



Gardening in Colonial Russian America

Archaeological and Ethnohistorical Perspectives from the Aleut Region, Alaska

Douglas W. Veltre, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology, Department of Anthropology, University of Alaska Anchorage, Anchorage, Alaska (dwveltre@uaa.alaska.edu)

Abstract Soon after Russian fur hunters arrived in Alaska in the mid-18th century, they began gardening to supplement the limited foods they brought with them and the locally available food resources. Although published accounts of gardening become more numerous by the early 19th century, the details of such efforts in the Aleut region of southwestern Alaska remain unclear. Archaeological and ethnohistoric data from several locales in this area, especially the Korovinski site on Atka Island, indicate that gardening, particularly for potatoes, was an important subsistence enterprise during the Russian era, not only for the Russian colonial population but also for Aleuts (Unanga[†]), whose overall subsistence economy underwent profound changes following contact.

As the Russian fur-hunting economy moved eastward across Siberia in the 17th and 18th centuries on its way to the Pacific coast, the Aleutian Islands, and then mainland Alaska, so, too, did the practice of gardening as a means of supplementing the locally available food supply. Although the first fur hunters reached the Russian Far East by the middle of the 17th century, it was not until late in the following century that vegetable gardening became widespread at Okhotsk and on the Kamchatka Peninsula (Gibson 1969:179–181). Potatoes — a somewhat later addition to a suite of other introduced vegetables that included cabbages, carrots, and beets — did especially well, particularly on the Kamchatka Peninsula, where annual yields totaled many hundreds of thousands of kilograms. By the early 1800s, potatoes — grown by both Russians and Natives — were an important product there, especially when fish were scarce (Gibson 1969:180).

The extensive development of gardening in the Far East came about only after the first Russian fur-hunting ventures to the Aleutian Islands had been undertaken in the several decades following Vitus Bering's and Alexei Chirikov's 1741 discovery of the archipelago. It is not surprising, therefore, that the limited historical records of those first voyages (e.g., Coxe 1780) make no mention of gardening in the islands. It is not out of the question that the early voyages might have carried some Siberian produce to feed their crews, but it is unlikely that the initial years of Russian expansion into the Aleutian Islands witnessed actual gardening. At some point in the later 18th century, however, the successes in raising crops in Russia were incorporated into the strategies of the Russian fur hunters, the *promyshlenniki*, in the Aleutians, where hunters often took several years to amass sufficient quantities of sea otter, fox, and other furs to make their voyages profitable. Ships frequently based their operations at particular locations in the Aleutians, from which smaller crews could venture out (Black 2004:70). Growing crops, even in small plots, could very well have provided these men with a significant nutritional supplement.

Be these possibilities as they may, by the end of the 18th century the historical literature begins to note with some regularity that gardening was fairly common in Russian America. To the east of the Aleut region, the first Russian settlement on Kodiak Island, established by Gregorii Shelikov at Three Saints Bay in 1784, included gardens (Sauer 1802, in Clark 1985:114), as did the first Russian Orthodox mission on that island a decade later (Black 2004:233). In the eastern Aleutian Islands, Georg Langsdorff, a naturalist and physician who visited

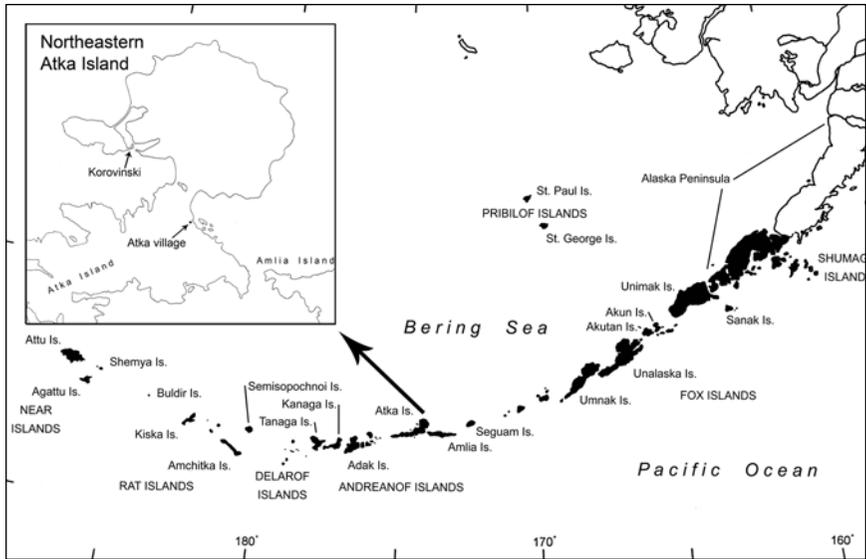


Figure 1. The Aleut (Unangaʼ) region (shaded). Inset of the northeastern portion of Atka Island shows the locations of the contemporary village of Atka and of the former village at Korovinski.

Unalaska in 1805, observed, “In recent years the Russians have begun to plant potatoes. They grow very well and the people enjoy eating them” (1993:15).

However frequent their casual mention, the details of such gardening efforts in southwestern Alaska nevertheless remain unclear in existing published accounts. In this paper, I review some of the archaeological and ethnohistoric evidence for Russian period gardening in southwestern Alaska and consider the significance of the practice to the Natives and Russians who lived there. More specifically, I focus my attention on that portion of Russian America that was, and remains, the traditional homeland of the Aleut. This is a vast area (Figure 1) that includes the western end of the Alaska Peninsula, the Shumagin Islands group to the south of the peninsula, and the entire 1500 km volcanic archipelago of some 200 Aleutian Islands, ending with Attu Island at the far western end of the island chain. Situated in a maritime environment where wind, cloud cover, and cool temperatures predominate, Aleuts obtained most of their foods and raw materials from the ocean, the immediate coast, and streams. Marine mammals, ocean and anadromous fish, intertidal marine invertebrates, and birds and their eggs provided the bulk of their diet. Plant foods, including some edible roots and bulbs, accounted for no more than an estimated five percent of the diet (Laughlin

1980:49). Only in the easternmost portion of Aleut territory — on Unimak Island and the Alaska Peninsula — were there any land mammals to hunt (McCartney and Veltre 1999).

Russian Contact in the Aleut Region

Aleuts experienced a long and devastating history of contact with Russians, beginning with the first voyages by Bering and Chirikov. By the late 1740s, the *promyshlenniki* had begun their inexorable colonial expansion eastward through the Aleut region, ultimately reaching southcentral and, by the early 1800s, southeastern Alaska in their quest for fur resources (see Lightfoot 2003 for a recent summary of Russian colonialism in Alaska). This push for fur resources also included the Pribilof Islands, north of the Aleutians, where Russians took Aleut laborers to harvest northern fur seals beginning in the late 1780s (Veltre and McCartney 2002).

In their pursuit of economic gain, the *promyshlenniki* exploited both the fur resources of Alaska and the indigenous Native populations. Because Aleut men were skilled at sea mammal hunting, they were forced to hunt sea otters and other animals, first by independent Russian fur trading companies, and, after 1799, by the newly formed Russian-American Company (Sarafian 1970), which held a monopoly on hunting north of 55° north latitude until the 1867 sale of Alaska to the United States (Tikhmenev 1978).

Russian dependence on Aleut labor for hunting and other work stemmed from two important causes. First, there were usually fewer than 600 Russians in all of Alaska at any one time (Fedorova 1973), far too few to undertake the myriad tasks necessary to conduct and manage the fur trade. Second, compared to the Russians' skills, Aleut pelagic hunting proficiency was unsurpassed, as noted by one Russian naval officer in 1820 (quoted in Gibson 1976:8):

If the [Russian-American] company should somehow lose the Aleuts, then it will completely forfeit the hunting of sea animals, because not one Russian knows how to hunt the animals, and none of our settlers has learned how in all the time that the company has had its possessions here.

The expansion of the Russian fur hunting economy into the Aleutians engendered broad and fundamental changes in traditional Aleut economic, religious, political, settlement, and subsistence realms (Veltre 1990, 1999). The result of

introduced diseases (Milan 1974), hostilities, relocations, and accidental deaths, a precontact Aleut population of some 12–15,000 plummeted to perhaps 2,500 by 1800, mere decades after initial contact (Lantis 1970:179). In short, by the beginning of the 19th century Aleuts had been reduced to an exploited underclass having little control over their own lives, and they remained such throughout the rest of the Russian period. It was in this colonial context that gardening became a part of the Russian and Aleut subsistence economy.

Gardening at Korovinski

My introduction to the issue of gardening in Russian America occurred in 1974, the year I began several seasons of fieldwork on Atka Island, in the central Aleutian Islands. My main research focus was to examine the impact of Russian colonialism on the Aleuts of that island, and I concentrated my efforts from 1974 to 1976 on a site offering unique credentials for that purpose. Korovinski, 16 km northwest of today's village of Atka (Figure 1), was the location of both a precontact Aleut village and a later Russian-American Company administrative office where both Russians and Aleuts lived. In addition, when Korovinski residents moved their village to the present location of Atka shortly after the 1867 sale of Alaska to the United States, the site was left almost completely undisturbed by later development. Therefore, I incorporated archaeological data, oral history, and written materials to address questions pertaining to the Russian colonial push into southwestern Alaska as well as to carry out work of interest and relevance to the people of Atka.

An overview of the history of Korovinski (drawn largely from Veltre [1979, 2001]) will provide context for a discussion of gardening. Initial occupation of the site happened about 2,000 years ago, when Aleuts settled both at the base of a large spit and near the edge of the bluff overlooking the spit (Figure 2). Occupation continued until around 500 years ago, when a major volcanic event deposited a thick blanket of ash over the eastern Atka Island region and forced residents to abandon their settlements.

Russian and Aleut occupation in the immediate Korovinski area occurred no later than 1795, when Grigori Shelikov's Atka Company (Fedorova 1973:127; Okun 1951:38) established operations here, likely on the small point of land beneath steep hills on the north shore of the entrance to Korovin Lagoon (Bergsland 1959:29). At that time, 41 Russian men worked in various hunting parties

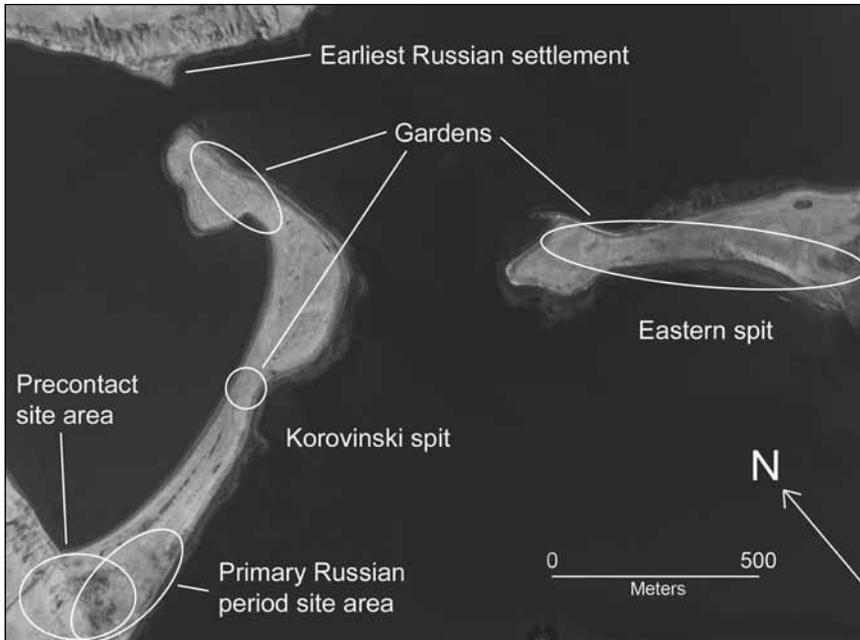


Figure 2. Primary areas of cultural remains in the Korovinski site area. Aerial photography by AERO-METRIC, Inc., Alaska Division (Roll 26B, Frame 22, May 12, 1986).

in the 1500 km span of islands from the Commander Islands in the west through the Andreanof Islands in the east, the Korovin Bay settlement serving as the main base of operations for this vast area (Fedorova 1973:126–127). Settlement here continued through the 1799 formation of the Russian-American Company until 1826, when the settlement was moved to the Korovinski spit itself, site of the earlier, precontact settlement. At about the same time, a reorganization of the Russian-American Company made the Korovinski settlement the company's western office, having administrative oversight for Company activities throughout the whole of the central and western Aleutian Islands.

Russian period remains appear archaeologically at several places on and near the Korovinski spit and are known from documentary and oral history accounts (Netsvetov 1980:13; Snigaroff 1986:3–7). They include the location of the Russian Orthodox Church, a cemetery, a store house for community-shared food and materials, a retail store, a cattle barn, a small number of houses, several dozen other buildings (such as warehouses, workshops, and so on), boat slips, and drainage ditches. Some 500 m north of the main settlement lie the remains



Figure 3. Low altitude oblique aerial photograph of the garden plots near the end of the Korovinski spit. The end wall on the far left is 32 m long. North is to the right.

of a small earthen dam where a mill might have been built to grind flour. To this list may be added the remains of several gardens, both on the Korovinski spit and on the “eastern spit,” across the narrow entrance to Korovin Lagoon just to the east of the Korovinski spit.

The best preserved of these gardens is near the end of the Korovinski spit (Figures 3 and 4). It consists of a series of adjoining, generally rectangular plots, each containing furrows and each enclosed by sod and rock walls approximately 1 m high and nearly as thick. The size of these plots is truly impressive — the southernmost plot’s south wall measures 32 m, and the combined length of the plots’ west walls is 171 m. A second walled garden lies midway along the spit, between the large gardens and the main settlement area; it encloses only about 100 m². Taking into account the varying widths of the larger garden’s plots, the approximate combined area of these two garden features is 4900 m², or just under one-half hectare.

Several walled gardens also are located on the eastern spit, but they are somewhat less distinct than those on the Korovinski spit (in part because sand



Figure 4. Detail of the walls at the Korovinski spit gardens, facing east.

dunes have covered many areas along the southern margin of the spit). A shortage of time during field work in the 1970s kept my on-site inspection of these gardens to a cursory examination, and I was unable to measure their size. However, my subsequent analysis of aerial photographs taken in 1986 indicates that plots of varying size and shape are distributed over most the spit's length (Figure 5). Many are now partially covered by sand dunes encroaching from the southwestern shore of the spit. With a combined area of approximately 1.4 ha, these garden plots cover more than twice the area of those on the Korovinski spit. Altogether, the Korovinski garden plots on both spits total nearly 1.9 ha.

The aerial photographs also reveal two areas near the base of the eastern spit that appear to contain surface depressions from a number of features. Bergsland (1959:29), based on linguistic information he collected in Atka in the 1950s, notes that this eastern spit was called "the priest's spit" and might have been the location of the Russian Orthodox Church; however, my own archaeological work places the church on the main Korovinski spit, as described above.

At the time I undertook this field research, the gardens at Korovinski were

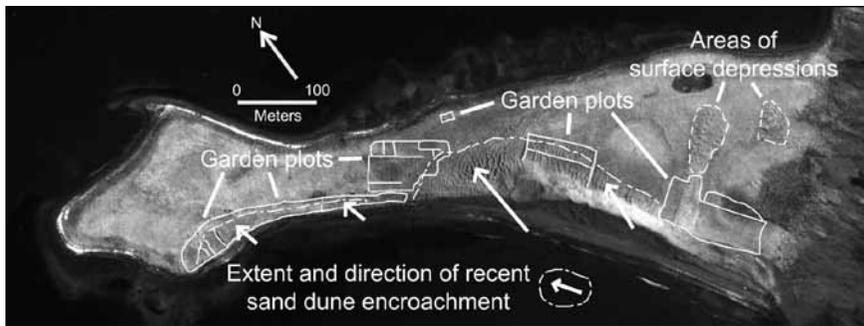


Figure 5. Eastern spit garden plots and surface depressions at the Korovinski site. Only some internal plot divisions are indicated. Aerial photography by AERO-METRIC, Inc., Alaska Division (Roll 26B, Frame 22, May 12, 1986).

the only known extant Russian period gardens known in Alaska. Also, as I discuss below, the Korovinski gardens appear to be substantially larger than any other Russian period gardens in the Aleut region.

According to Russian sources of the time, gardening was given “special attention” on Atka because it was difficult to supply the settlement (Gibson 1976:96, quoting Russian sources). The large size of the Korovinski gardens obviously fits well with this characterization. Further, Iakov Netsvetov, the first Russian Orthodox priest on the island, wrote in his diaries (Netsvetov 1980) that the Russian-American Company and the Russian Orthodox Church each maintained its own gardens at Korovinski. Netsvetov recruited his school pupils to work in the school garden, while it is likely that the Company hired local Aleuts to tend its plots, as is known to have occurred at Sitka (Khlebnikov 1976:51).

By the early 1800s, gardening was not unusual in Russian America, nor was keeping a variety of livestock. Gibson, for example, reports in his discussion of supply issues in Russian America that “every post had small gardens and several cattle, pigs, chickens, and ducks and perhaps some sheep and goats” (1976:96). He also quotes Ferdinand Wrangell, chief manager of the Russian-American Company from 1830 to 1835, who in 1832 wrote about Atka (Gibson 1976:96):

No other place in the colonies except Ross [Fort Ross, in California] is so suitable for the breeding of cattle and swine as Atka and the islands adjoining it; there is lush grass everywhere in summer, and the moderate cold and light snowfall save the work of making a winter supply [of hay], and the cattle always have pasturage.

Ivan Petroff (1884:22), writing two decades after the sale of Alaska to the United States, offered an additional perspective on animal husbandry at Korovinski:

The Russians introduced cattle and goats here [at Korovinski] as an experiment in those days. The latter became very unpopular with the timid Aleuts on account of their pugnacious disposition and the[ir] morbid propensity for feeding upon the grasses and flower[s] that grew on the earthen roofs of the barabaras [semisubterranean houses], frequently breaking them in or causing serious leaks. Though there is an abundance of nutritious grasses all over the island, the stock-raising experiment was allowed to lag, and finally, a short time after the [1867] transfer of the country to the United States, the last of the bovine race found its way into the soup-kettle and to the tables of the traders.

Directed at animals, Wrangel's and Petroff's comments also help explain a dominant feature of the Korovinski gardens — namely, that they are, in fact, walled in. The only compelling reason for erecting such substantial walls would have been to keep out domesticated animals, such as the cattle and, possibly, goats that the Russians brought to the settlement. Walls would not have prevented foxes (brought to the island during the Russian period) from disturbing the crops, nor is it likely that walls can be attributed to the removal of rocks from the area to be planted, since these are not present in excess at Korovinski. Even in the absence of written or oral history evidence, therefore, the archaeological documentation of garden walls provides strong evidence of imported domestic animals. This interpretation can be tested at other sites in Russian America where gardens are found.

One further aspect of the walls at the Korovinski gardens — clearly seen on the ground as well as in the aerial photographs — is the existence of internal walls in larger garden plots. Although such walls conceivably might have served to identify ownership, much less labor-intensive ways to do so could have been devised. A more likely explanation is that the new garden plots were appended to existing plots over time, perhaps due to an increasing need for potatoes and/or decreasing production per unit area over time.

Several factors must certainly have affected the productivity of the Korovinski gardens, albeit to unknown extents. Due mainly to persistent cloud cover, the Aleutian Islands receive substantially less solar energy than most other areas

Table 1. Comparison of three estimates of annual production of potatoes for the Korovinski gardens.

| | Korovinski spit gardens | Eastern spit gardens | Total for entire site |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Approximate area (m ²) | 4,900 ^a | 14,200 ^b | 19,100 |
| Estimate 1 ^c | 11,000-22,000 kg | 31,900-63,800 kg | 42,900-85,800 kg |
| Estimate 2 ^d | 3,000-4,500 kg | 8,700-13,000 kg | 11,700-17,500 kg |
| Estimate 3 ^e | 10,400 kg | 30,100 kg | 40,500 kg |

^a Computed from ground measurements.

^b Computed from 1 inch = 1,000 feet aerial photographs (AERO-METRIC, Inc., Alaska Division, Roll 26B, Frame 22, May 12, 1986).

^c Basis: 200-400 hundredweight/acre (Wayne Vandre, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Alaska Fairbanks, personal communication 1979).

^d Basis: 6-9 metric tons/ha (Chuck Brown, United States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, Palmer, Alaska, personal communication 2007).

^e Basis: 1 pound yield per plant, with one plant every 11 inches (Jeff Smeenk, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Alaska Fairbanks, personal communication 2007).

of the world. Combined with summer temperatures that are most often lower than 50° F (10° C), the Korovinski gardens certainly faced a very short and cool growing season. In addition, both the gardens themselves and the storage of harvested potatoes were likely beset with the same problems that have plagued Aleutian gardening efforts in more recent times — introduced Norway rats and introduced (or, on islands in the eastern Aleutian region, native) foxes. In the late 1820s, Kirill Khlebnikov (1994:223), a widely traveled and experienced Russian-American Company official, mentioned that the “great numbers of rats” on Atka “cause great damage,” although interestingly he makes no specific mention of potatoes or gardens. These growing and storage difficulties notwithstanding, potatoes are a hardy plant, requiring relatively little tending and being suited to the cloudy and damp maritime conditions that characterize the Aleutians. Finally, it is reasonable to suppose that Russians and Aleuts used seaweed, fish by-products, and other organic materials to fertilize the gardens, although there is no direct evidence for this.

I have made estimates of the productivity of the Korovinski gardens (including all plots on both the Korovinski and eastern spits) based on a variety of measures (Table 1). Ranging from 11,700 to 85,800 kg annually, they are rough approximations that do not take into account losses due to the potential difficulties mentioned earlier. However, they do indicate that, whatever the actual yield, the gardens on Atka had the very real potential to produce a substantial

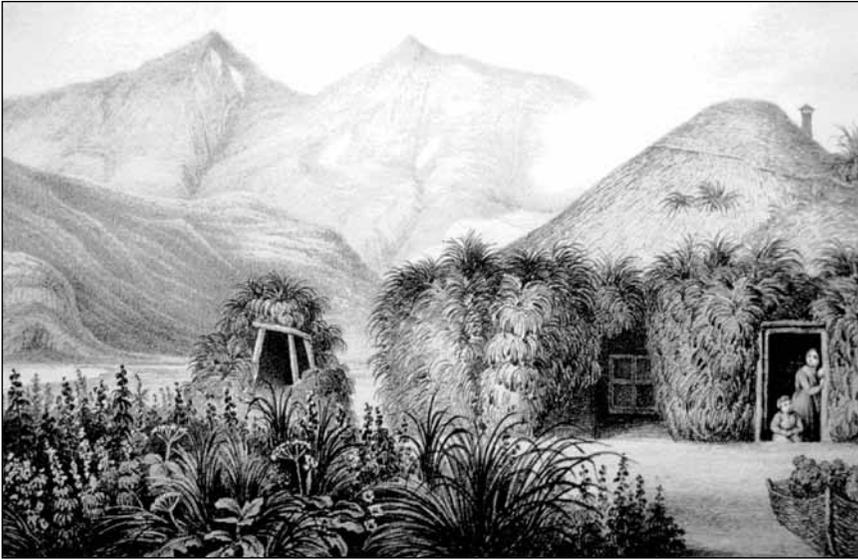


Figure 6. A house in Unalaska in the 1820s by Kittlitz. The garden plot, surrounded by netting (perhaps to keep out small domestic animals), is in the lower right corner (Kittlitz 1987a:216).

quantity of potatoes. By comparison, as Gibson has noted, “potatoes grew better [at New Archangel, present-day Sitka] than anywhere else in Russian America” (1976:100). There, in plots of unspecified total size, the annual harvest in the reported poorer growing years of the mid-1820s amounted to some 72 tons (roughly 65,000 kg), approximately half of what it was in the best years (Gibson 1976:101) and somewhat less than the highest Korovinski estimate.

Gardening Elsewhere in the Aleut Region

Other locales in the Aleut region yield archaeological evidence and/or artists’ representations of Russian period gardening — that is, evidence more direct than generalized historical acknowledgments of the practice. In 1827, Friedrich Kittlitz, traveling as a naturalist to study birds with Fedor Litke, made a drawing of an Aleut house (Figure 6) in Unalaska, which he described as follows (Kittlitz 1987a:217):

The rustic habitation seen in the foreground is one of the most opulent of the island, even though it is only constructed of earth like the dwellings of the poorest. Since there is no other wood available in the country other than the driftwood which is thrown up on the shore, it is a luxury item

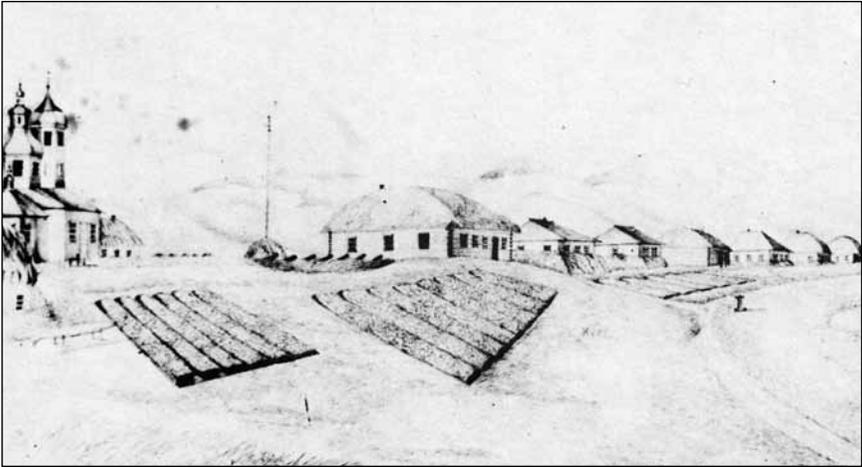


Figure 7. Gardens in Unalaska near the church and other buildings in 1843 by Voznesenskii (Golovin 1979:125).

and is rarely used in construction. For the same reason, the little field of potatoes which is situated in front of the house is surrounded only by a net. The potatoes are the only product cultivated in this country, and they grow very well.

Although the house might indeed have been opulent, it is certain that gardening was relatively common at Unalaska, as Kittlitz (1987b:173) wrote elsewhere:

The few houses of the Russian settlement were at the edge of the grassy meadow and did not in the least disturb the landscape. The buildings, surrounded by potato fields which could hardly be seen because of the prolific growth of the wild vegetation, were far apart from each other.

This description of hidden gardens might well explain why a somewhat earlier painting of the Unalaska settlement by Louis Choris in 1816 shows no clear evidence of garden plots (Choris 1822).

In 1843, almost two decades later than Kittlitz, Ilia Voznesenskii, a naturalist sponsored by the Russian Academy of Sciences, made drawings of the settlement at Unalaska in which Aleut barabaras, Russian-American Company buildings, and the Russian Orthodox Church are depicted along the shore of the Bering Sea (Alekseev 1987:39; Blomkvist 1972:122–3). One of these clearly depicts several furrowed garden plots in front of several of the buildings, including the church (Figure 7).



Figure 8. Low altitude oblique aerial photograph of the Russian Orthodox Church in Unalaska, showing garden furrows to the right (northeast) of the church.

What is fascinating about these Unalaska gardens — specifically, the garden adjacent to the church — is that their traces actually survive today. In an aerial photograph (Figure 8), faint furrows are evident between the church and the beach; I also examined these on the ground, where low but distinct ridges lie on the sloping lawn (Figure 9). Thus, while the Korovinski gardens survive because the site was abandoned at the end of the Russian period, the Unalaska church gardens remain because they are a part of the protected grounds of the church itself.

Gardens also appear in one other drawing by Voznesenskii. A view (Figure 10) of the settlement on Unga Island in the Shumagin Islands group in the eastern Aleut region south of the Alaska Peninsula reveals several different types of buildings, fish-drying racks, a cow (barely discernible), as well as several garden plots.

A final example of gardens known from either archaeology or artistic representation is a garden plot on St. George Island, in the Pribilof Islands, which I found during a brief site survey in 1986 (Veltre and Veltre 1986:23). This gar-



Figure 9. Garden furrows on the north side of the Russian Orthodox Church in Unalaska, facing west.



Figure 10. The Unga Island settlement in 1843 by Voznesenskii, showing garden plots among the buildings (Blomkvist 1972:120).

den, a single walled plot of several furrows measuring only about 100 m², is at one of the several early settlements in the Pribilof Islands of St. George and St. Paul, where both Russians and Aleuts lived to harvest fur seals in the late 1700s and early 1800s — shortly after the Russians found the Pribilofs in 1786 but before the consolidation of settlements to the present village locales (Veltre and McCartney 2002). Lying in a shallow bay across the island south-southeast from today's village of St. George, island residents call the locale, conveniently enough, Garden Cove.

Conclusions

The historical literature notes that 18th and 19th century Russian fur hunters often turned to local foods and Aleut-style housing to help them survive their years in the demanding environment of the Aleutian archipelago. Such accommodations were required, since it was impossible for them to import substantial quantities of either building materials or food. However, only brief consideration (e.g., Gibson 1976) has been given to the documentary evidence for Russians utilizing their own food production means, that is, gardening and animal husbandry.

As presented here, direct archaeological and other ethnohistoric data, though scant, nevertheless offer additional insights into Russian and Aleut food procurement and production in the early 19th century. It is clear, for example, that gardening was widespread in the Aleut region by the second half of the Russian era. Although the Korovinski gardens were exceptionally large and therefore more productive, most garden plots in the region were likely quite small, individually owned, and close to houses. In villages that continued to be occupied after the Russian period, gardens would likely not have escaped destruction from subsequent development activities, yet they still might be found in other outlying locales. The Unalaska church gardens are certainly a rare exception, protected, like the nearby burial plots, by their location within the church yard.

We must also keep in mind that gardening in the early and mid-1800s was undertaken in a substantially altered Aleut cultural landscape. By that time, the precontact population of the entire Aleut region had been decimated. Whole islands and island groups had been depopulated. For example, by 1830 only three main Aleut settlements remained in the central and western Aleutian Islands, where 70 years earlier there had been dozens. In this same region, a precontact Aleut population estimated to have been at least 5,000 had been reduced to some 400.

Traditional, precontact subsistence pursuits continued through the Russian

colonial period, but they did so in significantly modified ways. Aleut men provided the chief labor force for Russian fur hunting endeavors, and they frequently spent months each year away from their homes and families. This absence of men from the local Aleut subsistence economy meant that procuring certain important food and raw material resources (principally marine mammals, traditionally hunted solely by men) was severely curtailed. Correspondingly, it is probable that those resource activities traditionally (although not exclusively) pursued by women, children, and the elderly — such as fishing from the shore and streams, collecting intertidal marine invertebrates, and gathering vegetable items — took on increased importance during the colonial period. To these tasks, gardening was likely added in the Russian period. However, because such contributions to the subsistence economy have often been historically and ethnographically under-reported compared to the work of male hunters and fishers, it is not surprising that the importance of gardening is scarcely mentioned in the literature. Compounding this, family-based gardening seems to have diminished or been eliminated in the post-World War II era in the Aleutians, leading contemporary considerations of Aleut subsistence to overlook the contribution that gardening might have made in the Russian and early American periods.

In this light, gardening for potatoes, whether by Aleuts for themselves or by Aleuts and Russians for Russian needs, was an endeavor to which all members of an Aleut community could contribute. However, it is likely that the labor of young to middle aged males was, from the Russian perspective, more profitably utilized in hunting and other activities undertaken for Russian-American Company needs. Moreover, potatoes stored and transported well, making it possible — as occurred on Atka — to provision outlying settlements from a main gardening center. By providing a food resource that allowed Aleut men to labor at non-subsistence tasks for the Russian-American Company, then, gardening served to help maintain the Russian fur hunting economy in the Aleutians.

This paper, in a sense over thirty years in the making, is nevertheless just a start. I have focused specifically on archaeological evidence and on published ethnohistoric graphic and narrative portrayals of gardening, but I am certain that detailed accounts of the practice will emerge from future study of sources such as Russian-American Company documents and Russian Orthodox Church records. Similarly, although because of their large size the Korovinski gardens are doubtless unique, it is certainly possible that additional physical remains of gardens themselves will be found throughout the Aleut region at settlements

abandoned during the Russian period. Finally, on-going research, especially in southeastern Alaska, on the potato itself (its growing characteristics, yield, and genetic characteristics) is an avenue of investigation expected to shed light on gardening in the Aleut region.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

1. Used widely in southwestern Alaska by Russians, the name “Aleut” was never the precontact autonym of the Native residents of this entire region. In recent years, many individuals have returned to “Unanga” (and its variants) as a more traditional self-designation.

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