

IVAN VENIAMINOV
St. Innocent, Apostle to America
1797-1879



Anchorage Museum of History & Art. Library & Archives.

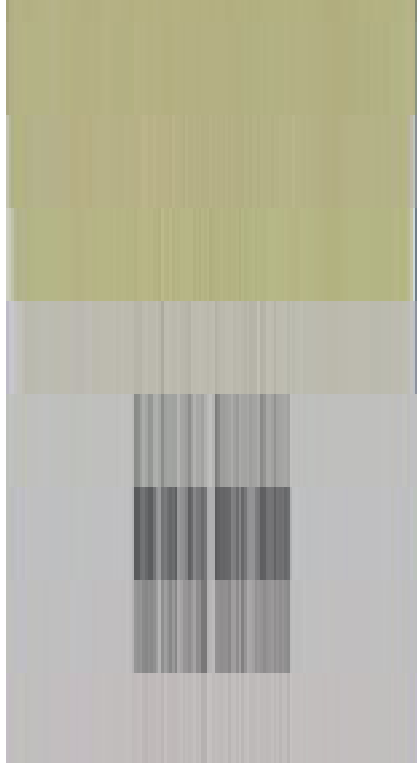
After many years of ministry in Alaska, Veniaminov was elevated to Metropolitan of Moscow, the highest office in the Russian Orthodox Church. Anchorage Museum of History and Art, Library and Archives.

Collection Name:	AMRC. General Photograph File
Identifier:	AMRC-b01-32-1
Title:	John (Ioann) Veniaminov.
Description:	Formal portrait of John Veniaminov, also known as Ivan Veniaminov and St. Innocent. n.d. Original photograph size: 7" x 5".



The Russian Bishop's House in Sitka was built by the Russian-American Company in 1842 and served as the home, office, and private chapel for Bishop Veniaminov. Anchorage Museum of History and Art, Library and Archives.

Collection Name:	AMRC. Ickes Collection
Identifier:	AMRC-b75-175-588
Title:	Sitka. Russian mission. Bishop's residence, office & chapel. Built by R[ussian] A[merican] Company for Bishop Veniaminov, 1842.
Description:	<p>Title taken from label on matting. View of building originally built as Russian bishop's residence, office, and chapel, which later became part of Sitka National Historical Park. Sign in yard reads: "Russian mission, 1842." Original label, crossed out, reads: "Sitka. Sheldon Jackson Presbyterian Boarding School for Indians. 1938." From verso: "Russian mission, constructed by Russian American Company in 1842 as a residence, office and private chapel for Bishop Ivan Veniaminov; also used as an ecclesiastical school until 1917, after which the ground floor was rented out to private individuals, except for one large room retained for church use. The upper floor was used by Orthodox bishops until 1969. The building is now a part of Sitka National Historical Park. There is no evidence that it was ever used by the Presbyterians, although they did use the Russian hospital next door, a similar structure which burned in the 1880s. R.L. Shalkop, Museum Manager, 12/76." Photographer's number 8363. 1938. Photographer: Ray B. Dame. Original photograph size: 8 1/8" x 10".</p>
Creator:	Dame, Ray B.



Veniaminov was canonized as St. Innocent, Enlightener and Apostle to America, in 1977. Alaska State Library.

Collection Name:	Alaska State Library Portrait File. Photographs. ASL.
Identifier:	ASL-Veniaminov-Ivan-3
Title:	Saint Innocent, Enlightener and Apostle of America.
Description:	Title taken from image. Icon depicting St. Innocent, or Ivan Veniaminov.

More about Ivan Veniaminov:

In the Russian Alaska of the early 1800s, the Native people and their cultures were suffering at the hands of foreign fur traders and hunters. Since the arrival of the *promyshlenniki*, many Natives had been abused or killed, either by force or disease, while a new culture, religion, and language was thrust upon them. Many Russian hunters and traders, and even some missionaries viewed Alaska's Natives as "bloodthirsty," "irrational," or "savage." However, one man stood out among them—a Russian Orthodox priest named Ivan Veniaminov, who found the Native Alaskans honest and hardworking, and offered friendship, tolerance, and consideration toward all around him, regardless of race or color. Veniaminov's zeal for his work, respect for the people, and abilities as a

scholar, linguist, and administrator left a positive mark on some of Alaska's darkest history.

Ivan Veniaminov was born on August 26, 1797, in the village of Anginskoe, in the Irkutsk province of Russia. His father, who died when Ivan was six, was a church server. The boy grew into a sturdily built man, a muscular six feet, three inches tall. Veniaminov entered the Irkutsk Theological Seminary in 1807, where he studied mechanics and became a skilled clockmaker. He married Catherine Sharina in 1817 and soon was ordained Deacon of the Church of the Annunciation. After completing his seminary studies in 1818, Veniaminov became a teacher at the parish. Three years later, he was ordained Priest to serve in the Church of the Annunciation.

Meanwhile, the Russian government had encouraged the church to send missionaries to the American colony to convert its aboriginal people. And as early as 1805 an employee of the Russian-American Company, Nikolai Resanov, had created a dictionary incorporating six Native Alaskan languages, a useful tool for traders in a foreign land. While the churchmen met some success in their mission, by the early 1820s, many of the priests and monks were growing old and replacements were needed. Veniaminov was called to serve in Unalaska, an island on the Aleutian chain, and in 1823, he sailed east with his wife, mother, brother and infant son, Innocent.

The Veniaminov family first arrived in the Russian America capital of New Archangel on October 20 with plans to stay through the winter and sail to Unalaska in the spring. The priest had three goals for his ministry to the Aleuts: to visit all of his parishioners, to establish a building where they could gather to hear the Word of God and, finally, to become fluent in the Aleut language. To prepare for his work in Unalaska, Veniaminov devoted himself to learning the language and customs of the Aleut people, relying on Aleuts whom the Russian-American Company had transplanted to New Archangel. During his winter there, Veniaminov learned more than two hundred Aleut words by intently listening and observing the pronunciation and intonation of the speakers.

Veniaminov and his family landed on the treeless island of Unalaska on July 29, 1824. Immediately he was impressed by the Aleuts' incredible ability to survive without the use of wood from trees. The Native people would compensate by building their boats and houses out of driftwood, trunks from the rose willow and skins and furs of the fur-bearing mammals that the Russians were now overhunting. Veniaminov later wrote: "Nature failed to [give the Aleuts] the material necessary for boats, that is wood, but . . . in compensation, she gave them greater ingenuity for the perfection of a special new kind of [boat]." He also would note that they were devout, intelligent and industrious, a far cry from view held by many traders.

Veniaminov taught the people carpentry, stone-masonry, and brick-making, preparing them to build a church and a school with their new trades. He learned the Aleut language and in turn created the first written alphabet. Assisted by an Aleut chief named Ivan Pan'kov, the priest published the first book written in an Alaskan Native language, an Aleut catechism. He also translated portions of the Bible into Aleut, and later perfected six Native dialects.

For ten years Veniaminov traveled in his canoe between Unalaska, Fox Island, and the Pribilof Islands as he taught and practiced the tenets of his faith while respecting the traditional ways of the Alaskans. Many Natives had converted prior to his arrival; however, to the chagrin of Veniaminov's predecessors, the people had continued to practice certain customs that the church viewed as pagan. Unlike other missionaries, Veniaminov used encouragement rather than condemnation to help his parishioners grow in their newfound faith.

In 1834, the Russian Orthodox church transferred Veniaminov to New Archangel, later known as Sitka, where he next devoted himself to learning the language and culture of the Tlingit people. He was eager to learn quickly so he could minister as well as teach the same trades he had taught the Aleuts. In time, Veniaminov and his parishioners built an architectural beauty: St. Michael the Archangel Cathedral. The spacious and splendidly decorated wooden structure towered over Sitka until it was destroyed by fire

in January 1966. In its place stands another St. Michael's, a reconstruction of the original design by Veniaminov. While in New Archangel, the priest also used his clock-making skills to design and build a clock for the cathedral tower and later built a residence, school, and private chapel that is today known as the Russian Bishop's House.

In 1838, Veniaminov traveled back to Russia to report on the activities of his newly founded church. While he was away, he received word that his wife had died, and he immediately requested a return to Sitka. His request was denied; instead, he was asked to take vows as a monk. Several of his adult children were back in New Archangel, and the priest doubted he could be as effective as a monk. After several days of prayer, he ultimately decided to take the calling offered to him. In 1840, Veniaminov was ordained Bishop and took the name Innokentii, or Innocent. His See was located in New Archangel, where he returned in 1841. Over the next nine years, Bishop Innocent's diocese grew larger, as well as his prominence within the church. By 1865, Bishop Innocent had returned to Russia, where he was ordained Archbishop and appointed a member of the Holy Governing Synod of the Church.

Archbishop Innocent showed no prejudice or preference to any member of his flock, whether Alaska Native or Russian Orthodox priests. He saw them simply as people in need. In 1867, he was elevated to Metropolitan of Moscow, the highest office in the church, and used his outstanding literary skills to revise many of the church texts that had contained errors. He also worked to improve the meager living conditions of retired priests by raising funds for a retirement home.

Metropolitan Innocent died on March 31, 1879, at the age of eighty-two. At his funeral sermon on April 5, Bishop Ambrose summarized the great man's life: "The make-up of Metropolitan Innocent's spiritual personality transcended the conditions and terms of life in our society: his heart was pure, his intentions always good; neither pride nor conceit could master him. He had no use for seeking praise from people, no reason or object for pretense from others. He appeared outwardly exactly where he was within—a direct, and honest, and sincere, and loving, and well-wishing pastor . . . "

Innocent was recognized for his great deeds and humanitarian nature on October 6, 1977, when the Holy Synod of the Church of Russia canonized him Saint Innocent of Alaska. These words are inscribed over his simple tomb: “May the Lord God remember your episcopacy in his kingdom, now and forever, and unto ages of ages. Through the prayers of Bp. Innocent, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen.”

LINKS:

Christian History Institute:

<http://chi.gospelcom.net/DAILYF/2001/01/daily-01-25-2001.shtml>

Holy Protection Russian Orthodox Church:

www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/saints/innocent_irkutsk.htm

Library of Congress, The Russian Church and Native Alaskan Cultures:

www.loc.gov/exhibits/russian/russch8.html

Restoration of the Russian Bishop’s House, Sitka:

<http://uaf-db.uaf.edu/jukebox/Sitka/program/htm/rbh.htm>

Original letters of Saint Innokentii [Ivan Veniaminov], 1835-1918:

<http://vilda.alaska.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/cdmg22&CISOPTR=2851>

Alaskan Orthodox Texts in Aleut, Yup’ik, Alutiiq, and Tlingit:

<http://www.asna.ca/alaska/>

Visit the library for more information:

Alaska’s libraries include audio, visual, and written material about Ivan Veniaminov and the early history of Russian America. Visit your local library or go online to see what’s available in holdings all over the state. Take these simple steps:

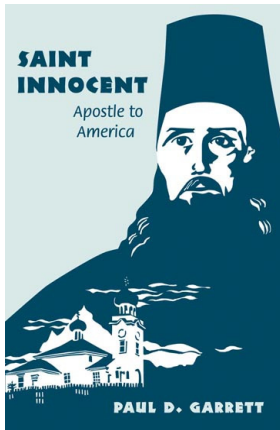
1. Access **SLED** (State Library Electronic Doorway) at <http://sled.alaska.edu/library.html>
2. Click on the listing for **ALNCat** (the Alaska Library Network Catalog) to view the Basic Search window.

Go to the Keyword field, and type in **VENIAMINOV** or **RUSSIAN ALASKA**.

More Reading:

Black, Lydia. *A Good and Faithful Servant: The Year of Saint Innocent—An Exhibit Commemorating the Bicentennial of the Birth of Ioann Veniaminov, 1797-1997*.

Fairbanks: University of Alaska Fairbanks, Alaska State Veniaminov Bicentennial Committee.



Garrett, Paul D. *Saint Innocent: Apostle to America*. Crestwood, N.J.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979.

Innokentii, Saint, Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolmna. Translated by S. A. Mousalimas and Jerome Kisslinger. *Journals of the Priest Ioann Veniaminov in Alaska, 1823 to 1836*. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1993.

Innokentii, Saint, Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolmna. Translated by Richard A. Pierce. *Notes on the Islands of Unalashka District*. Fairbanks: Elmer E. Rasmuson Library Translation Program, University of Alaska; Kingston, Ont., Canada: Limestone Press, 1984.

Oleksa, Michael. *Alaskan Missionary Spirituality*. Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1987.

Shenitz, Helen A. "Father Veniaminov, the Enlightener of Alaska." *American Slavic and East European Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Feb., 1959), pp. 75-80.

Veniaminov, Ivan; Lydia T. Black and R.H. Geoghegan (trans.) *Notes on the Islands of the Unalashka District*. Alaska History Series, No. 27, 1984.

AUDIO:

Audio, *The Engines of Our Ingenuity*, University of Houston:

www.uh.edu/engines/epi668.htm

VIDEO:

Sackett, Schuyler. *Russian Orthodox Alaska*. Videocassette (46 min.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Goldhil Video.