

Russia's Colony

Aleksandr Andreevich Baranov (1746-1819)

Born in Kargopol, northern Russia, he engaged in trade there, and then in Moscow and St. Petersburg. He migrated to Siberia, settling in Irkutsk in 1780, where he established a glass factory, distillery and other businesses. Shelikhov hired him in 1790 to direct activities in North America. One of Baranov's first acts was to move Shelikhov's settlement to St. Paul harbor, the present location of Kodiak City. In 1799 the new Russian American Company named him the first chief manager, and the tsar named him the first governor of Russian America. He molded Russian American Company activities into a coordinated, profitable, colonial enterprise, founding Ft. Ross in California in 1812, and developing contracts with American Yankee traders to supply Russian America. He attempted, but failed, to establish a Russian post in Hawaii. He was retired by the Company in 1818 under a cloud of some suspicion, later demonstrated to be unfounded. He died at sea while being transported back to Russia in 1819.