



# KODIAK HISTORY MUSEUM

Permanent  
Exhibit  
Guide

Kodiak History Museum  
101 Marine Way East  
Kodiak, AK 99615



Welcome! The Kodiak History Museum permanent exhibits offer a self-guided, chronological survey of Kodiak history from the late 1700s to the present day. Exhibits in the temporary gallery rotate biannually and events on the activities porch are posted monthly on our website calendar and social media.

The Kodiak History Museum is housed in a National Historic Landmark, the Russian American Magazin/Erskine House. The museum was formerly named the Baranov Museum until 2019 when it was renamed the Kodiak History Museum to better serve its mission to preserve and share all of Kodiak's history. The Kodiak History Museum operates the building in partnership with the City of Kodiak who owns the property.

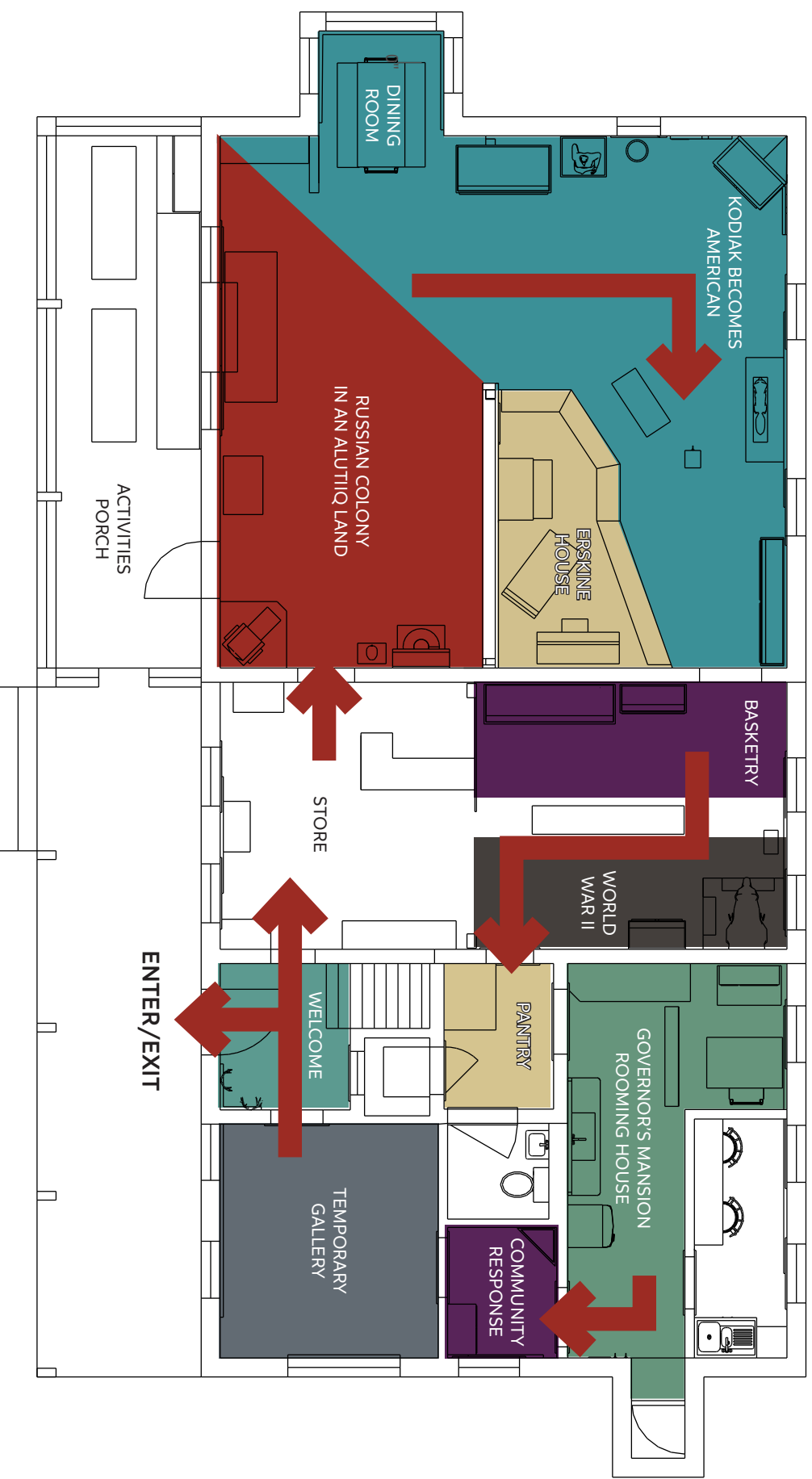
Admission to the museum is \$10 for adults and free to kids 12 and under. Museum members receive free admission.

Typically, visitors spend between 20 and 60 minutes in the exhibitions.

Our vision is to preserve and share Kodiak history with the values of innovation, excellence, inclusiveness, engagement, and community.

Inside this guide are highlighted key elements of 8 exhibit areas aimed to help volunteers and staff facilitate the visitor experience at the museum.

# EXHIBIT FLOOR PLAN





## RUSSIAN COLONY IN AN ALUTIIQ LAND

1780-1880s

### THE RUSSIAN AMERICAN MAGAZIN

The magazin has been at the heart of Kodiak's history for over 200 years.

The magazin is a powerful symbol in our community with a complicated history. The exhibits begin in the late 1700s, just before the magazin was built. The magazin is the oldest building in Alaska (c. 1808). Magazin is the Russian word for store or warehouse as this building was first a sea otter pelt warehouse. The building also served as a residence for the Russian American and Alaska Commercial Company officials, families and a boarding house.

### RUSSIAN COLONY IN AN ALUTIIQ LAND

The account of the massacre at Awa'uq/Refuge Rock illustrates the initial conflict and violence used in Russian colonization.

Colonization is the process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area.



*Object highlight: Bust of Alexander I. This bust was brought on a ship called the Neva during the first circumnavigation of the world in 1804. It sat on top of the roof gable of the magazin watching over sea otter hunting parties as they departed from the channel.*

Kodiak people and goods were critical to the survival of Russian America.



The map on the red wall shows some of the settlements on Kodiak during the Russian period. Alutiiq people served as hunters, laborers, guides, translators, sailors, and soldiers for the Russians. The term 'Creole' refers to people of both

Russian and Alutiiq decent. The objects on the wall are connected to stories that paint a broad picture of the relationships of the people around Kodiak during that time.



*Object highlight: Kamleika. This kamleika is made of seal or bear intestine, a waterproof material. This most likely was worn when hunting in a qayaq. Hunters would carry a sewing/mending kit for their kamleikas that would contain bone needles such as those displayed next to the kamleika.*



*Object Highlight: Qayaq/baidarka. Baidarka is the Russian word for skin boat. Most qayaqs are single or double hatched. After Russians arrived on Kodiak, they forced many Alutiiq people to hunt sea otters. The three-hatch qayaq was created to transport more goods and sometimes a Russian official. Skins on qayaqs need to be replaced every few years while the wooden frame is passed down through generations. This qayaq belonged to two brothers who hunted sea otters for the Alaska Commercial Company. It was later found in a warehouse in Unalaska in the 1950s and brought to the museum.*

### CARPENTER'S WORKSHOP

The magazin was built to last.

This exhibit displays tools that would have been used to build the magazin in 1808. Builders constructed the magazin using two main tools, an axe and pit saw.



*Object highlight: Logs of the magazin. These logs are from spruce trees. Notice areas where the logs have patches or are joined in the middle.*

*The Kodiak History Museum logo represents the type of lap joint seen joining two logs together. Some of the logs may have been salvaged from older buildings. Why re-use logs? In the 1800s, there were few trees near St. Paul Harbor. Much wood for building came from Woody or Afognak Islands.*



*Object highlight: Workbench. This workbench is special because when it was created, there were no trees on Kodiak Island. A wooden bench such as this would have been shipped here. It*

*belonged to the Sargent family. Their house was located in Sargent Park behind the magazin.*

## RUSSIAN-AMERICAN COMPANY STORE

The Russian-American Company was a powerful force in Alaska.

This exhibit addresses how the magazin and Russian-American Company store was a place of control. Years would pass without supply ships arriving from Russia. This meant that the Russian-American Company had very little to pay and supply Alutiiq and Russian workers. As a result, people had to make the most of the goods that were stored and sold in this building. As before the Russians came, Alutiiq people hunted pelts, sewed kamleikas, caught fish, and picked berries. But then, the Russian-American Company took these goods and then sold them at high prices to the people who made them. This resulted in a cycle of debt, giving people no choice but to continue to hunt and work for the Russian-American Company. The objects on the store shelves are examples of what would have been sold in the magazin.

## KODIAK BECOMES AMERICAN

1867-1940s

### DINING ROOM, MURDER IN THE MAGAZIN

It was a rough and exciting time in 1880s Kodiak.

On November 1, 1886, Benjamin McIntyre, the General Agent of the Alaska Commercial Company, was murdered at the dining table here in the magazin. Sit down at the table and read the exhibit book to investigate this Kodiak history mystery and learn what the witnesses can tell us about Kodiak in the 1880s.

In 1867, the U.S. purchased Alaska from Russia. Kodiak went from experiencing Russian colonization to Americanization.

It would take some time for Kodiak residents to adopt American ways of life. This exhibit explores Kodiak "becoming American" and aspects of Kodiak as an international crossroads with Alutiiq, Russian, and American practices. New residents married into local families, imparting new customs. The presence of the Alaska Commercial Company, Baptist missionaries, and American teachers cemented the use of the English language in the community.



*Object highlight: Kugweks. Kugweks/'housekeepers' hold sewing needles and thread, mail, and other household goods. With gut skin next to silk thread, and duck feathers sewn on flannel, these early American period kugweks, show how some Kodiak residents held onto their cultural traditions and adopted new materials.*

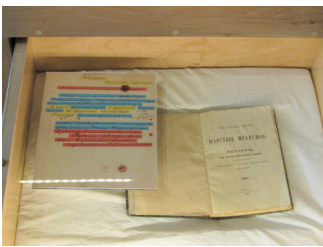


*Object highlight: Wedding dress. The Sargent family lived next door to the magazin. Their story illustrates how Kodiak was introduced to an American way of life through business and through marriage. American businessman, Frederick Sargent moved to Kodiak and married a local Creole woman, Mary. The Sargent's daughter-in-law, Fevronia, married their son at the Kodiak Orthodox church in this dress. Mary sewed this dress for the bride. The fabric most likely arrived in Kodiak after a nine-day steamship trip from San Francisco.*

## ORTHODOXY

Our Russian past influences Kodiak's culture today.

This exhibit corner introduces Orthodoxy, backyard banyas, and balalaikas to demonstrate this concept. The first Russian Orthodox missionaries in the Americas came to Kodiak in 1794, making Kodiak the home of American Orthodoxy. The church was the only Russian institution to remain active in Alaska following the US purchase. In American Kodiak, the Orthodox Church became a place that preserved the Alutiiq language. Still today, Kodiak villages have Orthodox churches, and many Kodiak Native people identify as Orthodox.



*Object highlight: Kashevaroff letter. In Kodiak today, you hear many languages as you walk down the street. This was the case in the Russian-era and early American era Kodiak, as well. The most common*

*languages were Alutiiq and Russian before the U.S. purchase. After, American teachers and missionaries didn't allow either language in the classroom, and English was the language for business. As a result, Alutiiq and Russian were spoken less in Kodiak homes. This letter was written by priest Nicolai Kashevaroff ordering carpet for the church in 1931. Note that there are three languages used in this everyday activity.*

## FURS

Kodiak is an international crossroads. People have come to Kodiak because of the natural resources, such as fur.

This exhibit explores Kodiak's fur riches in the form of hunting, trapping, and guiding. Russians came to Kodiak to secure furs for trade with China. Americans trapped, hunted and opened fox farms to supply furs to fashion houses in London and San Francisco. Later, Kodiak residents marketed our most famous fur bearing mammal, the Kodiak Brown Bear, to hunters interested in taking home a trophy.



*Object highlight: Sea otter, land otter, and fox furs. It is okay to touch these objects. Notice the difference between the sea otter and land otter furs. Sea otter pelts can have up to 1 million hairs per square inch. The magazin was built as a sea otter pelt warehouse.*



*Object highlight: Walter Metrokin drawer. Walter Metrokin was one of Kodiak's first bear guides. This one-armed Alutiiq/ Russian guide was born around 1866. He reportedly killed over 70 bears in his life. Walter's son, Eli became the first Alutiiq person to earn a registered bear guide license.*

## EARLY FISHING

Kodiak's diversity stems from our fisheries.

People from all over the world come to Kodiak for the fishing industry. Fishing and fish processing were separate, segregated jobs, where fishermen were commonly white Scandinavians and cannery workers were predominantly Asian from China. This case highlights the influence of Scandinavian and Chinese workers in fishing and processing.



*Object highlight: Boat wheel. This boat wheel is mounted backwards on purpose. The verso of the wheel shows Kodiak's Island ingenuity where resources can be scarce. This wheel was well-used; notice the wear on the gear and the replaced wood mount board made from an old ADF&G sign marker.*

## ERSKINE HOUSE

1911-1948

The Erskine House served as a community gathering place throughout the family's tenure in the building.

This exhibit showcases objects from the Erskines (W.J. and Nellie Erskine with children Wilson and Carolyn) who lived in the magazin between 1911 and 1948. Nellie Erskine was one of the key organizers of recreational activities such as chaperoned parties for the servicemen and local young women in their home.

The Erskine family is significant due to their fostering of arts, culture, and learning in Kodiak. Their house was a museum of sorts, with historic and prehistoric artifacts throughout. They collected artworks from significant artists and a large library.



*Object highlight: Telephone. In her memoir, A Faraway Island, Carolyn Erskine remembers, "Communication was not very advanced in Kodiak. There was a telephone system of sorts; all connected by one line which rang in every house that had*

*a phone, with all conversations audible to anyone who wanted to listen... As a rule they did not stay on the line but there were exceptions. We noticed a ticking sound which we identified eventually as someone listening to our conversations with a loud clock nearby," (pg. 92).*

*Object highlight: Wallpaper. Did you know that the Erskines had a flamboyant and eclectic taste in wallpaper? The wallpaper throughout the exhibits are modern recreations of wallpaper patterns used during the turn of the 20th century. Notice remnants of original wallpaper on the magazin ceiling near the start of the exhibits.*

### 1912 NOVA RUPTA

Natural disasters have changed Kodiak.

On June 6, 1912 Mt. Nova Rupta sent a cloud of ash to Kodiak. Kodiak residents were saved by a boat, U.S. Revenue Cutter Manning that sailed the town out to sea for fresh air. You can still see the layer of ash in Kodiak's soil that has changed the landscape. View photographs of Kodiak after the eruption on the digital picture frame in the Erskine living room and read detailed accounts of the event in the exhibit book mounted to the reader rail.



## BASKETRY

### 1900-present

The Kodiak History Museum is closely connected to Kodiak's weaving heritage because of teachers and students who have practiced and learned the art within the museum over the last 50 years.

This exhibit showcases the Alutiiq basket weaving art form. Basket weaving is a historic and living tradition taught today by many master weavers featured in the case.

Grass baskets and mats were necessary goods for Unangan society. When Europeans arrived on the Aleutian Islands, they found Unangan women weaving grass baskets that were as fine as cloth. These women started using silk threads, beads, and other new Western materials in their designs. No longer were their baskets made purely for function, as they now are considered highly collectible.

The case is loosely divided into 3 sections, historic baskets from the early 1900s, 1970s weaving masters, and their students who also became teachers.



*Object Highlight: Fishing basket. This basket from the early 1900s, has a cone-shaped bottom and was used to carry fish. Notice the repairs that were done to damage near the base from use and the open weave that allows water to escape, while other decorative baskets are woven to be watertight.*



*Object Highlight: Photograph. This photograph shows a weaving class held at the museum in the 1980s. The masters in this picture taught the artists of today.*

## WORLD WAR II

### 1939-1945

Kodiak went from a sleepy fishing village to a bustling city during WWII.

This exhibit focuses on the everyday life of Kodiak residents during the 1940s. There was an influx of over 10,000 military personnel from all over the world stationed in Kodiak. Businesses boomed and the city was covered in hastily erected housing and entertainment venues.

The exhibit book shares reproductions from Marie Olsen's scrapbook. Marie was a young woman during the 1940s and attended many of the dances held around town to entertain the troops. She saved her invitations and made a scrapbook with notes about each event. This gives us a snapshot into her exciting social life in the 1940s.



*Object highlight: Half Bear. There are many stories about how Half Bear became half of a bear. The true tale is that after famous bear guide Charles Madsen killed it, they found the bear's backside was too mangy to taxidermy. The front of Half Bear was mounted in Kodiak's former Totem Igloo Curio Shop in the 1940s. It was tradition for visitors and famous USO entertainers to have their picture taken with Half Bear. Continue the quirky tradition and don't forget to tag #halfbear.*



## PANTRY

1911-1948

We all have fond memories in our Kodiak kitchens.

The pantry exhibit is an open artifact storage area showcasing kitchen artifacts along with food-related quotes from the book *A Faraway Island* by Carolyn Erskine (a memoir from her time living in Kodiak in the early 1900s). Many of the kitchen artifacts are from the village of Afognak before it was destroyed during the 1964 earthquake and tsunami.



*Object highlight: Samovars. The top shelf of the pantry highlights our beloved samovar collection, a family symbol often passed through generations. See right for a cross section of a samovar showing how water was heated and dispensed for making chai/tea.*

## GOVERNOR'S MANSION ROOMING HOUSE

1950s

Kodiak experienced many changes in the mid-20th century.

This exhibit shares the experiences of the Gilbreath and Fields families when they lived in the magazin. During this time, many fishermen traveled into Kodiak looking for short-term accommodations. The Fields family capitalized on this need by renting the upstairs rooms as a boarding house.



*Object highlight: Cobbler shop sign. The Fields family ran a cobbler shop on the magazin sunporch.*

## 1964 EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMI, 1964

The 1964 earthquake and tsunami was a monumental event in Kodiak.

On March 27, 1964, a 9.2 magnitude earthquake shook Alaska. The exhibit book gives a first-hand account from Wanda Fields sharing her experience living through the earthquake and tsunami. The event led to the rebuilding of Kodiak's downtown and revitalization.

## FISHING TOWN, USA, 1950s - present

The fishing industry remains part of the foundation of Kodiak's culture and economy.

The collage of photographs above the kitchen sink connect Kodiak's fishing industry, subsistence fishing, crab festival, canneries/processing, and the Coast Guard through fishing and food. All of these forces help shape our fishing regulations today. Try on fishing gear and get a taste for Kodiak's modern fishing culture. Kodiak is also home to the largest Coast Guard base in the world helping protect our fleet.



*Object highlight: Two photographs. These photographs show cannery operations at Port Wakefield and Kinnear & Wendt in the 1970s. The Wakefields were pioneer king crab fishermen. They opened Port Wakefield king crab cannery at the start of Kodiak's king crab boom in 1954 across from Afognak, on Raspberry Island. Kodiak was the king crab capital of the world where deckhands could come and make as much as \$100,000 in one season in the 1970s. King crab fishing*

*was not well regulated and the crab population quickly diminished by 1980. Today, Kodiak has adapted and focuses on other fisheries such as salmon, halibut, and pollack.*

## COMMUNITY RESPONSE

Kodiak is home to a diverse community with people who each have their own Kodiak story.

This space poses interactive questions to museum visitors. It is called a Community Response space because the questions and activities respond to an event/issue/discussion/exhibit currently experienced by the Kodiak Community and gives visitors a chance to respond as well. This space may also be used as an extension to the temporary gallery.

## TEMPORARY GALLERY & STORE

The temporary gallery exhibits feature community-centered projects and historical topics rotating biannually.

The Kodiak History Museum store sells a variety of imported, Alaska made, and Kodiak made goods with a particularly large range of Alaska and Kodiak themed books. Artist and vendor information can be found next to selected goods. Please feel free to ask our store staff for assistance.

**THANK YOU FOR VISITING  
THE KODIAK HISTORY MUSEUM!**