

# Timeline of Astrakhan History

Astrakhan has a strategic location on the Volga River, just north of the Caspian Sea. It is about the same latitude as Billings, Montana. As a result, the two cities have very similar climate:

Astrakhan gets about ten inches of precipitation in a year.

The average temperature is 26 degrees in January and 78 in July.

Billings gets 14 inches of precipitation. All of the extra rain falls in summer, making the temperature lower than in Astrakhan. The average temperature in Billings is 27 degrees in January and 73 in July.

Astrakhan, however, is much older than Billings, which started as a railroad stop in 1882 and is now an oil city of 170,000. Astrakhan's population is over 500,000.

- \_\_\_ early 1200s. A traveler wrote the first description of an important trading city on the Volga.
- \_\_\_ 1395. Tamerlane's army captured the city and burned it to the ground.
- \_\_\_ 1459. The rebuilt city became the capital of the Astrakhan Khanate.
- \_\_\_ 1556. Ivan the Terrible's army captured the city and destroyed it.
- \_\_\_ 1558. Ivan the Terrible built a new Kremlin (fort) on a low hill a few miles downstream.
- \_\_\_ 1569. The Ottoman army (from modern-day Turkey) besieged the city.
- \_\_\_ early 1600s. The city became the Russian gate to the east.
- \_\_\_ 1670. Stenka Razin and the Cossacks captured the city and held it for 17 months.
- \_\_\_ 1672. The Russians recaptured the burned city and started rebuilding.
- \_\_\_ 1702. Peter the Great built a shipyard for the Caspian navy against Persia (Iran).
- \_\_\_ 1705. Kondraty Bulavin led a Cossack army that captured the city.
- \_\_\_ 1711. Russians recaptured the city and made it the seat for the Astrakhan Governate.
- \_\_\_ 1718. A fire swept through a large part of the crowded city.
- \_\_\_ 1719. The Safavid Persians (from modern Iran) plundered the city.
- \_\_\_ 1720s. Russians rebuilt the city and made it the base for a push into Central Asia.
- \_\_\_ 1764-6. Catherine the Great helped German people settle near the Volga River.
- \_\_\_ 1774. Kazakh tribesmen kidnap thousands of the Volga Deutsch immigrants.
  - Only half were successfully ransomed; the others were killed or sold as slaves.
- \_\_\_ 1830. A cholera epidemic killed most of the people in crowded Astrakhan.
- \_\_\_ 1914. The Bolshevik (Communist) army captured Astrakhan.
- \_\_\_ 1919. A workers' revolt against the Bolsheviks failed; thousands were executed.
- \_\_\_ 1941. The Nazis made Astrakhan one end of the "A-line," the east border of the German Reich.
- \_\_\_ 1942. The Germans bombed the oil terminals of Astrakhan as part of the attack on Stalingrad.
- \_\_\_ 1943. Astrakhan was named the capital of a Soviet oblast (state).
- \_\_\_ 1991. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Astrakhan remained as capital of a new province.
- \_\_\_ 2012. There was massive fraud in the mayoral election, which drew international protests, but the people "accept political corruption as a given that is useless to protest."  
(Quotation from the anonymous author of the Wikipedia history of Astrakhan.)

## Critical Reading of a History Timeline

**Background:** The city of Astrakhan had a long and complicated history.

**Reading:** Critically read each line on the Timeline of Astrakhan History. Try to decide if that was a time of population growth or decline.

1. Put a capital L on the line in front of each date when you think the city might have LOST a lot of its population (at least 1/4 of the people died or left the city).
2. Put a small l by each date when the city population might have gone down a little.
3. Put a small g by each date when you think the population might have grown a little.
4. Put a large G on the line in front of each date when you think the conditions were right for rapid population GROWTH - when many people might have moved to Astrakhan from other places.
5. Put a ? on the line next to a date when you really cannot decide whether the population might grow or decline at that time.

(Try not to have too many ?'s. One fact about critical reading is that there is almost always a little uncertainty about your decisions, BUT the process of trying to make a decision can help you understand the meaning of a text better!)

**Adding it up:** When you have made a decision about each time period, count the total number of dates that you put in each group. Write the totals here:

G's \_\_\_\_\_ g's \_\_\_\_\_ l's \_\_\_\_\_ L's \_\_\_\_\_ ?'s \_\_\_\_\_

**Conclusion:** Write a three-sentence generalization about the history of Astrakhan:

**Discussion question:** How does the history of Astrakhan help us understand the attitude of the people toward the voting fraud in 2012, as well as this quotation from a famous Russian novel (and Oscar-winning movie) called *Dr. Zhivago*?

“War would have ended years ago, but for Russians’ cursed ability to endure suffering.”