

## Teacher's Guide to the Russian Abacus or S'chyoty


By National Park Service


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### Teacher's Guide to the Russian Abacus or S'chyoty By National Park Service

Sitka National Historical Park preserves the history and culture of the Tlingits who first settled in the Sitka area and the Russians who arrived in 1799 to colonize Alaska. From 1804-1867, Sitka was known as Novo-Arkhangels'k or New Archangel, the capital of Russian America. When the Russians arrived, they brought with them their religion, language, and culture to share with the Tlingit and other Europeans who colonized Alaska with the Russian American Company. They also brought along various business tools, like the Russian abacus, or s'chyoty. The Russian American Company kept extensive business records using the s'chyoty, or Russian abacus. The s'chyoty is used even to this day in some parts of Russia to determine sales totals. In the 1840's, the first Bishop of the Alaska Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, Bishop Innocent, established a residence and seminary in Sitka. He also created an elementary school in the 1843 Russian Bishop's House, a building built by the Russian American Company to hold the seminary, a chapel, and the Bishop's personal quarters. The historical Russian Bishop's House was restored to its 1853 appearance by the National Park Service and is cared for by Sitka National Historical Park today. This special building is one of only three or four Russian American buildings left in all of North America, it is over 70% original, and it is the only one restored to its original historical period with original furnishings inside. It also contains the oldest Russian Orthodox church (a small chapel) in Alaska. As Native Alaskans were converted to the Russian Orthodox Church, they became citizens of Russia and entitled to an education. Russian American Company officials wanted to ensure that local people would be able to function in the company as clerks, managers, accountants, etc. Curriculum in the mission schools included religious studies, arithmetic, history, languages, geography, penmanship, etc. Because of the regular use of the s'chyoty, therefore, students attending classes at the Russian Bishop's House would have used it for lessons in arithmetic. This arithmetic would also have been handy for the more practical skills of carpentry and blacksmithing also taught in the school.

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