

MARY ANTISARLOOK ANDREWUK

"Sinrock Mary"

1870–1948

<http://www.award-graphics.com/newell/eskimo/index.html>



Mary Antisarlook as she appeared in the late 1800s.



Archives, University of Alaska, Fairbanks

Like many Inupiaq women of her time, reindeer herder Sinrock Mary wore traditional facial tattoos of parallel lines on her chin. Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Collection Name: Lomen Family Papers, 1850-1969
Identifier: UAF-1972-71-2279
Title: Sinrock Mary
Description: Caption provided by cataloger. Photograph of Sinrock Mary at Klikitarik.

Collection Name: AMRC. Ickes Collection
Identifier: AMRC-b75-175-158
Title: Sinrock Mary. Klikiktarek [sic], Alaska.
Description: Title taken from label on matting. Reindeer herder Mary Antisarlook Andrewuk (known as Sinrock Mary) sits next to corral fence in Klikitarik, Alaska, with reindeer carcass/hide hanging on fence in background. July 1938. Photographer: Ray B. Dame. Original photograph size: 10" x 8 1/8".
Creator: Dame, Ray B.

Collection Name: Lomen Family Papers, 1850-1969
Identifier: UAF-1972-71-2278
Title: At the Klikiktarek Corral
Description: Title from verso.

Reindeer Committee with Esther Oliver, Sinrock Mary, Mrs. Willie Aconran with children, Clyde and Pauline, Klikiktarek Corral.



Anchorage Museum of History & Art. Library & Archives.

Collection Name: AMRC. Ickes Collection
Identifier: AMRC-b75-175-161
Title: Reindeer Committee with Esther Oliver, Sinrock Mary, Mrs. Willie Aconran with children, Clyde and Pauline, Kliktarek [sic] corral.
Description: Title taken from label on matting. Reindeer Committee members with women and children at reindeer corral in Klikitarik, Alaska, with men peering through fence in background. Pictured left to right are: Esther Oliver, C.E. Rachford, Frank Reeds, reindeer herder Sinrock Mary (Mary Antisarlook Andrewuk), I.D. Wilson, Mrs. Willie Aconran with Clyde and Pauline Aconran. Photographer's number 7985. July 1938. Photographer: Ray B. Dame. Original photograph size: 8 1/8" x 9 7/8".
Creator: Dame, Ray B.

Collection Name: AMRC. Ickes Collection
Identifier: AMRC-b75-175-160
Title: Sinrock Mary and Esther Oliver. Klikiktarek [sic], Alaska.
Description: Title taken from label on matting. Reindeer herder Mary Antisarlook Andrewuk (known as Sinrock Mary) and Esther Oliver sitting next to corral fence at Klikitarik, Alaska, with reindeer hides hanging on fence in background. Photographer's number 7984. July 1938. Photographer: Ray B. Dame. Original photograph size: 10" x 8 1/8".
Creator: Dame, Ray B.



Anchorage Museum of History & Art. Library & Archives.

Collection Name: O. D. Goetze Collection
Identifier: AMRC-b01-41-222
Title: Herd of reindeer of N[orth]w[est] Alaska.
Description: Title taken from front. Herd of reindeer near Nome, Alaska. Photographer's number 1030. n.d. Photographer: O. D. Goetze.
Creator: Goetze, O. D. (Otto Daniel)

More about Mary Antisarlook:

Mary Antisarlook was given the name Changunak in 1870, when she was born to an Inupiaq mother and Russian father, a trader on the Seward Peninsula. But by the early 1900s, she became known as Sinrock Mary, Queen of Reindeer, a nickname she would carry for the rest of her life.

Changunak grew up in St. Michael at the mouth of the Yukon River, where the Inupiaq people saw much interaction with foreigners: whalers, missionaries, gold miners, traders, Russian and English speakers alike. She was fluent in those languages as well as in her Native language. In St. Michael, Mary married an Inupiaq man, Charlie Antisarlook, in 1889 and the couple moved to Cape Nome.

As a young woman, Mary served as a translator on the U.S. Revenue Cutter *Bear*, with Captain Michael A. Healy at the helm, when the vessel was used to transport reindeer from Siberia to Alaska. Healy and others believed the imported animals would thrive in Alaska, providing meat and income for the Native people. Government officials established reindeer stations at various locations, and although the first dozen imported reindeer did not survive, those from subsequent trips did and their numbers grew. Following an apprenticeship program, Charley Antisarlook received a few animals of his own and managed his herd at a place called Sinrock. He and Mary adopted several children and worked the reindeer herd together.

A reference to Sinrock Mary appeared in a January 1894 letter written by Ellen Kittredge Lopp, the wife of teacher and reindeer station manager Tom Lopp. She described a quiet Sunday in January when her husband and ten herders had gone to move the herd. While they were absent, several households gathered into one, with one man, four boys, women and children together for the remainder of the winter—with the exception of one woman. “The woman from the other house [Mary Antisarlook] was going to come,” wrote Ellen Lopp, “as her husband has gone herding, but her husband was afraid she would get into trouble with some of the other women. She is half Russian, talks English, and is too much like an American.” Five months later, on May 2, Mary served as Ellen’s midwife when she delivered a baby boy named Dwight. Ellen wrote her mother about the birth. “I let the woman I had planned to have with me go fishing at about nine o’clock because I wasn’t sure enough she would be needed to keep her. He

was born at one. The woman I did have, Mary Antisarlook, did better, for she knows more of American ways. She was troubled because I didn't put on a tight belt and let her help me by pressing with her hands as the Eskimos do." (A collection of Ellen Lopp's letters from Cape Prince of Wales was published in 2001 as *Ice Window: Letters from a Bering Strait Village: 1892-1902*.)

In the winter of 1897-98, when eight whaling ships were trapped in the sea ice near Point Barrow, the Antisarlooks were part of a mission to deliver food to the starving crew members. The "Overland Relief Expedition" was organized by Lt. David H. Jarvis, who contracted with Mary and Charley for their animals, promising that the government would replace their number plus extra to account for the fawns that would have been born that spring. Charley accompanied the men who drove the reindeer north to Barrow.

In 1900, the couple's herd had grown to five hundred head when Charley succumbed to the measles epidemic. As a woman and a Native, either of which would disqualify Mary from owning property, she had to fight to keep her half of the herd. A tenacious person, Mary was successful in her battle and held her assets, which eventually increased into the largest herd in the North. Eventually she became one of the richest women in Alaska.

With the discovery of gold on the beaches of Nome, the area was inundated with miners as thousands poured into the region. Sinrock Mary saw the effect of disease and unlawful activity on her people. And while she welcomed the miners' business and the friendship of some, Mary constantly had to protect her herd from those who wanted the animals to haul loads or to take them for food.

A savvy businesswoman, Sinrock Mary sold meat to local businesses and the Army station, and made her own fortune during Nome's gold rush. In 1901, she moved her herd to Unalakleet, where she married again. Her second husband, Andrew Andrewuk, was an Inupiaq, but unlike her first husband, he was not interested in participating in the reindeer-herding business. Nonetheless, Mary trained some of her children and many other Inupiat men as reindeer herders.

This key figure in the history of Alaska remains a hero to many, remembered for her tenacity, generosity, and friendship. She died in 1948.

LINKS:

The Reindeer Queen: Once the Richest Woman in Alaska—The True Story of Sinrock Mary. This documentary of Sinrock Mary's life by filmmaker Maria Brooks is available through Documentary Educational Resources. See

<http://www.der.org/films/reindeer-queen.html>

or view it online at Google video:

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=8365705902287396976>

About Sinrock Mary, by Jodi Velez-Newell, Mary's great-great-granddaughter:

www.award-graphics.com/newell/eskimo

Alaska History and Cultural Studies:

www.akhistorycourse.org/articles/article.php?artID=182

Visit the library for more information:

Alaska's libraries include audio, visual, and written material about Sinrock Mary, Alaska reindeer herding, and the Nome gold rush. 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 **SINROCK MARY, ALASKA REINDEER**, or **NOME GOLD**.

More Reading:

Anchorage School District. *Natives in Alaska's History*. Anchorage, AK, 2004.

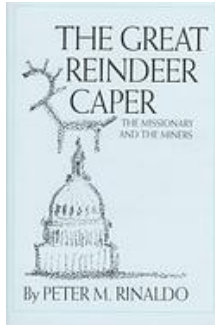
Murphy, Claire R. and Jane Haigh. *Gold Rush Women*. Anchorage: Alaska Northwest Books, 1997.

Jackson, Sheldon. *Report on the Introduction of Domestic Reindeer into Alaska*. Serial publication. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1893-1898.

Ray, Dorothy Jean. *The Eskimos of Bering Strait, 1650-1898*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975.

Ray, Dorothy J. "Sinrock Mary: From Eskimo Wife to Reindeer Queen." *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 75 (1984): 98-107.

Smith, Kathleen Lopp, Verbeck Smith, Ellen Louise Kittredge Lopp, and William Thomas Lopp. *Ice Window: Letters from a Bering Strait Village, 1892-1902*. Fairbanks, Alaska: University of Alaska Press, 2001.



Rinaldo, Peter M. *The Great Reindeer Caper: The Missionary and the Miners*. Briarcliff Manor, N.Y.: DorPete Press, 1997.

VIDEO:

Brooks, Maria. *The Reindeer Queen: The Story of Sinrock Mary*. VHS. Anchorage, Alaska: KAKM, 1991.

Brooks, Maria, et. al. *The Odyssey of Captain Healy*. VHS. Waterfront Soundings Productions, 1999.