



# The Fur Farms of Alaska: Two Centuries of History and a Forgotten Stampede

*Sarah Crawford Isto*

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After its rudimentary beginning in 1749, fur farming in Alaska rose and fell for two centuries. It thrived during the 1890s and again in the 1920s, when rising fur prices caused a stampede for land and breed stock and led to hundreds of farms being started in Alaska within a few years. The Great Depression, and later the development of warm, durable, and lightweight synthetic materials during World War II, brought further decline and eventual failure to the industry as the postwar economy of Alaska turned to defense and later to oil. *The Fur Farms of Alaska* brings this history to life by capturing the remarkable stories of the men and women who made fur their livelihood.

“For more than 200 years ‘soft gold’ brought many people to Alaska. Fur farming was Alaska’s third-largest industry in the 1920s, and Sarah Isto writes of the many efforts, successes, and ultimately of the fur farming industry’s failure. This well-researched history contextualizes current fox elimination projects on Alaska islands and explains the abandoned pens one stumbles across. This is a story that has long needed to be written.”—Joan M. Antonson, Alaska State Historian

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