

Celebrate Native People



photo by Richard Martin

Mini Fact:

Saxman Totem Park in Ketchikan, Alaska, is a working Native carving center.



November is National American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month. Since 1990, this time has been dedicated to celebrating the traditions, customs and many contributions of Native people in the United States.

The Mini Page meets some Alaskan women featured by the National Park Service to learn more about their lives.

Pelagia Melgenak

In 1912, Pelagia Melgenak, who was about 35 years old, lived in a remote Alaskan village called Savonoski with her husband, Petr Kayagvak, and children. As she later told her grandchildren, the volcano Novarupta erupted that year, covering the community with hot ashes.

“They thought the end of the world was coming when the mountain started erupting,” Pelagia’s grandson Teddy said. But Pelagia and other townspeople had learned from their elders what to do in case of an eruption: Turn over boats so ash wouldn’t fill them up, collect fresh water before it became contaminated, and be ready to make an escape.

After Petr died, Pelagia remarried and helped her family survive the 1918 flu epidemic by social distancing — staying away from townspeople and visitors! Although she moved away from Savonoski, she returned to nearby Qit’rwik every year until she was an old woman. That area is now Katmai National Park.


Pelagia is remembered by her family and community for helping share stories, songs and traditions to link them to their past.

Sinrock Mary

Mary Makriko was born in 1870 to an Alaskan mother and Russian father. Able to speak English, Russian and Inupiat, she was raised in a town where traders and Native people gathered to exchange goods. After marrying Charlie Antisarlook, Mary moved to Sinrock, where she learned from Siberian reindeer herders how to raise the large animals and use them to pull sleds.


After Charlie died, Mary fought to keep half their herd and sold reindeer meat to the thousands of people who had come to Alaska in search of gold. Her business made her the richest Native woman in the North and gave her the nickname “the Reindeer Queen,” but she was also known for her generosity.

Mary’s herd numbered about 1,500 animals when she died in 1948.



photos courtesy NPS

Pelagia Melgenak
1879-1974



A reindeer and herders
around 1899.

Katie John

Shortly after Alaska became a state in 1959, a traditional fishing site in the upper Copper River area was closed for **subsistence fishing**, or fishing for food rather than for sport. Katie John, who was raised in the area, went to work to change the law so that local people could continue to fish for salmon there. For many years, she fought to keep a traditional subsistence lifestyle available to Native people.

Katie was born in 1915. She learned to live off the land from her grandmother and mother. “We had no pencil, no paper,” she said. “We used our head. Everything my mother told me, my grandmother told me, it’s in my head.”

Katie created the first written alphabet of her Native language, the Ahtna Athabascan language, and recorded pronunciation guides so future generations would keep the language alive. (“Ahtna Athabascan” is the **Indigenous**, or Native, name for the Copper River.)


Katie died in 2013 at 97 years old.

Try 'n' Find

Words that remind us of Native Alaskan women are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward. See if you can find:

ALASKAN, ALPHABET, AMERICAN, CONTRIBUTION, CUSTOM, FISHING, GOLD, HERD, HERITAGE, INDIAN, MEAT, NATIVE, QUEEN, REINDEER, SUBSISTENCE, TRADE, TRADITION, VOLCANO.

R G N I H S I F I N D I A N
E T S C U S T O M W T A E M W
E R C O N T R I B U T I O N G
D A K H F N A C I R E M A I O
N D Z E V O L C A N O D S X L
I I T V T I T E B A H P L A D
E T R I T V J E G A T I R E H
R I A T E C N E T S I S B U S
R O D A X H N A K S A L A P Y
Z N E N D Z D R E H N E E U Q



Cook's Corner


Reindeer Snack Mix

You'll need:

- 2 cups Bugles corn snacks
- 2 cups pretzel sticks
- 2 cups cheese-flavored crackers
- 1 cup bite-size shredded wheat
- 1 cup corn Chex
- 1 cup pecan halves

What to do:

1. Preheat oven to 250 degrees. Place first six ingredients in a large bowl. In another bowl, microwave butter to melt. Stir in remaining ingredients.
2. Drizzle butter over snack mixture; toss to combine. Transfer to an ungreased 15-by-10-inch baking pan.
3. Bake 1 hour, stirring every 15 minutes. Cool and store in an airtight container. Serves 12.



• You'll need an adult's help with this recipe.

1. Powerful; not easy to injure; healthy (6-letter adjective)

□ □ □ □ □ □

2. Quality of a person that pleases (6-letter noun)

□ □ □ □ □ □

3. Group of families from the same ancestors (5-letter noun)


□ □ □ □ □

4. Someone who directs/guides or goes in front of (6-letter noun)

□ □ □ □ □ □

1. Dakota believes in _____ family traditions and rules.
2. Ayla is someone of great _____, inside and out.
3. Nuvua lives among a large Chinook _____ on an island.
4. Kira earned respect as a wise _____ with honest goals.

ROOTONYM®
by Jan & Carey Orr Cook




Study the definition. When you know the missing word, fill in the letter boxes and the sentence blanks.

Answers: Strong, Beauty, Tribe, Leader.

Mini Jokes


Skyler: How do you get into a reindeer's house?
Shawna: Ring the deer-bell!



Eco Note

Finnish researchers say Europe can reduce global warming related to its food consumption by switching, at least in part, to edible insects, such as crickets, flies and worms. The team from the University of Helsinki and LUT University, Finland, proposes eating them fresh or drying and processing them into flour for bread and pasta. It adds that directly eating the insects will contribute less to climate change than using them for livestock feed instead of soy.

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For later:

Look in your newspaper for items about American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month.

Teachers:

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