



Alaska History Day 2025

Topic Ideas for the theme “Rights and Responsibilities in History”

Questions? Contact alaskahistoryday@gmail.com

Alaska History Topics:

- Whaling History
 - Subsistence v. Commercial Whaling
- Aleut Revolt of 1763
- Alaska Revenue Cutter Service (1867-1915)
 - Duties/Impact on Communities
- First & Second Organic Acts (1884, 1912)
- Cordova Coal Party (1911)
- Founding of Alaska Native Brotherhood/Alaska Native Sisterhood (1912)
- Shoup Women’s Suffrage Bill (1913)
- Impact of Indian Citizenship Act (1924) in Alaska
- Matanuska Colony (1935)
 - *Topic Guide Prepared by Sheri Hamming, President, Palmer Historical Society*
- Aleut (Unangax) evacuation and relocation, Summer 1942
- Japanese American relocation and confinement, 1942-1945
- World War II and Alaska Territorial Guard (1942-1945)
 - Civil Rights Advocacy
- World War II and Aleutian Campaign
 - (in addition to the Unangax forced relocation)
- World War II and Alaska Highway
- Alaska Equal Rights Act (1945)
- Rampart Dam Controversy (1954-1960s)

- Alaska Statehood Committee (1950s)
- Alaska Constitutional Convention (1955-1956)
- Alaska Mental Health Enabling Act (1956)
- Alaska Statehood (1959)
- Barrow Duck In (Utqiagvik) (1961)
- Burning of Douglas Indian Village, (July 1962)
- Good Friday Earthquake (1964)
- Ted Stevens (1923-2010), (Appointed to US Senate, 1968):
 - Role and Impact in Alaska and federal politics
- Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (1971)
 - *Topic Guide in NHD 2025 Theme Book*
- Molly Hootch Case/ Tobeluk V. Lind (1976)
- Alaska Permanent Fund and Permanent Fund Dividend (1976 and 1980)
- Great Monument Trespass (1978)
- Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) (1980)
 - Topic Guide Prepared by Philip Wight
- Exxon Valdez Oil Spill (1989)
- NAGPRA's Implications for Indigenous Communities in Alaska (1990)
- Native American Languages Act (1990)
- Katie John V. US (2001)

Circumpolar/Arctic History Topics Relating to Alaska

- Formation of Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC)
- Friendship Flights with USSR - late 1980s
 - Implications for Indigenous communities on both sides of the Bering Strait
 - Topic Guide by David Ramseur
- The development and impact of the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line
- Industrialization of the circumpolar North
 - World War II
 - Lend-Lease
 - Weighing Sustainability v. defense v. economy
- Russian Alaska
 - Indigenous peoples and Orthodoxy
 - Cultural legacy and memory

Important Bills, Laws and Court Cases:

- 1st Organic Act (1884)
- Davis et al. V. Sitka School Board (1906)
- 2nd Organic Act (1912)
- Indian Citizenship Act (1924)
- Indian Reorganization Act in Alaska (1936)
- King-Havenner Bill (1938)
- Anti-Discrimination Act of 1945
- Voting Rights Act (1965) in Alaska
- Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) - (1971)
 - *Topic Guide in NHD 2025 Theme Book*
- Passage of Marine Mammal Protection Act (1972)
- Tobeluk vs. Lind / Molly Hootch Case (1976)
- Indian Child Welfare Act (1978)
- Frank Vs State (1979)
- Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) (1980)
 - Topic Guide Prepared by Philip Wight
- Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990)
- Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act (1996)
- Katie John case (2001)

Research Areas:

- Civil Rights in Alaska
- Colonization and Colonialism
- Environmental Rights & Responsibilities
- Civil Rights
- Resource Access Rights
- Education Rights & Responsibilities

Matanuska Colony Project 1935

Compiled by Sheri Hamming, Palmer Historical Society

At the heart of President Roosevelt's New Deal resettlement program was a growing support for getting back to America's agricultural roots. A "Back to the Land" movement resulted in over 100 resettlement communities around the United States including Alaska's 1935 Matanuska Colony Project. The 203 Matanuska Colonist families were selected from Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin relief roles. The climate, soil, and agricultural conditions of the Matanuska Valley were comparable to those of the northern Midwest states. Many people from that region were of Scandinavian descent with knowledge of dairy and truck farming, and an understanding of harsh weather conditions. Government officials determined this population would be best suited for the strenuous pioneer life in Alaska's Matanuska Valley.

Resources:

- Colony House Museum, 316 E. Elmwood Ave, Palmer, AK 99645, <http://www.palmerhistoricalsociety.org/colony-house-museum/>
- Palmer Historical Society, "The Matanuska Colony 1935," <http://www.palmerhistoricalsociety.org/online-projects/the-new-deal/>
- National Park Service, *Alaska's Matanuska Colony*, (United States of the Interior, National Park Service, through the Government Printing Office, 2020) <https://www.nps.gov/articles/alaska-s-matanuska-colony.htm>
- Evangeline Atwood, *We Shall Be Remembered*, (Alaska Methodist University Press, 1966)
- Heather Lehe, *Colony Kids, Adventures Of The First Years In Alaska* (Publication Consultants, 2001)
- Orlando W. Miller, *The Frontier in Alaska and the Matanuska Colony*, (Yale University Press, 1975)
- *Knik, Matanuska, Susitna — A Visual History of the Valleys, Matanuska - Susitna Borough* (1985, 1994) (Pages 160 – 235)
First Printing December 1985 - Bentwood Press, Sutton, Alaska
Second Printing December 1994 - L&B Color Printing , Wasilla, Alaska
- *Alaska Far Away — The New Deal Pioneers of the Matanuska Colony* (Juster Hill Productions San Francisco, 2008)
Documentary
- *Where the River Matanuska Flows — Stories from Alaska Pioneers* (by Juster Hill Productions San Francisco, 2005)
Film

The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA)

Compiled by Philip Wight

The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980 has been called the “greatest land preservation act in U.S. history” (Sierra Magazine, 1991). It designated more than a hundred million acres—larger than California—of Alaskan lands as protected conservation areas. The passage of the legislation represented a culmination of decades public concern over America’s wildest places, growing pressures to develop Alaska’s natural resources, and the need to balance subsistence and conservation for Alaska’s rural and Indigenous residents.

Even with extensive political compromises made in order to facilitate its passage, ANILCA proved a historic piece of legislation. It expanded the National Park System by 44 million acres, including new national parks at Gates of the Arctic, Glacier Bay, and Wrangell-St. Elias. It added 36 million acres to the National Wildlife Refuge system, including more than doubling the size of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. ANILCA also designated 51 million acres within these parks and refuges as “wilderness”—the highest federal land protection status—and more than doubled wilderness areas in the United States. It also protected segments of 25 Alaskan Rivers. Many historians regard the passage of ANILCA as the zenith of the American Environmental Movement and one of the most consequential acts in Alaskan history.

Primary Sources:

- Text of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (December 2, 1980), Public Law, 96-487, <https://www.nps.gov/locations/alaska/upload/nilca-electronic-version.pdf>
- Statewide Library Electronic Doorway (SLED) Compilation of ANILCA Primary Sources: <https://lam.alaska.gov/c.php?g=1283941&p=9425156>

Secondary Sources:

- G. Frank Williss, "[Do Things Right the First Time": Administrative History of the National Park Service and the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980](#)", September 1985
- Daniel Nelson, *Northern Landscapes: The Struggle for Wilderness Alaska* (New York: Routledge, 2004)
- Frank Norris, *Alaska Subsistence: A National Park Service Management History* (Anchorage AK: Dept of the Interior, 2002)

Melting the “Ice Curtain” Between Alaska and Russia Native Peoples (1980-present)

Compiled by David Ramseur

For centuries, the indigenous peoples of the Bering Strait lived in relative harmony and crossed the 55 miles between Alaska and Russia to subsist on marine mammals and share common cultures and Native languages. In 1938, the governments of Soviet Russia and the United States recognized the historic visitation between Native peoples of their countries and established a process for interactions. However, 10 years later, Cold War tensions cast a dark shadow on Russia-Alaska relations. In 1948, both countries agreed to ban all contact across the Strait, separating Native families.

Nearly 40 years later, US President Ronald Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev endorsed the idea of renewed educational, scientific and cultural exchanges across the Bering Strait. This eventually led to a new process of “visa-free” travel for Native peoples of the region who were permitted to visit each other without the requirement of a visa from the two national governments. Between 1993-2015, nearly 4,800 Russia and Alaska Native people visited each other under the visa-free program, helping to improve relations between the two countries.

Primary Sources

- Bering Straits Regional Commission, Agreement between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Signed Sept. 23, 1989 at Jackson Hole, Wyoming, by US Secretary of State James Baker III and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze. [Bering Strait Visa-Free Travel Program - United States Department of State](#)
- Text of the visa-free agreement: [UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS—UNITED STATES: AGREEMENT CONCERNING MUTUAL VISITS BY INHABITANTS OF THE BERING STRAITS REGION on JSTOR](#)
- “The Baker- Shevardnadze meeting, Yes on Start, for Now,” *The New York Times*, September 27, 1989.

Secondary Sources

- David Ramseur, *Melting the Ice Curtain: The Extraordinary Story of Citizen Diplomacy on the Russia-Alaska Frontier* (University of Alaska Press 2017.)
- “Russians Visit Savoonga to Celebrate Shared Ancestry,” *Nome Nugget*, July 8, 2016.