established trading posts on the islands. The Russian-American Company's role was to collect furs, sell them to European buyers, and transport goods to the islands.

The company used a system of trading and barter with the Native Americans, who used the goods to obtain items they needed or wanted. This system allowed the company to gather furs and trade for goods that they could sell to European buyers.

The company also established trading posts and forts on the islands, which served as headquarters for the fur hunters and traders. These forts provided protection for the company's employees and allowed them to carry out their work more effectively.

The Russian-American Company continued to operate on the islands until the late 19th century, when the United States assumed control of the area. During this time, the company played a significant role in the fur trade and helped to establish the islands as a major source of furs for European markets.
Genealogical research
Golodof family tree: Bering Island/Unalaska
Reaching out to families:

www.aleutians.org/family
Thank you!