PART ONE: THOSE OLD-TIME PEOPLE

Chapter 1
The Three Villages

W hen Andrew Makarin dismantled and burned the Chapel of St. Nicholas at Biorka in the mid-1960s, he formally extinguished the last of three traditional villages that had survived thousands of years on or near Unalaska Island in the eastern Aleutians.[1] Born in 1889, he had become its most influential and tenacious resident. But now it was over. The last resident of Kashega, George Borenin, had moved away a few years earlier, while the third village, Makushin, had succumbed at the outbreak of World War II. The war had hastened the end of these three villages, but they had survived into the 20th century long after others near them had disappeared. What resources had sustained them decade after decade? What crises had they weathered? How had relationships among them changed? What factors had led to their decline? Who had played key roles in their fortunes and misfortunes?

Once the flames from the burning chapel had died out and the ashes had cooled, a wooden shell was erected over the site of the altar to protect the consecrated ground. Surmounted with a cross, the four-sided pyramidal roof sloped down to the walls, the whole standing about five feet above the scorched earth. Andrew died a few years later. Decades passed. The few remaining houses collapsed. Storms splayed their walls and roofs like playing cards across an arc of land resting between a lake and Beaver Inlet, an arm of the Bering Sea. The wild rye that floods the shoreline grew closer until it nearly consumed the small structure. In 2009 and 2010 the National Park Service, as part of its Lost Villages Project, sponsored trips aboard the U.S. Fish and Wildlife vessel *Tiĝlax̂* to the three villages for a few former residents, their children and grandchildren.
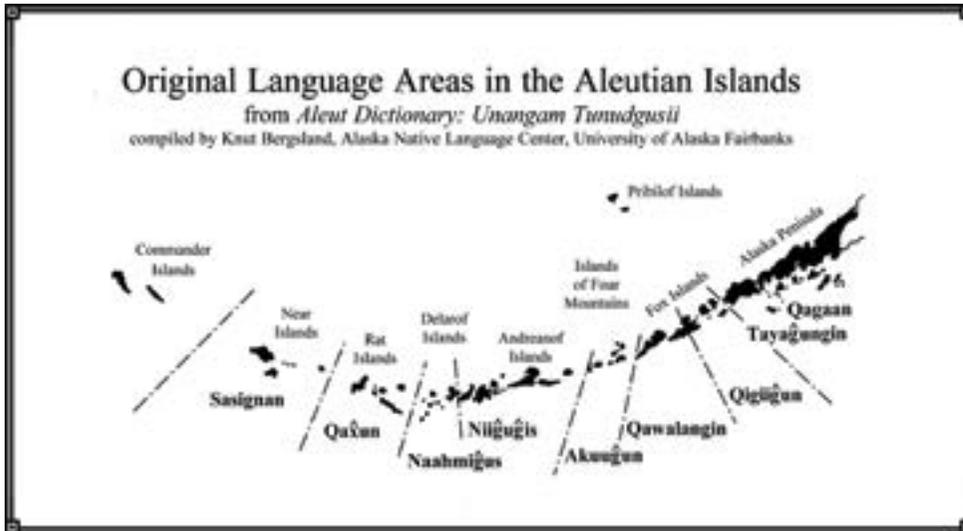
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1   Only one other traditional village remained in this region—Nikolski, on Umnak Island. For the depth and complexity of settlements in the Unalaska Bay area, see Knecht and Davis, "The Amaknak Bridge Site." Called Iliuliuk throughout the 19th century, the village of Unalaska had been established by Russians as a fur-trading center between 1775 and 1778. Even as it absorbed surrounding villages, its core remained a commercial center controlled by outsiders. In a smaller but similar way, Akutan Village was established by late 1876 or early 1877 to meet the needs of the Alaska Commercial Company.

Makushin was reached the first year while Kashega and Biorka were visited in 2010. At Biorka, Irene McGlashan and Kathy Dirks (Andrew's granddaughter) stood beside a new wooden cross erected near the now crumbling structure that had protected the altar site and sang *Memory Eternal [Vechnaya Pamyat]*, the concluding hymn in the service for the dead.
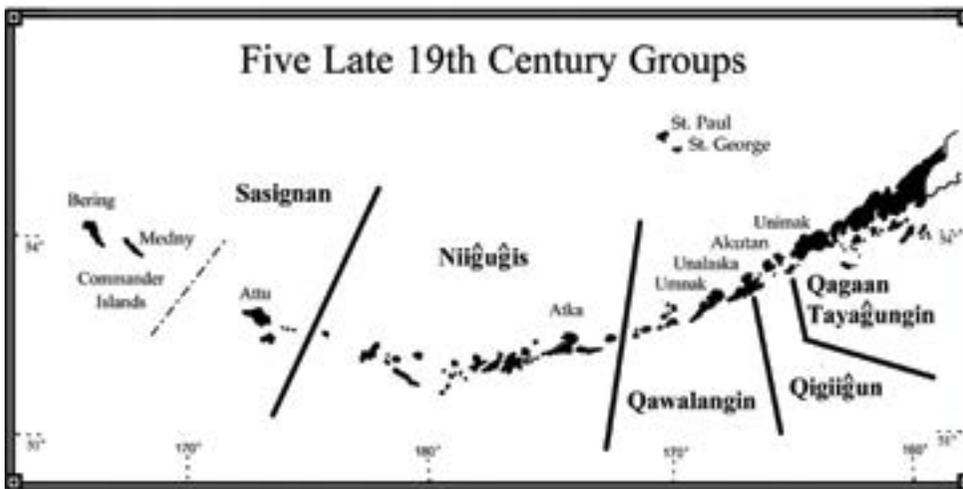
The razing of St. Nicholas Chapel followed by the erection of the protective shell and the visit forty-five years later provide fitting metaphors for the Lost Villages Project: fire and remembrance. This book is another portion of that project. It attempts to trace the history of these three villages through the crucible of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, into the initially prosperous decade under the United States, and then across the first half of the 20th century that saw debilitating poverty, war, relocations, and abandonment.

The newly planted cross at Biorka, 2010. Left to right: Irene McGlashan, Frederick Lekanoff, Jane Mensoff, Kathy Dirks, Brian Rankin, Eva Kudrin. Photograph by Greg Jones.

Map of the Original Language Areas in the Aleutian Islands. Map by Ray Hudson.

Map of the Five Late 19th Century Groups (including the Pribilof Islands). Map by Ray Hudson.

Village Locations

Biorka, Kashega, and Makushin were villages in an area of the eastern Aleutians occupied for millennia by two relatively distinct groups of Unangax̂. Over thousands of years, linguistic, cultural, and political differences had arisen across the thousand-mile chain of islands that were significant enough to produce rivalries and wars. There were eight major groups present when Russians first ventured into the Bering Sea in the 1740s, after a centuries-long eastward expansion across their northern continent.[2] By the time the United States purchased Alaska in 1867, three groups were gone. Although the wars among those that remained had long been over, there were still rivalries and cultural differences that endured into the 20th century.

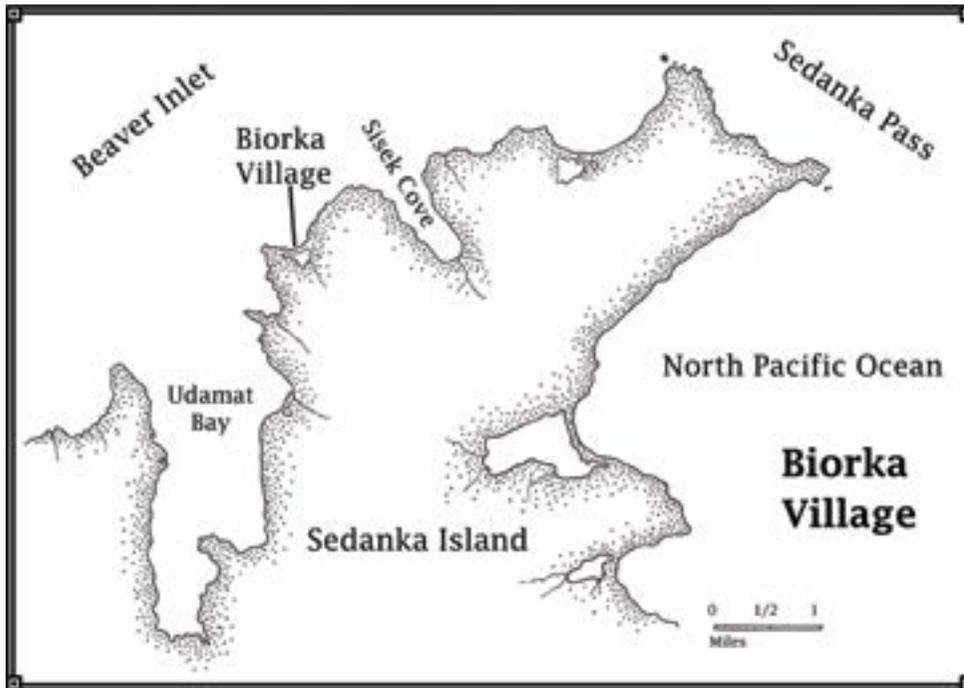2   Bergsland and Dirks, Aleut Tales and Narratives, 2-4.

The remaining five groups had boundaries that differed slightly from those of the 18th century. There was a *Sasignan* village at Chichagof Harbor on Attu in the Near Islands—with occasional occupation of a former village on nearby Agattu. The once populous region from Kanaga Island in the west to Amukta Pass in the east was now represented solely by *Niiĝuĝis* living in a village at Nazan Bay on Atka, a few die-hards who held to the old village in Korovin Bay, and seasonal users of scattered hunting and fishing sites in the Andreanof and Rat islands. The remaining three groups were found in the eastern Aleutians, an area that extends from Amukta Pass, through Umnak, Unalaska, Akutan and Unimak islands to the eastern limit of Unangax̂ territory on the Alaska Peninsula. These people spoke the same basic dialect of Aleut, although there were regional variations. Like the other units, these three had names derived from their respective geographical positions. The *Qawalangin*—a word denoting "a location toward the east"— occupied the area from Amukta Pass eastward to the north side of Unalaska Island. This included Nikolski Village near the southwestern tip of Umnak Island along with Chernofski, Kashega, and Makushin villages on the southwest coast of Unalaska Island. Continuing east, the *Qigiiĝun* lived from Wislow, on the northwest coast of Unalaska Island, through the Krenitzin Islands. This included Unalaska or Iliuliuk, along with Biorka and Akutan villages. The *Qagaan Tayaĝungin*—or "people of the farther east"—inhabited the diverse region east of the Krenitzins, including Unimak Island and the Alaska Peninsula with its adjacent islands.

By 1867 Unangax̂ settlements on St. Paul and St. George in the Pribilof Islands were well established. What began as artificial outposts of transient workers for the Russian-American Company had jelled into permanent and rooted communities by the third decade of the 19th century. The Pribilofs were most closely tied to villages in the eastern Aleutians. Nevertheless, until the mid-20th century when they broke free from repressive government control, their history differed significantly from that of settlements in the Chain. Not unlike the two Pribilof Islands, the two Commander Islands off the coast of Kamchatka had transplanted Unangax̂ settlements. Bering Island had a village primarily composed of people descended from Attu residents, while Atka had been the traditional home of the people on Copper Island.

Biorka Village was located on Sedanka Island. This island is an extension of the southeastern arm of Unalaska Island that forms Beaver Inlet. The two islands are separated by narrow Udagak Strait. Sedanka comprises a little over half of the southern side of Beaver Inlet. This inlet, along with Makushin and Unalaska bays, dozens of smaller bays, protected coves, and deep fjords sculpting the island, give Unalaska the longest coastline of any Aleutian Island. Biorka was originally located beside a lake in a shallow cove at Sedanka's northwestern tip. In the 20th century, people referred to this location as *Achuuĝix̂ Tanax̂taqax̂* ("Outer Former Village").[3] The village itself was called *Qakilux̂*. This name was retained when the village moved further inside Beaver Inlet, beyond deep Sisek Cove to a shallow

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3   Bergsland, Aleut Dictionary, 603.

cove at the mouth of Udamat Bay. The name of this cove, *Sidaanax̂*, was derived from the word for graphite which Unangax̂ had added to their pigments to give the resulting paint on gut raincoats and other items a glistening appearance.[4] This name also appears on the western side of Unalaska Island at Sedanka Point, near Kashega Bay. While there in 1761, Ivan Solov'ev, one of the first Russians to visit the area, was given a small amount of "silver dye with sparkles used for coloring faces."[5]

Biorka Village. Map by Ray Hudson.

In the 19th century, the village was often called by a variant of the name of the bay, Sedanka. In the late 20th century, Irene Makarin referred to the "Biorka church house," as *Sedanka kamgaa ulax̂*. The name *Biorka* appeared sometime in the early 19th century. The word is not Unangax̂, and who bestowed it and why remain a mystery.[6] (Apart from loan words, "B" is not found in *Unangam tunuu*, the Aleut language.) In 1809 the same name was used for an island in Southeast Alaska. Ioann Veniaminov, the great 19th century priest and ethnographer, spelled it "Bor'ka." George Davidson, an early American geologist and cartographer, citing material from Father Innokentii Shaiashnikov in 1867, used "Biorka." Henry W. Elliott called it "Borka" in 1886. The U.S. Bureau of Fisheries recorded "Burka" in 1888, and in the 1890 census Samuel Applegate of Unalaska spelled it "Borka." In 1902 Marcus Baker wrote that it was "now commonly written and pronounced Biórka." He said the name came "from the Norwegian Bjerk

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4   Veniaminov, Notes, 96.
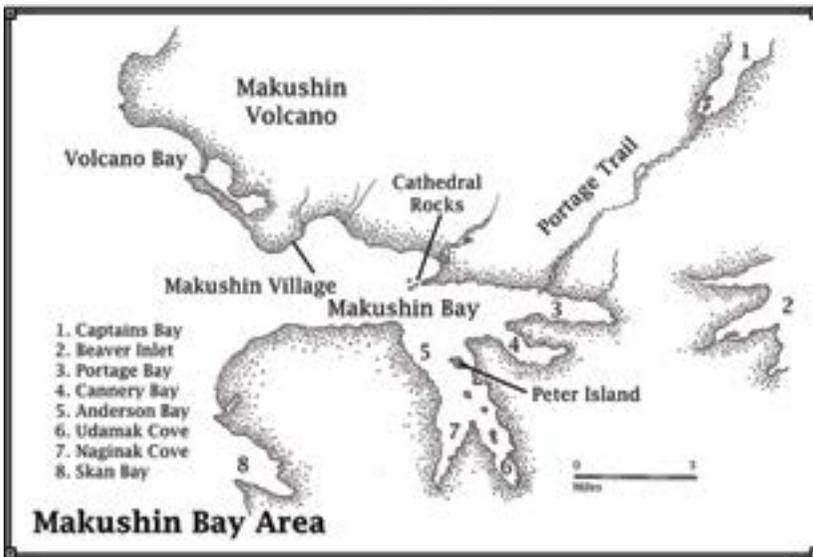5   Ponomarov and Glotov, "The Voyage to Umnak and Unalaska Islands," 62.
6   rene Makarin distinguished "Biorka" and "Borka" with the former used for the old village and "Borka" for the more recent site. The Beginning of Memory, 200.

Ö or Swedish Björk Ö, meaning *Birch Island*."[7] This is either highly unlikely or remarkably inappropriate for a village among islands where there are no trees.

Makushin Volcano, rising 6,680 feet, dominates the broad northwestern arm of Unalaska Island. At the western point of this land mass is Cape Kovrizhka and just south of this is Volcano Bay. Makushin Village was originally located here along a wide beach at the northwestern entrance to Makushin Bay, a vast body of water branching into four other bays and two deep coves. In the 1870s the village was moved inside Makushin Bay, close to where another village had once existed. The new village was called *Ignichiinax̂.*[8]

Variations of the name Makushin appear in early accounts. The suggestion that the name derived from Russian *makushka*, meaning "the top (of the head)," is contravened by its application to the village (and not to the volcano) shortly after contact. The volcano was known as *Ayaĝin* and was not called Makushin until the 19th century.[9] Knut Bergsland suggests *Magusix̂* may refer to "soaking" or be a reference to the lagoons in the vicinity.[10]

Kashega's name evolved from the Unangax̂ word *Qusiix̂.*[11] Veniaminov called the settlement "Koshigi." Lydia Black emphasized that there is no evidence the name derived from "an alleged Russian surname."[12] Unlike Biorka and Makushin that were situated at the entrance to large complex bays with numerous villages, Kashega Village was nestled inside its own relatively small bay. This village was one of several along the southwestern coast of Unalaska.[13] Kashega Bay is framed by McIver Bight on the north and Buck Bight on the south with Buck Island
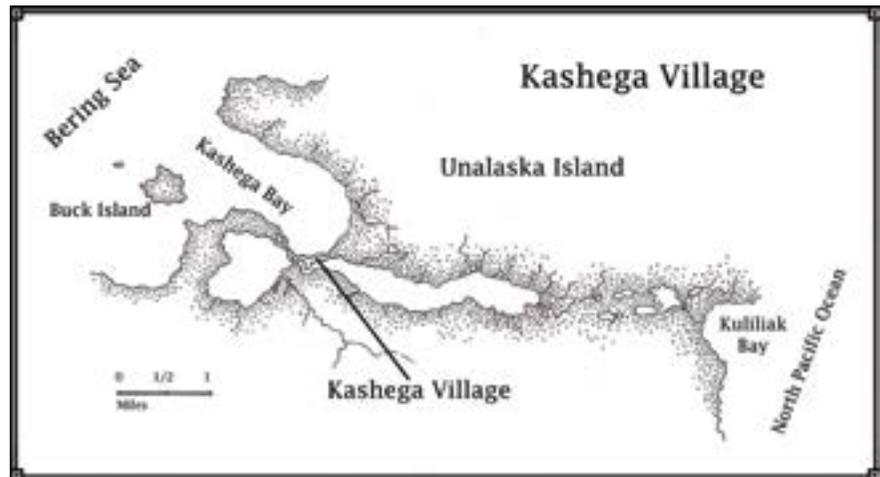

Makushin Bay Area. Map by Rary Hudson.

7   Baker, Geographic Dictionary of Alaska, 98.
8   Nick Galaktionoff in The Beginning of Memory, 152.
9   The generic terms for volcano, anĝidachaluɣ and anĝiĝii, refer to a mountain with a place for emitting breath or smoke. According to Black's marginalia in my copy of Sarychev's Account of a Voyage, Nick Galaktionoff said the name of Makushin Volcano recorded on page 60, Aijagin, referred to any volcano.
10   Bergsland, Aleut Dictionary, 605, 271.
11   Bergsland, Aleut Dictionary, 607.
12   Veniaminov, Notes, 40, note **. It was Sarychev who in 1792 was said to have named the location after Yeflm Koshigin who wintered at Unalaska in 1763.
13   A 1986 survey from Kof Point, at the north entrance to Skan Bay, down to Konets Head at the southern tip of the island, found sixty-two sites (Douglas Veltre, Allen McCartney, and Jean Aigner, Archaeological Survey).

between them. Alexander Baranov, the first manager of the Russian-American Company, described Kashega Bay as "one of the worst" on the island because of winds that hurled out of the west-northwest, northwest, north-northwest "and other points of the compass between."[14] The village was located at the confluence of streams flowing from two fresh water lakes. The larger and more western lake extends into a valley that leads past small streams and freshwater lagoons to Kuliliak Bay on the Pacific side of the island. This low pass effectively cuts Unalaska Island into two topographical sections. North are the precipitous Shaler Mountains that Veniaminov characterized as "high, steep, and impassable."[15] The terrain to the south moderates into a series of gentle hills.

Although these villages will be explored in detail in the course of this book, it is important to understand at the beginning that they were small settlements throughout the 19th and 20th centuries—small but incredibly tenacious. While their numbers varied, each village retained a sustainable core. It is also important to recognize that these villages never existed in isolation. They were components of the social, political, and economic complex that formed the eastern Aleutians. More narrowly, each had ties to nearby villages with Biorka associated with villages in the area and in the Krenitzin Islands while Makushin and Kashega were inextricably bound to Chernofski at the southern tip of Unalaska Island.

Kashega Village.
Map by Ray Hudson.

Populations of Biorka, Kashega, and Makushin, 1834-1930

	c.1834	1867	1890	1897	1920	1930

1834: Ioann Veniaminov, *Notes on the Islands of the Unalashka District*. 1984:259-260
1867: George Davidson, *Alaska Territory*. 1869:222.
1897: C. L. Hooper, *A Report on the Sea-Otter Banks of Alaska*. 1897:27-29.
1890, 1920, 1930: U.S. Census data

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14   Khlebnikov, Notes on Russian America: Parts II-V, 120.
15   Veniaminov, Notes, 94.

Populations of Biorka, Kashega, and Makushin, 1834-1930

Biorka	44	85	57	48	46	22
Kashega	41	69	46	52	51	38
Makushin	35	49	51	71	33	31

1834: Ioann Veniaminov, *Notes on the Islands of the Unalashka District*. 1984:259-260
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Sources and Difficulties

A satisfactory history of these three villages would include archaeological findings, the collective narratives of the communities, and information about the lives of significant individuals. All three areas present problems. Biorka and Makushin are especially complicated because they were not anchored to specific geographic places. Both villages changed physical locations within historic times and yet retained distinct identities.

Little archaeological work has been carried out at any of the three village sites. Projects have been done in the vicinity of Unalaska Bay—most notably on Amaknak Island and at Reese Bay.[16] However, only preliminary surveys have been made of Beaver Inlet, Makushin Bay, and the southwest coast of Unalaska. Generalities about life in the three villages can be inferred from other locations, but each year more discoveries are made in various sections of the Aleutian Chain and new theories are woven from fragmented data as we struggle to understand how, for at least ten thousand years, people adapted in different ways to a rich and challenging environment. A fuller account of life at Makushin, Kashega, and Biorka will have to await further archaeological research.

Written records about the villages are meager. None was ever the subject of a detailed report. They flourished and declined with little attention from the outside world. The scant information available comes primarily from two sources: first, brief reports submitted to Russian and American officials; and, second, Unangax̂ oral traditions and memories. The difficulty with reports has to do with the need their authors had to impress those in charge, a tendency to brag, and an understandable ignorance about the area. On the other hand, Unangax̂ oral narratives, transmitted over centuries, can be surprisingly faithful to the events or at least to the way the events are encapsulated in the memory of the people. For an example of this, see William Laughlin's discussion of the integrity of the local account of the 1763/64 Medvedev massacre and

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16   Dumond, ed. Archaeology in the Aleut Zone of Alaska. McCartney and Veltre, "Longhouses of the Eastern Aleutian Islands, Alaska," 249-265.

its confirmation in archaeological findings and historical sources.[17] I say this despite Veniaminov's caveat that although "more or less accurate" such narratives were "embellished by the imagination of the storytellers."[18] The problem with oral narratives centered on Biorka, Makushin, and Kashega is that they come to us, in a sense, once removed from the oral tradition. That they have arrived at all is remarkable and is almost entirely due to Nick Galaktionoff. In his youth he spent time with elders and listened to their stories. Among them were his grandmother, Marva Petukoff of Makushin, and his acquaintances Andrew Makarin (b. 1889) and Alex Ermeloff (b. 1881) of Biorka. It is important to note, however, that traditional inculcation in oral narratives was not part of Nick's childhood training the way it had been for people a generation earlier, such as Makarin and Ermeloff.

William Tcheripanoff of Akutan, born in 1902, explained that a prerequisite to learning traditional lore was an interest on the part of the child. Repetition was a core pedagogical tool. "Before [the age of] ten the adults let the children watch what they are doing," he said.

> The mothers give them stories, stories, stories, you know. The father, same way with him…. If he [the child] can't stand it, well, they let him go. They have to have the interest to learn or they don't teach them. That's what my mother used to do to me. During fine weather like this, summer time, I want to play outside but had to sit down inside, in the mud-house, grass, you know. She would hold me on her lap and talk to me, talk to me…. One time I asked her, "Ma, you tell me that story yesterday again." My mother say, "Ya, Bill, you're not going to learn it now, not next year either. By and by, you'll learn it." Now I got it now, see? The same way with my father.[19]

Today's elders grew up in the mid-20th century and what passes for traditional knowledge may actually have its roots in published material or in individual memories, rather than in collective village narratives. For example, the erudite Philemon Tutiakoff would sometimes deliver a pronouncement about earlier Unangax̂ practices that, to the uninitiated hearer, might have been mistaken for orally transmitted knowledge when, in fact, he had learned it after reading the 1984 translation of Veniaminov's *Notes on the Islands of the Unalashka District* or some other scholarly work. On the other hand, the fictional account he wrote about 18th century Unangax̂ has traces of traditional practices that reflect the moral and societal norms of his childhood.

It is appropriate to ask how reliable Nick Galaktionoff was as an informant about the "deep past."[20] Reflecting widespread Unangax̂ interest in their history, he met

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17 Laughlin, Aleuts,120-126.
18 Veniaminov, Notes, 301.
19 Hudson, ed., Cuttlefish One, 27.
20 Pratt, "Introductory Note," 121.

many of the criteria the anthropologist Ernest S. Burch Jr. set for reliability.[21] I first met him in 1964 and saw his gradual emergence as an aide to such scholars as Knut Bergsland and Lydia Black. Black used him as a principal informant on several occasions and wrote that he "is believed by others to be the sole surviving authority on ancient whaling lore. The overall time depth of his information extends to six generations…., that is, roughly, to the late 18th century."[22] Marva Petukoff may have incorporated elements of traditional training when she spoke with him; however, the stories Nick conveyed from Makarin and Ermeloff were told to him as an older teenager or young adult. *Unangam tunuu* was Nick's first language and, in repeated tellings, Nick's versions of these stories remained consistent. Information emerged gradually, usually following requests around specific topics. Although his interest in what was being said about his people led him to gather information from visiting scholars, when he repeated this information he often prefaced it with an acknowledgment of its source—just as he did when relaying traditional narratives. His virtual blindness excluded reading contemporary publications.

Differing from traditional narratives, the personal recollections so generously provided by Nick and a handful of early 21st century Unangax̂ need to be evaluated the way that all memories are measured: by their internal consistency and in conjunction with other accounts and records.

Writing about specific individuals who lived in these three villages presents its own challenges. We know there were people of renown in the Aleutians before recorded history. Remarkable burials were reserved for them and their families, interments that included mummification. There are accounts that personal relics—a strand of hair, a dollop of saliva—conveyed something of the power of notable elders.[23] While individuals strove to attain fame through travels and victories in war, a deeply rooted reticence prevented bragging or self-promotion. "An Aleut values only the praise and good reputation which others accord him," wrote Ivan Veniaminov.[24] The anonymity treasured by these early residents of the Chain has resisted our best efforts to pry it loose. Thanks to Knut Bergsland and Lydia Black, we have over 160 personal names from the three villages predating the adoption of Russian names. Because these names were frequently derived from the accomplishments of ancestors, a study of them might reveal clues about specific events in the lives of those "long-ago people"—to use a local expression. It was not that the name of an ancestor was given to a child, but rather the name itself reflected a specific event in the ancestor's life.[25] These names, however, were bestowed in context; that is, when an elder named a child he did it only after telling the story surrounding the name. The name became a device for the preservation of history. Lacking the context, the majority of

21 Burch, "The Method of Ethnographic Reconstruction," 125-129.
22 Black, "Whaling in the Aleutians," 12.
23 Veniaminov, Notes, 224.
24 Veniaminov, Notes, 184.
25 Veniaminov, Notes, 190. See Bergsland's carefully annotated translation in Ancient Aleut Personal Names, 59-60.

ancient names are intriguing, but ultimately mystifying. We can only wonder what an ancestor of a Kashega chief did to be remembered in 1792 by the name *Qugax̂ tunuchx̂inax̂* ("Made the spirit speak") or what deeds the ancestor of an old man from Makushin had done to produce the name *Iĝanax̂ kuchichx̂inax̂* ("Had the terrible one fished out from boulders").[26] Selected to illuminate one moment in a longer narrative, names were unique and were rarely repeated in succeeding generations. Unangax̂ names did not suggest a continuity of spirit; the reincarnation of an ancestor was not conveyed through proper names.[27]

Beginning in the 19th century, a great many names appear in the birth, baptismal, marriage, and death records of the Orthodox church. Unfortunately, few names can be attached to specific events, continuing the difficulty of telling the story of these villages in personal terms. The best sources for even skeletal accounts are Andrei Grinev's recent compilation *Kto Est Kto v Istorii Russkoi Ameriki* [*Who's Who in Russian American History*], published in 2009, and, to a lesser extent, Richard Pierce's *Russian America: A Biographical Dictionary*, published in 1990. Only in the 20th century, specifically with the efforts to understand the implications of the World War II evacuations, do distinct individuals emerge in village histories.
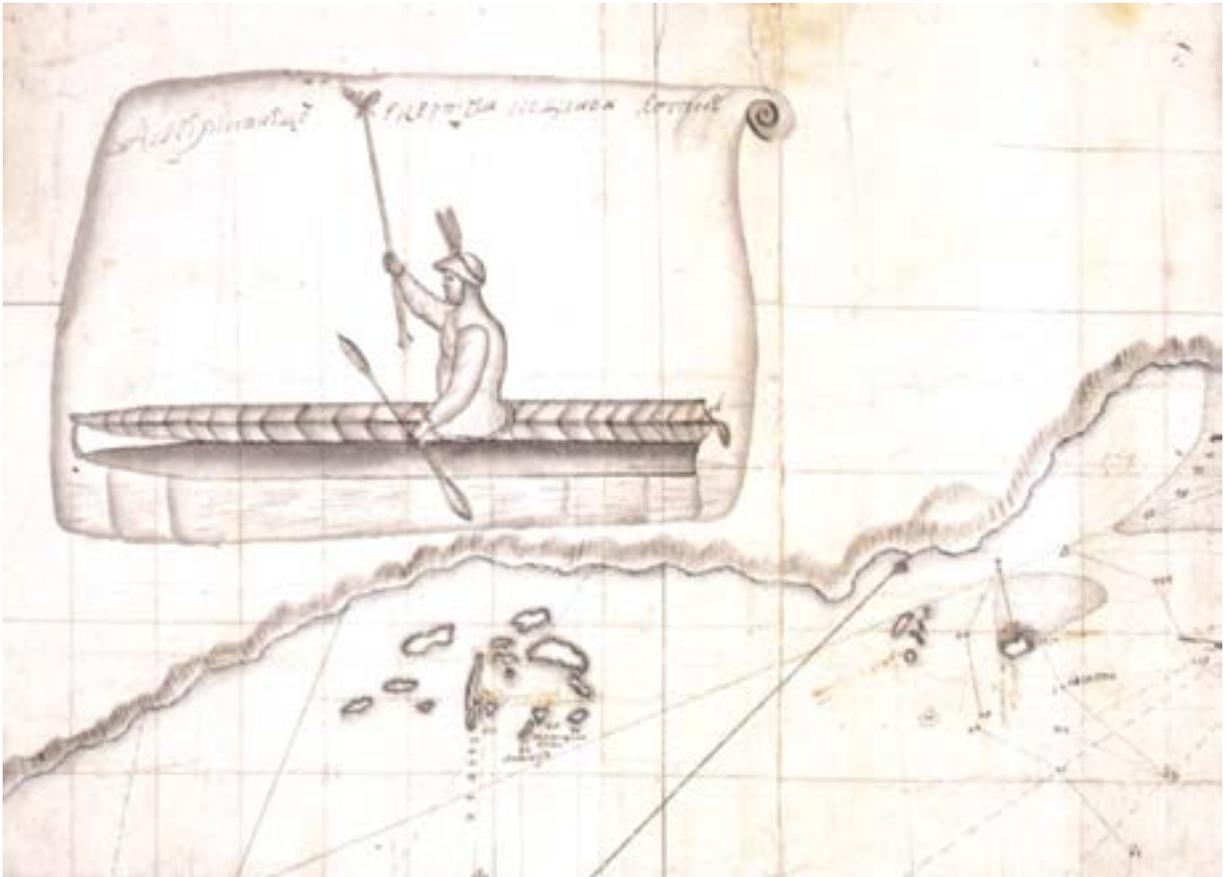

Unalaska.

Given the difficulties involved in writing about these three villages, what value could there possibly be in a description of their slow journey to extinction? One answer is in understanding the significant differences between traditional Unangax̂ villages and an "urban village" such as Unalaska. In varying degrees, these three villages extended the familial nature of 18th century communities into the 20th century. To describe the small differences that distinguished these three from one another is more difficult than to detail how they differed from Unalaska, the regional center for commerce and religion. And it is this latter difference that is more illuminating. Survivors of these villages, long after the villages had ceased to exist and the residents had moved elsewhere, would proudly identify themselves as Kashega people or Makushin people or Biorka people. Another reason is that the story of these villages expands our understanding of the impact of World War II on Alaska Native communities. A third reason is found in the contributions the last residents made as people today reclaim cultural identifiers and redefine what it means to be Unangax̂ in the 21st century. There is no doubt that the handful of survivors from these three lost villages helped shape contemporary Unangax̂ identity. They did this by living ordinary lives centered on the seasons, by raising families, by speaking Unangam tunuu, by the traditional skills they practiced and shared, by the ways they met a host of challenges, and by the stories they told their children and grandchildren. The last gift was memory.

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26   Bergsland, *Ancient Aleut Personal Names*, 138, 135..
27   Bergsland, *Ancient Aleut Personal Names*, 64, 63.

Sketch of an "Aleut at Shumagin Island" by Sven Waxell, mate of the *St. Peter* captained by Vitus Jonassen Bering, Second Kamchatka Expedition, 1741. wikimedia.org