

Promyshlenniki



Advancement of the Promyshlenniki to the East by V.G. Vagner (1880-1942) from the collection of the Krasnoyarsk Kray Museum

The Great Northern Expedition expanded Russian geographical knowledge east to the Aleutian Islands and mainland Alaska. News quickly spread of the large sea otter populations in the Aleutian Islands, which drew the attention of Siberian traders. The Promyshlenniki, or traders, were Russian and indigenous Siberian contract traders primarily from the serf class who served on the front line of the Alaskan fur trade. Emelian Basov is considered to be the first Promyshlennik to travel east; he sailed to Bering Island in 1743 and returned to Kamchatka the following year with thousands of sea otter pelts which unleashed a frenzy amongst the Promyshlenniki. As the 'fur rush' continued during the late 18th century, hundreds of trappers descended upon the Aleutian Islands with limited naval experience and soon coerced the Aleut and Alutiiq hunters to do the majority of otter hunting. As time went on many Promyshlenniki took Aleut and Alutiiq partners and adopted their lifestyles. By the 1830s the share system had been abandoned and replaced with salaries and the focus on the fur trade had shifted because of depletion, the status of the Promyshlenniki remained in name only as they became skilled employees of the Russian American Company.

These Russian and Siberian workers brought with them many aspects of their cultures, of note being their clothing. While these men did not don the ornate traditional clothing of Central and Western Russian serfs, they were issued material for prescribed clothing of the Russian American Company. Patterns, styles and colors were simple and conservative. Traditional Russian clothing colors are white and red, and these were frequently used by the Promyshlenniki. In 1805, chief manager Alexandr Baranov directed company stores in Kodiak and Unalaska to have frieze coats, linen trousers, and cotton and linen shirts available at all times for Russian American Company employees as standard dress.

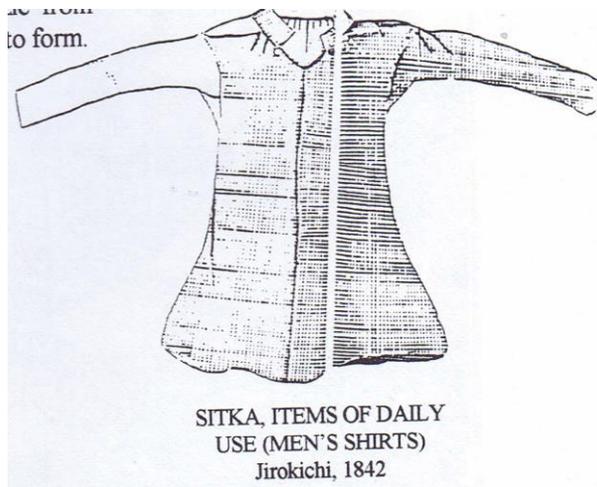
Traders and merchants kept their hair at ear length with short straight cut bangs, plus beard and moustache. Siberian Promyshlenniki often wore red wool caps trimmed with fur; this was typical of serfs during the first quarter of the 19th Century.



N. D. Myl'nikov, Portrait of a Merchant, 1837, Iaroslavl Art Museum, Russia

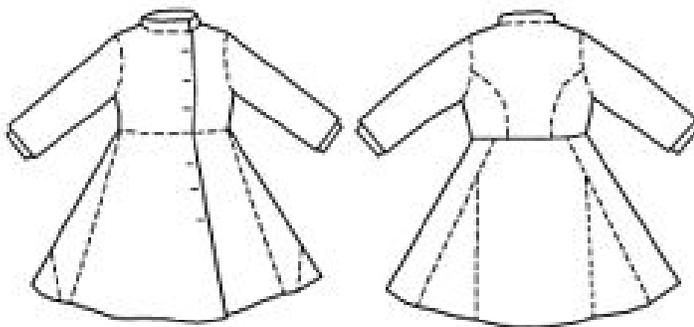
Russian Trader, Russian Bishop's House, Sitka National Park Service

Ticking was used to make shirts from cheap linen. The linen often has a striped design in the weave to create the ticking pattern. Red and white linen ticking or unbleached linen was used most often for shirts as they were cheap to manufacture. Shirts had triangular collars and v-necks that could be secured with a tie.



18th Century shirt design and ticking sample

During the 19th century, the *kazakin* coat was worn throughout Russia as a year round coat. It originated in southern Russia and was commonly worn by the Cossacks. The *kazakin* coat is a double-breasted jacket that stops at the knee. In Siberia and Alaska these coats were made of frieze material of natural colors: brown, blue, yellow or off-white. Frieze refers to woolen, coarse plain weave cloth with a nap on in the inside. The belt is a mandatory part of traditional Russian clothing for both men and women as it is considered to have protective qualities, much like an amulet. For the Promyshlenniki these belts consisted of woven red cloth or leather. A leather or cloth strap was worn across the chest to support a cartridge pouch. Trousers were made of loose fitting linen and were secured with a drawstring. Trousers were worn tucked into high leather boots called *bakhily*, also known as jackboots. Russian American Company employees were used Tula military model muskets and carried leather gun cartridge pouches .





Winter Fishery, John A. Atkinson, 1804



1808 Tula Musket



Example of Merchant and Promyshlenniki from *Clothing in Colonial Russian America: A New Look*

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