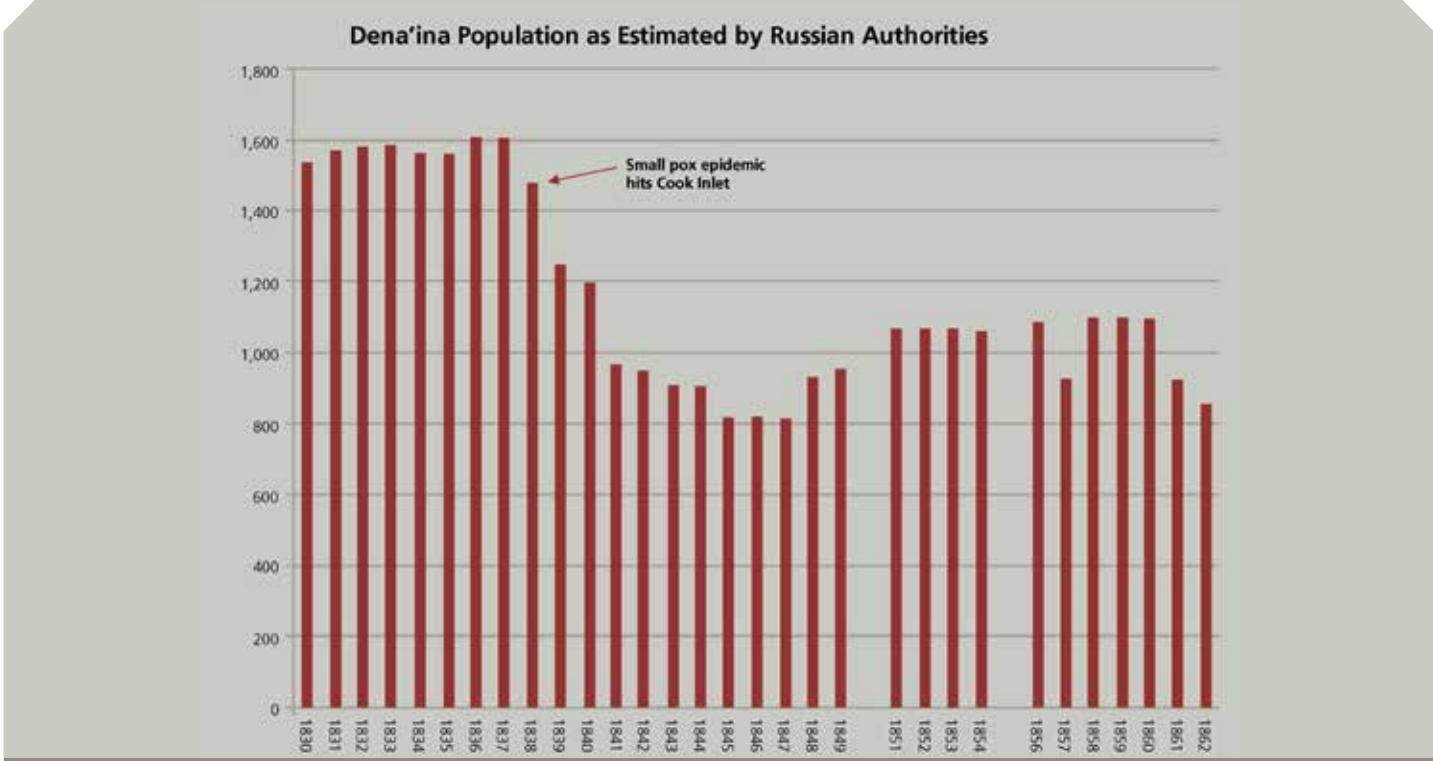


# Russian America 1799-1867



## 1838 – 1840. SMALLPOX EPIDEMIC KILLS HALF THE DENA'INA POPULATION

By 1838, a smallpox epidemic that had first appeared in Sitka in 1836, reaches Dena'ina country, claiming at least half the Dena'ina population. Attempts by shamans, the

traditional Dena'ina healers, to combat the disease fail, opening the Dena'ina to the missionizing efforts of Russian Orthodoxy.

Dena'ina population chart from 1830 to 1862. Courtesy of James A. Fall

Russian America **1799-1867**

1799

1845

1867

YOU  
ARE HERE



**1845. A RUSSIAN ORTHODOX MISSION IS  
FOUNDED AT KENAI**

From the first Russian Orthodox mission in the Dena'ina homeland at Kenai, founded by Hegumen Nikolai in 1845, priests, assisted by Alaska Native guides, song leaders, and lay

readers, journey to most Dena'ina villages over a one or two-year cycle. Gradually, most Dena'ina become adherents of Orthodox Christianity.

The Chapel of Saint Nicholas was built on the site of the first Kenai Church and covers the grave of Abbot Nikolai, the first missionary in the Kenai area, early 20th century. Anchorage Museum, 1974.004.008

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**1800 – 1895. DENA'INA ACT AS MIDDLE MEN IN THE FUR TRADE**

Using well established trade routes and trading partnerships, Dena'ina leaders (*qeshqa*) bring European goods such as tobacco, tea, matches, beads, and cloth to more inland Athabascan communities, exchanging them for furs, which they

trade for a profit at Cook Inlet posts. As Shem Pete explained in reference to the renowned Alexander Creek chief Diqelas Tukda, "*Yets' qeshqa hghila*" (from this, he became a rich man).

Three Dena'ina men with one holding a rifle obtained in trade, Kasilof River, 1890. Photo courtesy of University of Alaska Fairbanks, Wetherbee collection 1959-866-31