

THE NEW AFOGNAK:  
A CASE STUDY OF THE RELOCATION OF THE AFOGNAK VILLAGE TO PORT LIONS

A  
PROJECT

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*Thank you Native Village of Afognak for providing figures 1-10, 12-13, 16-19 used in this project.*

## I. Introduction

The Kodiak Archipelago is located 225 air miles south of Anchorage in the Gulf of Alaska. Afognak Island is the second largest island of the archipelago. The Kodiak Archipelago is a temperate rain forest, with a mild climate from the warm Japanese current. The temperature remains fairly constant (usually between 0°F and 60°F) with occasional high winds.



Fig. 1: Kodiak Archipelago Map

The Alutiiq people, the indigenous people of the region, have inhabited the Kodiak Archipelago for approximately 10,000 years.<sup>1</sup> The Alutiiq population at the time of Russian contact is estimated to have been about 6,500, which decreased by half largely due to disease,<sup>2</sup> but was also affected by war and migration. Today, the U.S. Census reports that 1,772 Alutiiq people residing within the archipelago<sup>3</sup> in six villages (Akhiok, Karluk, Larsen Bay, Old Harbor, Ouzinkie, and Port Lions) and the City of Kodiak, many more live elsewhere in Alaska and in the lower 48 states.

Traditionally the Alutiiq people called themselves Sugpiat, “The Real People.” The first western contact they experienced was with the Russians who arrived on Kodiak in 1763.<sup>4</sup> The Russians called the Sugpiat “Aleuts,” the same term they used to call the indigenous group of

<sup>1</sup> Crowell, A. Steffian, A. and Pullar, G. (2001). *The Origins of Alutiiq Culture*. Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People. P. 26. Fairbanks: University of Alaska.

<sup>2</sup> Crowell, A., et al (2001). P. 32.

<sup>3</sup> According to the 2000 United States Census.

<sup>4</sup> Crowell, A., et al. (2001). P. 54.

people who inhabited the Aleutian Chain in Southwest Alaska. The Sugpiat/Aleuts began calling themselves “Alutiiq,” the Sugpiat translation of “Aleut,” by the early 1850’s, as documented by ethnographer, Heinrich Holmberg in 1854.<sup>5</sup> As demonstrated in the quoted material throughout this case study, the people use all three terms and may call themselves whichever term they feels is appropriate. Today, all three names may be used interchangeably although the generally accepted term is, “Alutiiq.”

The primary focus of this case study can be best characterized in two parts. The first section evaluates the relocation of the Afognak Village residents after the 1964 Earthquake and Tsunami. Utilizing firsthand accounts of Afognak residents and the author’s personal experiences as an Afognak



Fig. 2: Afognak and Port Lions Location Map

Alutiiq growing up after the relocation in the Native Village of Port Lions. This case study will discuss the relocation and how it affected the culture, identity, and traditional values of the Afognak Alutiiq people. Currently there are several traditional Alaska Native villages in rural Alaska facing the need to relocate because of erosion or other environmental changes. Thus, the second section of this case study will provide applications for future relocations efforts, utilizing the experience gained from the Afognak relocation.

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<sup>5</sup> Holmberge, H. (1985). *Holmberg’s Ethnographic Sketches*. P. 35. Fairbanks: The University of Alaska Press.

## II. Life in Afognak Prior to 1964

### Layout of Community

For centuries before Russian contact the Village of Afognak sat on the coast of Afognak Island. Later, the Afognak Village consisted of two distinct settlements “Russian Town,” also known as “Derevnia,” and “Aleut Town.” During Russian colonial rule many Russian men intermarried with Alutiiq women creating a Creole class.<sup>6</sup> Russian America, later named Alaska, was dominated by the Russian American Company, which enjoyed a monopoly over all of Alaska.<sup>7</sup> By the time many of the Russian American Company employees reached retirement

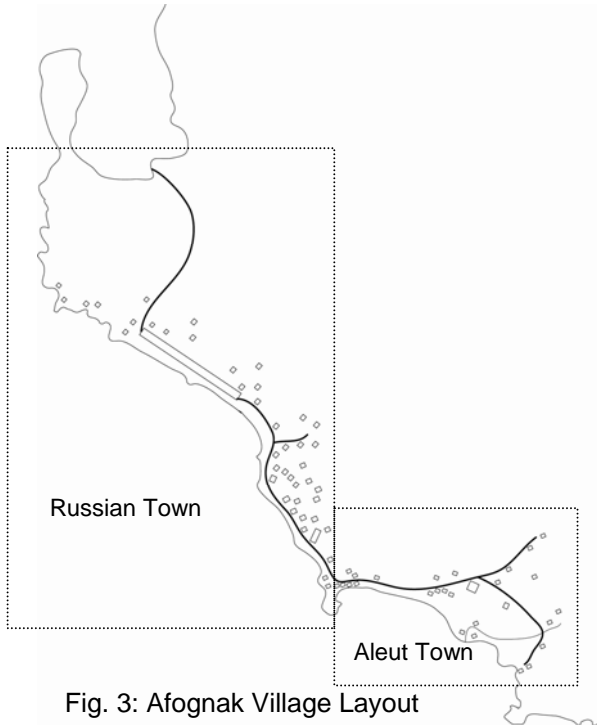


Fig. 3: Afognak Village Layout

age, many had married into the community and opted to stay in Afognak upon retirement.

Eventually, a Russian retirement community, named “Russian Town” or “Derevnia,” was established as part of Afognak community, but a distinctly separate settlement from “Aleut Town.”

Later, during the United States rule, canneries were established throughout coastal Alaska.<sup>8</sup> The companies which owned the canneries often preferred to hire outsiders instead of Natives and thus imported a large number of Scandinavians,

among other cultures, for a workforce.<sup>9</sup> This cultural influx affected the small Villages. In Afognak, the Scandinavians also established roots in “Russian Town” and became integrated

<sup>6</sup> Crowell, A., et al. (2000). P. 58.

<sup>7</sup> Crowell, A., et al. (2000). P. 54.

<sup>8</sup> Crowell, A., et al. (2000). P. 63.

<sup>9</sup> Crowell, A., et al. (2000). P. 63.

into the Afognak community. Lars Larsen, an Alutiiq Elder who grew up in Afognak, talked of the influence the two cultures ultimately had on Afognak Village; “The Russian influence was there in language and custom of tradition for eating and the church influence was there. However, the skills of the Nordic people, they were carpenters...bricklayers. These skills showed up in the structures that they built there...”<sup>10</sup> The intermixing of the three cultures had an overwhelming impact on the Afognak Alutiiq people’s religious beliefs, language, and traditions.

Historically the settlements were divided, as indicated by their names, along racial lines. The names of the two settlements continued overtime. However, as the groups inter-married and shared social experiences, the racial divisions become harder to discern as the following statements demonstrate. Elder John Pestrikoff clearly recalled racial discontent and a division that led to fighting among the younger generation while attending school in the early 1900’s:

Recess time the bigger boys used to hold me against the wall, the other boys bloody my nose and stuff like that. Teacher’s didn’t care for that, they didn’t mind because we lived on the other side, Aleut Town side, just because we lived on that side. Teacher’s didn’t care. If you have a bloody nose, wash it off and sit down in your desk and do your work. That was hard. One recess time they were after me, they were going to gang up on me again like they did before. So I was prepared, I ran out, first one, ran out recess time. They were getting ready to gang up on me again, do the same thing to me. It hurts when they hit you, you’re against the wall like crucified and the bigger boys hold your legs and arms and let

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<sup>10</sup> Unpublished interview with Lars Larsen (July 23, 1998). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. Dig Afognak Elders Camp. Afognak, Alaska.

them hit you, the smaller boys hit you. Just hatred, discriminations...Russian Town they gang up on you because I lived on the other side, Aleut Town. That was rough. So, I ran, I ran like a rabbit, fast. They never caught up to me because I was ahead of them, quite a few feet. I ran home. I never went to school since. I didn't finish my fourth grade.<sup>11</sup>

There may also have been a strong understanding of sharing and a sense of community despite for both sides of the village.

As a child I had no comprehension of racial lines or heritage had any effect on our relationships or our family lifestyle. We accepted them, they accepted us, as far as my contacts because my dad could speak the language too, he learned the language, the Aleut language....He also treated them like he treated anybody else. We helped; my dad would help them, the people in Aleut Town when they were short on food. Many times they didn't have vegetables, they didn't have meat, and he would be more than willing to share. We were never told that this person was not acceptable, or we should keep away from them, or anything. We had free access to them and they had free access to us. Many of the people from Aleut Town would come to our home knowing that they could get help. My dad was readily available.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Unpublished interview with John Pestrikoff (July 23, 1998). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. *Dig Afognak Elders Camp*. Afognak, Alaska.

<sup>12</sup> Unpublished interview with Lars Larson (July 23, 1998). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. *Dig Afognak Elders Camp*. Afognak, Alaska.

Elder Betty (Larsen) Nelson describes her experiences and those of her husband Abner Nelson:

...We mentioned Aleut Town and Derevnia [Russian Town] I never knew, I never sensed a division there. Because we played with all the kids from Aleut Town and they played with us and we didn't live in Aleut Town we lived in the Russian part of town...Abner said when he was younger there was a kind of maybe what you would call prejudice, you know there was a kind of you didn't mix the two, the young people anyways. But I never had that feeling I always felt just free and accepted in both areas.<sup>13</sup>

Gladys (Gregorioff) Olsen recalls that by the time she attended school, such racial issues began to subside:

We spoke Russian most of the time and then they spoke the Native language and they had a village of their own right in the same like Afognak in the end but they call it Aleut Town. But, by the time I went to school everybody went to school. Everybody mixed together, there was no difference no matter what nationality you were.<sup>14</sup>

Many of the Elders, like John Pestrikoff, Lars Larsen, and Gladys (Gregorioff) Olsen were raised in a time when it was considered better to be Russian, which suggests a definite

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<sup>13</sup> Unpublished interview with Betty Nelson (September 19, 1998). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. *Youth & Elders Conference*. Kodiak, Alaska.

<sup>14</sup> Unpublished interview with Gladys Olsen (November 30, 1998). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. Kodiak, Alaska.



racial divide. And so, those who could pass as Russians did. Many of them, like Lars perhaps still, out of habit, call themselves Russian.

Perhaps the racial division, and eventual acceptance is best articulated by Elder Julia (Lukin) Naughton, “We lived in what they called Aleut Town and it didn’t bother me that it was called Aleut Town cause people on the other side were Aleuts too but they called it Russian Town. And it didn’t bother me cause nobody really made a big issue of it.”<sup>15</sup> Although some of the people of Afognak may have passed as Russian or white, they were Native people and thus, no one was better than anyone else was.

## **Subsistence**

In the days before western contact, Afognak people lived without federal laws and western currency. Instead, they lived as a community following the traditional Alutiiq way of life, living from the land and sea and trading with other indigenous groups. After western contact and the subsequent purchase of Alaska by the U.S., a new way of regulating the people’s inter-dependency with the land was enforced. Eventually foreign definitions of ‘subsistence’ were forced on Alaska Native people in an effort to better ‘regulate’ their use of Alaska’s natural resources. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service defines subsistence as “...the customary and traditional uses by rural Alaska residents of wild, renewable resources for direct personal or family consumption as food, shelter, fuel, clothing, tools or transportation; for the making and selling of handicraft articles out of nonedible by-products of fish and wildlife resources taken for

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<sup>15</sup> Unpublished interview with Julia Naughton (July 18, 1999). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak, Kodiak, Alaska.

personal or family consumption; for barter; and for customary trade.”<sup>16</sup> This definition illustrates the economic and nutrient importance of subsistence.

Certainly, the Afognak people spent a substantial amount of their time gathering subsistence foods, hunting and fishing, as proved through this account by Gertrude Raumaker, who spoke of her impressions when moving to the remote community for the first time:

The village stores seemed pitifully inadequate to us, especially since they weren't to receive any new stocks until several months after we arrived. The hardest privation was no meat! Just a few mouldy hams, because the people, themselves, were in the habit of supplying their needs with fish – dried fish, salt fish, canned fish. Margaret and I got so hungry for thick steaks, hamburgers, and roasts, that whenever possible we would hitch hike to Kodiak for a fresh-meat spree.<sup>17</sup>

However, both the federal definition of “subsistence” and Raumaker’s description of the village store fail to articulate the cultural value of subsistence for the Afognak Alutiiq people. Subsistence activities traditionally reinforced many cultural values such as kinship and respect. Pat “Juney” Mullan discussed how providing food for the community strengthened the importance of family and individual’s roles within them. Life was a system guided by reciprocity - helping one another and sharing what you had with the entire community:

And I can remember in school sometimes dad would ask me to take the shotgun to school or a twenty-two or something and try to get a duck or rabbit or something on the way home and we'd always give it to an elder. If we went out fishing we'd

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<sup>16</sup> U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. *Federal Subsistence Management Program: Wildlife Regulations*. Retrieved April 2, 2005 from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska Region website <http://alaska.fws.gov/asm/>.

<sup>17</sup> Raumaker, G. (1945). “Full Moon Over Afognak.” P. 31. *The Alaska Sportsman*.

come home with a bunch of fish and we'd sometimes never get any for ourselves because we'd give 'em to elders. If one of the ladies in the village had, her husband was sick or something, they couldn't get fish we'd give it all to them. So there was a real sense of the village taking care of each other we knew who needed what it was really, I think fantastic way to be raised with that sense of community.<sup>18</sup>

Mullan's account of the importance of subsistence illustrates the sense that the community members felt responsible to provide for the entire community, not just themselves or their immediate family. Elders were to be respected and provided for and those too weak or sick were to be looked after.

As Mullan describes below, life in Afognak revolved around the seasons and subsistence activities. The yearly cycle of nature guided activities:

In the spring of the year the men would go out and we'd get loads of kelp for... fertilizer you get the leafy kelp at low tide. And they'd bring it in and we'd back it up the gardens....And then men would go up to Port Bailey or Uganik and they'd start working on their seines and getting ready for fishing. Then the women would work in the gardens. And then at the end of the salmon season, in the fall, it would be time to harvest the gardens so the potatoes or whatever would all be picked up and the men would take them up to the cellars and store 'em. And then after that we'd all go together and get Silvers and work as a family. But it seemed like it flowed so smoothly the gardens would be planted before the men

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<sup>18</sup> Unpublished interview with Pat "Juney" Mullan, Jr. (May 2, 1999). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. Kenai, Alaska.

left, then fishing be over, the men would come back harvest them, put 'em away, and then we'd all go Silver fishing.

Subsistence activities involved everyone in the family and took precedence over other activities. Pat "Juney" Mullan talked about how everyone in his family had an important role in subsistence activities:

...when we did fishing with gram and grandpa we'd make a little dam in Aleut Town creek and just put all the fish in there...gram and grandpa be over splitting fish, and mom and dad, and Johnny, you know, the whole family. The kids we'd be...cleaning fish or whatever it was just a big family thing. And then canning cases and cases and we'd cook 'em in a big galvanized wash tubs....We'd go out Malina beach and I can remember grandma baking bread in the beach. She'd dig a hole in the beach and put dough in a coffee [can] and wrap aluminum foil or something, build a fire over it and sit there. They'd boil fish heads and humpys in a old coffee can right on the beach and sit there and have a picnic.<sup>19</sup>

Alexandria (Knagin) Spracher spoke of going trapping together as a family, "Oh, papa used to take us...when he went trapping or hunting...." She explained that her family would leave in October and would not return to Afognak until spring:

And wouldn't come back 'til maybe March or April. So all I had I'd have just a couple of months of schooling. I'm never ashamed to admit I was seventeen years

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<sup>19</sup> Unpublished interview with Pat "Juney" Mullan, Jr. (May 2, 1999). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. Kenai, Alaska.

old when I was in the seventh grade 'cause I missed so much school papa taking the whole family rowing from Afognak to Village Island....<sup>20</sup>

Spracher's experience exemplifies the crucial importance of subsistence to the community. Teaching the Alutiiq traditional way of life was more valued in the community than earning a western education. People could use subsistence skills to provide for their families and serve a vital role in the village, whereas an education meant one would have to leave the community to attend high school and get a job outside.

Ruth (Olsen) Dawson also discussed the importance of family while lovingly describing smoking fish with her grandmother Christina (Knagin) Lukin during the summer months.

...when the men brought fish home...grandmother immediately worked on it...we'd go to the beach and split the fish and then rinse it off right there in the creek. And then they had an old wooden box that they carried the fish up in and they would stop again at the middle of the creek to rinse it off again. And before we got it up to the house some of it went into the smoke house and some of it went for canning. But I can remember getting up four o'clock in the morning to go down to the...mouth of the creek to, to be with grandmother while she, while she split the fish and got it ready for the smoking or the canning. It was important, it was a very important part of our lives. And some of it they would have outside screens kind of like the food cache that you see up in the interior but they just had them up high on stilts and with a screen all around it. And they would dry fish like

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<sup>20</sup> Unpublished interview with Alexandria Spracher (September 18, 1999). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. Kodiak, Alaska.

that. And that was a important part of their diet but grandmother would smoke two hundred and fifty fish at a time and she worked hard, very hard. And she was known all around the island for her smoked fish. Everybody wanted Mrs. Lukin's fish.<sup>21</sup>

Subsistence practices not only emphasized family relations, bonds and responsibilities, but they also taught traditional roles. For example, the women were responsible for gathering foods while the men were away fishing, as described by Dawson:

The women spent a lot of time gathering berries, herbs and medicinal plants. And then another thing was always picking berries...[grandmother] would show me as a little girl to pick the ones down below and she would get the higher ones. And that was, that was another part that was fun and of course then we'd come home and she'd clean them before we get 'em ready for jelly or family desert of cheeduk<sup>22</sup> and that was always a highlight in my life.<sup>23</sup>

The gardens in Afognak proved to be a important source of fresh food for the Afognak people, and another means of family unification. Nicholas Anderson talks of their prominence in Afognak, "Oh, everyone had one. Holy smokes there's gardens everywhere! We grew a lot of potatoes and rutabagas, strawberries, and even beets...." The Afognak people adapted the western system of agriculture to complement their subsistence meats, creating a community that was very self-sufficient, ending any requirement on outside sources of food.

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<sup>21</sup> Unpublished interview with Ruth Dawson (July 18, 1999). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak, Kodiak, Alaska.

<sup>22</sup> Cheeduk is an Alutiq delicacy which consists of salmon berries, canned milk and sugar mixed together.

<sup>23</sup> Unpublished interview with Ruth Dawson (July 18, 1999). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak, Kodiak, Alaska.

## Social / Kinship Roles

“Basically the whole village was our yard we could go anywhere. And there was always somebody there to watch.”<sup>24</sup>

Pat “Juney” Mullan, Afognak Resident

The people of Afognak Village were a community. They relied on one another, valued each person’s contributions, and celebrated the intricacies of life together. The Afognak people often talk of the big gatherings the community would have when everyone would come together to visit and celebrate.



Fig. 4: Children in Afognak

...the fondest memories [of Afognak] I think were the gatherings. Like a birthday party...if it was my birthday or anybody’s birthday, the whole village would be invited....There’d be like thirty, forty people in the house just celebrating a birthday. And there’d be peroks, and cakes,

and pies, and homemade stuff it was an all day thing, it wasn’t just a piece of pie, a bunch of gifts and ice cream and it was over with. It was, it was a big thing.

Just the sense of, I think the sense of family taking care of each other.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Unpublished interview with Pat “Juney” Mullan, Jr. (May 2, 1999). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. Kenai, Alaska.

Just about everything in village life could be a social opportunity, “And in Afognak if there was banya at five o’clock you were over there at noon and it was a social affair. Everybody showed up and you sat and drank tea and ate tarts all day.”<sup>26</sup>

Allen Lukin discussed the feeling of friendship that was so prevalent in Afognak, “What I really liked about it was all the people were very friendly. If there was something going on everybody pitched in to help. And [when] there was [a] doing everybody got together.”<sup>27</sup>

Lars Larsen talked about the social gatherings in Afognak and the love of music, gatherings, and dance the Afognak people shared:

My next door neighbor, who was Paul Chichenoff and



Fig. 5: people dressed up for masquerade party in Afognak

related to us, had a dance hall. It was my job just before the dance to go over there sweep it out and put the dance powder on the floor to make it slick. The people from Katani here would come over, they were very musical, they would play the banjo, the mandolin, guitar, and I think they also played the accordion. There were other people that were talented. The Nelson family were talented, my

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<sup>25</sup> Unpublished interview with Pat “Juney” Mullan, Jr. (May 2, 1999). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. Kenai, Alaska.

<sup>26</sup> Unpublished interview with Pat “Juney” Mullan, Jr. (May 2, 1999). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. Kenai, Alaska.

<sup>27</sup> Unpublished interview with Allen Lukin (April 6, 1999). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. Anchorage, Alaska.



brothers could play different instruments. None of them had official lessons in music but they could all listen by ear: they could duplicate anything they hear on the radio. It was really amazing....Everybody was a good dancer in Afognak.<sup>28</sup>

The gatherings and social events were such an intricate part of the community's structure, and they remain vibrant memories in the hearts of the Afognak people. Social gatherings may have been, like the dances, an opportunity to celebrate their connectedness to each other and the village that they called home.

### **Russian Orthodox Church**

The Russian Orthodox Church was a fundamental part of the Afognak community. The Russian Orthodox beliefs, brought during Russian occupation of Alaska, had a powerful impact on the Afognak people. Their lives centered on the Church and religious events. It was, in many respects, the heartbeat of the Village. Lars Larsen stressed the importance of the Church:

The Russian Orthodox Church was the main factor in circle where we had our religious activities centered there. Also our recreational activities were part of it and it was a portion of our life that occupied, I'd say, sixty percent of our lives.



Fig. 6: Afognak Russian Orthodox Church, 1943

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<sup>28</sup> Unpublished interview with Lars Larsen (July 23, 1998). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. *Dig Afognak Elders Camp*. Afognak, Alaska.

Because we were very devout, we believed what the priest preached and taught us, and we were quite obedient to the teaching of the Russian Orthodox faith.<sup>29</sup>

Arlene (Garner) Nelson talked of the excitement she and her sisters felt during the Russian holidays:

...we didn't have much money but for every holiday, mainly the holidays were Easter and Christmas, even if there were six of us girls in our family, four boys, each holiday we ran around in black patent shoes and a fluffy dress. That was for the Christmas holidays and our special Christmas program at school and we were so very proud of every piece of clothing we got then. But we were dressed to the hilt on holidays.<sup>30</sup>

Pat "Juney" Mullan also discussed the importance of the Church:

Our family life, the school life, the social functioning of the village revolved around Russian holidays...everything revolved around what was going on it [the] Russian Orthodox Church. If there was a Russian holiday the school was let out. If we were fasting for communion we weren't served the snacks and stuff at school that we would have normally gotten.

The Village celebrated Russian Orthodox holidays, which followed the Russian calendar. Thus, the community often doubled up on holidays. For instance, Christmas and Easter was celebrated on both the American date and Russian date.

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<sup>29</sup> Unpublished interview with Lars Larsen (July 23, 1998). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. *Dig Afognak Elders Camp*. Afognak, Alaska.

<sup>30</sup> Unpublished interview with Arlene Nelson (November 30, 2000). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. Kodiak, Alaska.

### **III. The Impact of the 1964 Earthquake & Tsunami**

“Made me understand the awesome power of our Creator seeing something like that happen.”<sup>31</sup>

Ivan Lukin, Afognak Resident

The Afognak people had to adapt to many dramatic changes, starting with the arrival of the Russians. However, few experiences can compare to the affect of the 1964 Earthquake and Tsunami. Dr. Gordon Pullar wrote the following brief description of the impact of the 1964 earthquake and tsunami:

After many millennia of existence, change and development the village of Afognak suddenly and dramatically changed forever at 5:36p.m. on Good Friday, March 27, 1964. The Great Alaska Earthquake and Tsunami was a defining moment for many Alaskans but few more than the residents of Afognak village. The earthquake, with a magnitude of 9.2 on the Richter Scale and lasting four minutes, was the largest earthquake ever recorded in North America and the second largest recorded anywhere (the largest was in Chile in 1960). The earthquake’s epicenter was in Northern Prince William Sound, about 280 miles northeast of Afognak.

In the day following the earthquake there were 11 aftershocks measuring over 6.0 on the Richter Scale and nine more in the following three weeks. The earthquake and tidal wave caused many millions of dollars in damages in Alaska as well as in

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<sup>31</sup> Unpublished interview with Ivan Lukin (July 18, 1999). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. Kodiak, Alaska.

Canada, Oregon, California and Hawaii. In the Kodiak area alone the financial losses were estimated at over \$45 million. The total death toll in Alaska was 107 with another 15 dying in Oregon and California. The people of Afognak not only mourned the death of two of its residents who were returning from Kodiak on their fishing boat but the loss of their village and life as they had known it. Afognak was hit with a wave having a maximum height of 10.8 feet. The loss of homes, vehicles, bridges, and personal possessions in Afognak was estimated at over \$500,000 and the cost of reestablishing the village at \$816,000. The population of Afognak at the time of the earthquake and tsunami was estimated at 190 by the U.S. Bureau of Census. In their report prepared in 1965 and published in 1967, Kachadoorian and Plafker said, 'Of an estimated 38 structures in the village, 23 were either extensively damaged or destroyed. Many structures, including the grocery store and community hall, were floated from their foundations and washed as much as a half a mile inland....In addition, most of the estimated 26 automobiles in the village were either damaged by the water or destroyed by the waves; two bridges were washed out along the coastal road.' As a result of the tectonic subsidence at Afognak some of the wells used for water supply were contaminated by salt water.<sup>32</sup>

The 1964 Earthquake and Tsunami and the devastation it wreaked on their village was an emotional shock for the Afognak people and would test their strength as a community.

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<sup>32</sup> Pullar, G. (2004). *The Great Alaska Earthquake and Tsunami of 1964*. Afognak Village History. Retrieved March 6, 2005 from the Native Village of Afognak Website: [http://www.afognak.org/education/history\\_chapter1.php](http://www.afognak.org/education/history_chapter1.php).

#### IV. Immediately Following the Earthquake & Tsunami

“Some of the families didn’t know if their kids were alive or not....”<sup>33</sup>

Julia (Knagin) Pestrikoff, Afognak Resident

The 1964 Earthquake and Tsunami changed the lives of the Afognak people forever. The devastation of the earthquake and tsunami was felt by everyone and pushed their emotions to the edge. The security and stability they felt for their community was shaken to the core as they returned to the village to find much of it destroyed. Many of the residents had little choice but to

clean out their homes and live in them until an alternative was found.

Helen (Knagin) Nelson described her family’s experience, “...[our home

was] taken off

its...foundation and put in

a different position. But we cleaned it up and stayed there ‘til...we moved to Port Lions.”<sup>34</sup>



Fig. 7: The Afognak store was washed out into the ocean from the 1964 Earthquake and Tsunami

Betty (Larsen) Nelson talked of the fear the residents experienced as the environment around them changed drastically after the 1964 earthquake and tsunami.

<sup>33</sup> Unpublished interview with Julia Pestrikoff (October 11, 1999). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. Location unknown.

<sup>34</sup> Unpublished interview with Helen Nelson (September 19, 1998). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. *Youth & Elders Conference*. Kodiak, Alaska.

...the lake was, everything was just full of saltwater. And the tides started coming in and it came up to parts, I mean up to heights that it never had been before. We didn't realize that the land had sank five to eight feet in some places. So it started coming...up to the yard almost... it was confusing...just frightening. It was like some kind of nightmare...on high tide and where there was a Northeast wind the water would just about come up to our front door....<sup>35</sup>

Allen Lukin indicated that their water supply became contaminated from saltwater forcing residents to seek out alternative locations to fill their needs:

We used to have a well right pretty close to the house a water well and after the tidal wave we had to walk all, we'd had plastic jugs all the ways to Aleut Town they had a big creek there. We used to have to get our water from there and pack it all the ways home. Some, take a jug or two on our ways to school, fill up a jug and walk home, pack it home.

John Pestrikoff discussed the loss some of the villagers experienced, and the reaffirmation of their traditional ways as illustrated by the united assistance the people received from their fellow community members:

...we were lucky we didn't lose much; we didn't lose our boat and we didn't lose much groceries; not even flour...our home was nice and dry; that's how lotta people come down [to our house] and have something hot to survive on you

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<sup>35</sup> Unpublished interview with Betty Nelson (September 19, 1998). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. *Youth & Elders Conference*. Kodiak, Alaska.

know, what we had...we shared a hot water or whatever we had...some of them lost everything; clothes, food, no house....<sup>36</sup>

The community found the strength to survive by relaying, as their traditional values had taught them, upon each other. They united and supported one another as they sought solutions to the devastation they faced.

## **V. The Decision to Relocate**

I have often heard stories about the state of the village following the earthquake and tsunami and the decision to move the village. According to the stories, the men got together and talked about what to do for their future. After much discussion, they held a vote on whether to rebuild Afognak or relocate the village to a new place. I am told it was a very close vote; 18 for relocating, 17 for rebuilding the village. After the decision was made, the men began seeking out a new location for their village. Betty (Larsen) Nelson described the search they endured for a new home:

...we weren't going to be able to build and so they all got in their boats and started looking for a new place. Then that was the first, that was our first form of government that we experienced. They formed a city council with several of the men and they decided that we should look for a new location. And then when they did look they wanted a place with some place where there was first of all clear good water source. Then deep water for the...they had visions of the ferrying coming in. And a good harbor for the boats and airstrip. We wanted all the modern conveniences that we could get. But then they looked over at Anton

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<sup>36</sup> Unpublished interview with John Pestrikoff (October 11, 1999). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. Location unknown.

Larsen Bay and they looked at Litnik but those places, all of them hunted those places for all their lives, and they knew those bays froze sometimes. Anton Larsen, not a good location so then they settled on Settlers Cove there.<sup>37</sup>

Once the people chose the site of their new village, they were faced with the momentous task of building a village from the ground up. Some chose to relocate to Port Lions and still others chose to move to Kodiak and other communities, forever altering



Fig. 8: The future location of Port Lions in Settlers Cove

the composition of the village residents.

## VI. The Relocation of Afognak Village to Port Lions: Challenges and Successes

It was emotionally difficult for the residents to leave their home to make a new one in a different location. Helen (Knagin) Nelson discussed the emotional impact of the relocation and the support she felt from everyone as they faced the challenge together:

...you think about picking one family up you take your family and try to move it to another city or community but you think about picking up a whole community and all these emotions, different emotions come through you. Things that you never, I didn't think we'd ever encounter but it was good even then knowing that,

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<sup>37</sup> Unpublished interview with Betty Nelson (September 19, 1998). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. *Youth & Elders Conference*. Kodiak, Alaska.



we worked together and we were one. And we had help with the Salvation Army, I think they paid for some barges to bring some material or belongings to Port Lions from Afognak. But it was quite an experience picking up a whole community....<sup>38</sup>

Anthropologist Nancy Yaw Davis, wrote her dissertation on the impacts of the 1964 Earthquake and Tsunami on Kodiak. She interviewed Afognak residents and described the process of building Port Lions, how decisions were made, how the new village differed greatly from the layout of their traditional village, and how all this made the villagers feel:

The Lions Club International decided to ‘adopt’ the village and provide for its relocation and rebuilding. Plans were made in meetings held between Lions Club and BIA representatives and the villagers. Several scouting trips were made and a suitable location chosen and agreed upon. The reason the villagers liked the location was that it was high, bare and would give everyone a view of the bay.

In the meantime, state engineers from Anchorage came to check the chosen site. They decided it would be ideal for an airstrip.



Fig. 9: Homes being right next to each other on wooded lots in Port Lions without a view of the ocean.

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<sup>38</sup> Unpublished interview with Helen Nelson (September 19, 1998). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. *Youth & Elders Conference*. Kodiak, Alaska.

Another location for the village had to be chosen nearby. A section by a stream near the proposed airstrip was decided upon. The men then went fishing for the summer. When they returned, they found that the foundations for the houses had already been started by Mennonite volunteers and that the houses were to the north of the areas chosen earlier. Rather than being close to the proposed airstrip, the houses were two miles away from it. Furthermore, they were spread throughout a wooded and swampy area....

The Lions found they could finance only seven houses. The rest, thirty-eight houses, were built by the BIA....The Afognak residents found their villages rearranged. Instead of a single row of houses each with privacy and a view of the beach, the new Port Lions was a carefully laid out town of moderately large lots arranged in semi-circles among great spruce trees. Rather than the preferred unobstructed view of the beach, tides, boats and planes, all but a few houses on

the first row had a view of only trees and other houses.<sup>39</sup>



Fig. 10: Home being built on hilly, wooded lot in Port Lions

The new layout of their community proved difficult to get used to. Allen Lukin discussed his experiences with the new environment, through the eyes of a twelve year old boy, “It was strange, it was really

<sup>39</sup> Davis, N. Yaw (1971). *The Effects of the 1964 Alaska Earthquake, Tsunami, and Resettlement on Two Koniag Eskimo Villages*. Doctoral Dissertation. Pp. 407-408. Seattle: University of Washington.

strange cause Afognak was pretty level ground, moved to Port Lions there was some hills there, and it was like clumped together rather than spread out. It took awhile to get used to it.”<sup>40</sup> A community that once enjoyed huge, ocean front lots now felt confined among the spruce trees, hills and neighbors.

The villagers found the move difficult - to leave their traditional village, the place that their ancestors had lived for generations, and establish roots elsewhere. Compounded with this was the fact that the location they chose for the community was moved to accommodate an airstrip. The villagers wanted an airstrip and good harbor so they chose an alternative site right in-between the two. The site would allow the villagers to walk throughout the community while still providing space for everyone to feel comfortable. Unfortunately, the Mennonites moved the location and did not consult the villagers, leaving them to adjust to wooded, swampy lots that were, in the eyes of the villagers, too close. A people who once enjoyed views of the bay would now face their neighbors. The Afognak Alutiiq people’s lives were dependant on the land and the sea. A people who lived off the sea and traveled it daily, needed a view of it to evaluate the ever changing weather conditions. Clearly, the villagers were disappointed to discover so few of them would have the ability to see the bay, but they could not afford to start over. The location of the village was too far from the airstrip, and the place for their future harbor, so the people would have to buy vehicles to traverse the area.

In addition, many Afognak community members chose not to move to Port Lions and preferred instead to move to other communities, such as Kodiak and Anchorage. This changed

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<sup>40</sup> Unpublished interview with Allen Lukin (April 6, 1999). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. Anchorage, Alaska.

the social make up of the community. Gone were many long standing villagers who were a strong part of the support. The community's identity was not that of Afognak; in fact because it differed so much from the previous location, a new unique identity of Port Lions was created.

The strange space was not the only challenge to their Afognak lifestyle and identity the villagers faced. For the first time in history, the Afognak people had modern amenities. They enjoyed running water, heaters, indoor plumbing, electricity, and telephone and television access. People did not have to work so hard to survive. They would not have to chop wood for fuel or deal with honey buckets and outhouses. They could all have washing machines and dryers without requiring a generator to run them. However, they also had to have the money to pay for all of it. Thus, another layer was added to the complex move. A people who traditionally needed very little money suddenly faced the realization of how much their new lifestyle cost.

## **VII. The New Afognak: Life in Port Lions**

### **Layout of Community**

The community, which was once segregated, found itself now mixed with little consideration to ethnicity or family ties. Families that historically lived in Russian Town were suddenly neighbors with those that lived in Aleut Town. I have heard stories about how difficult it was for the people to get used to living so close to one another. People who had been neighbors all their lives and dependant on one another were suddenly living across town from one another. Thus, the social make-up of the community changed. A people who had historically identified themselves and their families, in part, by where they physically lived in the community was no longer applicable. Over the years, people began developing names for the

different sections of the Village. However, unlike Afognak Village, where names were based on race, the names in the new village were based on the environment. For instance, the Port Wakefield side of Port Lions is called “Across” because it is across the Cove from the rest of the village and Betty’s Hill is named for its close proximity to Betty and Abner Nelson’s home.

### **Subsistence**

The relocation meant that the people had to quickly learn new places to conduct their subsistence activities. The men were familiar with the area, having fished and hunted in the Cove before, but their primary subsistence areas were too far away from the new village to be practical. The women had to learn new places to gather foods and medical plants. Eventually, of course, the new, different places became familiar and remain in use today. However the Old Village still lingers in our people’s memory. For instance, each year when the blueberries are ripe and ready for picking, I hear stories about how the blueberries on Afognak were bigger and tastier than those found around Port Lions. Many women still insist that their husbands take them to the traditional Afognak berry patches so they can get better berries for their jams and jellies.

Today, life in Port Lions does not revolve as strongly around the seasons as life did in Afognak. Many of the original residents have left the community to seek employment opportunities elsewhere, and many newcomers have arrived, changing the cultural design of the community. However, many families still work to maintain their traditional ways. Families are still very active in subsistence hunting and fishing. Each summer when the salmon begin to run, the Cove is littered with little skiffs, filled with families working together to get enough fish for

the year. Parents still work to pass on the traditional ways of respecting Elders and sharing. My father, Ivan Lukin strives to pass the knowledge he learned from his Elders onto my sisters and me. He does this, he explains, because of the values that knowledge instills in us:

...The older people I respected them a lot because they...lived by their seasons.... I try to pass it onto my kids here....They learn there's a certain time of year you put fish up and there's a certain time of year you hunt game and you did those things. And they did...they worked hard. They put their wood



Fig. 11: My dad, Ivan Lukin, hanging fish in his smoke house in Port Lions

up for the winter or whatever and I, the difference I see today versus back then is people, people cared, people helped each other out when they seen someone needed a hand.<sup>41</sup>

Today very few of the women still gather medical plants and herbs. Most purchase such things at the store. This traditional knowledge is not being passed down as it once was. A few of the women have maintained their traditional roles, but most find themselves busy with the other intricacies of life, work, and child rearing.

Each summer when my family fishes we take enough not only for our family, but also for those people in the community who cannot fish for themselves. I always hear of the young men catching king salmon and not taking the fish home to their mothers, but

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<sup>41</sup> Unpublished interview with Ivan Lukin (July 18, 1999). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. Kodiak, Alaska.

instead taking them to Elders. The men know they can fish again the next day, and their families can be proud that they gave the fish away rather than bringing it home. People who share in this way are honored through whispers in the community.

Each year my dad leaves work for a few weeks to participate in subsistence activities: fishing in the summer, hunting in the fall and winter. As a family we process the meat and prepare it for the winter. It is shared with others and savored for its flavor. Although people do not participate in subsistence as much as they once did, it is still very much a part of our lives and culture.

### **Social / Kinship Roles**

The social make up of the community changed drastically because of modern conveniences and the new layout of the village. Socializing was no longer as much a part of community life as it was in Afognak, nor were the frequent celebrations. Lael Morgan, in a 1976 update on the Alaska communities that were most affected by the 1964 earthquake and tsunami, wrote the following regarding the relocation to Port Lions:

...Mr. and Mrs. Sergay Sheratine – Afognak born and married over 50 years – dream wistfully about returning but admit they've grown used to the comforts of Port Lions. 'Them days was good days. It was a good village,' Mr. Sheratine allows. 'The people of Afognak never used to go hungry. But this is the easy life. Here you go to phone the oil man. We live pretty good.'

Missing, of course, is the closeness of a small isolated community. This is the first village where I've ever encountered 'No Trespassing' signs and Native owners interested in enforcing them. Old-timers complain there is little visiting back and forth. More money and less living off the land...less sharing.

Yet it is a fine community. In the modern American sense you could find none better.<sup>42</sup>

The village was a reproduction of a modern American town with running water, television, and suburban style lots. However, as the 'No Trespassing' signs illustrate, the new lifestyle came with a cost. The changes created a modern American people, who did not rely upon one another as strongly as they once did. Allen Lukin recalls the decrease in socializing and the effect modern conveniences had on the social make-up of the community:

I can remember a few, few times when my uncles and some of the other guys would get together and play music and have dances. And after we moved to Port Lions I don't remember too much about, I mean they used to have some but...Well one thing I noticed after we moved from Afognak to Port Lions and everybody got power, electricity, then comes the telephones, then come TV, then everybody, it just seems like they just stuck to themselves. It wasn't like it was in Afognak. That's one thing I noticed a big change in, is they got Americanized, cause those memories I have of Afognak was a lot of people helping each other. Big get-togethers...or fishing for home use, you know, everybody coming to help

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<sup>42</sup> Morgan, Lael (1978). "Earthquake Villages: A Decade of Struggle." *Alaska Magazine*.



clean fish and can... We moved to Port Lions [and] it was totally different and that's one thing I did notice....<sup>43</sup>

Faded into the background of many villagers lives were the traditional Alutiiq ways of sharing, visiting, and the importance of kinship.

Ivan Lukin, who was sixteen when the village relocated, also discusses the changing kinship roles within the community:

...people don't stop and help people like they used to before. I remember days [in Afognak] when in the fall when dad would come home and he'd be rolling thirty barrels of fuel up the beach by himself and somebody come by and they'd see him and before long he'd have half a dozen people helping him... People visited a lot, they went back and forth to different houses and spent time visiting, and you don't see a lot of that anymore.<sup>44</sup>

Barbara (Anderson) Willits, a resident of Afognak who left before the earthquake, noticed a significant difference in the treatment of people when she first visited Port Lions years after it was built. She explained:

Well I think today, after I was there the last time, they live to themselves. They're not as open like, they used to be friendlier. I don't know what it is anymore, when I went up there we didn't get one invitation for tea, we used to like to drink tea and

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<sup>43</sup> Unpublished interview with Allen Lukin (April 6, 1999). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. Anchorage, Alaska.

<sup>44</sup> Unpublished interview with Ivan Lukin (July 18, 1999). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. Kodiak, Alaska.

talk, sometimes in Aleut and laugh our heads off. They didn't do that anymore, I was surprised.<sup>45</sup>

Although community life in Port Lions is quite different from Afognak, and people visit less and depend on one another less than they once did, Alutiiq values are still prevalent in Port Lions. Perhaps I can see them and have a different perspective from those who grew up in Afognak because I never lived in Afognak. It was destroyed before I was born so all I know is Port Lions. I now live in Anchorage, but when I travel to Port Lions to visit my parents the house is always full of people. Each night my dad lights the banya and people come in droves to visit and bathe. Not everyone visits and not everyone takes banya, but still others do work to maintain and nurture our traditions.

Every time I drive through Port Lions people wave hello and stop to ask how I have been. The people are friendly and helpful. Last winter when I was home my dad and I went hunting. When we got home, two of the village men came to help us process the catch. The men knew my dad would take them hunting and help them process their next catch. I am constantly amazed how giving people are in Port Lions. My dad persistently callings his neighbors to borrow a fishing pole or their All Terrain Vehicles to go hunting. Likewise, they arrive a few days later to borrow a saw or his truck. Life is a cycle of reciprocity, of sharing and giving.

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<sup>45</sup> Unpublished interview with Barbara Willits (December 18, 1998). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. Bellingham, Washington.

## **Russian Orthodox Church**

It is difficult for me to write about the Russian Orthodox Church's influence in Port Lions because I did not grow up actively following the faith. My sisters and I were baptized Russian Orthodox; but by the time I was old enough to understand faith, my parents had converted to Protestant. My parents and us children attended the non-denominational church just down the road from the Russian Orthodox church. During school, religion was not supposed to be discussed according to federal law; however when the Russian Orthodox Church held service during school the majority of the children left school, while those of us who were non-Orthodox remained for the duration of the day.

However, in hearing the stories of Afognak, the importance of service, and Russian holidays I think it is quite different in Port Lions. Many people have converted to other religions and perhaps because of modern conveniences and the influence of outside cultures, the Church is not as prominent in the community that it once was.

Fewer people attend service and follow the strict rules of Lent and other Orthodox customs. I do, however, recall seeing the Russian Orthodox maskers get dressed up and go house to house trying to fool one another. They did not come to our house because we did not practice Orthodoxy, so I always had this sense of being left out, or divisions in the community. The Russian Orthodox children used to tease me when I was growing up because I was



Fig. 12: Inside view of the Port Lions Russian Orthodox Church

different, I went to a different church. I always wished my parents had stayed Russian Orthodox so I would not be so different.

### **VIII. Afognak People Today: Identity & Culture**

Over the last forty years the Afognak Village has been left to decay. Many former Afognak residents travel to what most now call “the Old Village” to remember a time long past, and a simpler time that is firmly instilled in their hearts. The Old Village is our people’s cultural connection to our traditional lands, the sense of community and memories of togetherness. The Afognak Elders, for the past twelve years, have worked to instill the “Old Afognak” values in Alutiiq children by attending *Dig Afognak Cultural Camp*. Each summer this culture camp brings Elders and youth together on the history village site. For the Elders, the camp reaffirms the traditional way of life. Elder Julie (Christiansen) Knagin reminisced about her life in Afognak while at Katani, participating in the annual *Dig Afognak Cultural Camp*:

It was kind of a nice time in our lives; it was the last time that we ever lived in a village and while we were there I think; life was simple; it was hard work and it was a very peaceful time; just enjoyed it, there was no; the only thing we had was a radio so it was; we created our own entertainment such as and socializing just visiting a lot more with each other than we you do now....All of us [Elders] enjoy it so much out here [at *Dig Afognak*] because we can capture back what we used to have; those of us that lived that life; we don’t want it to be gone; we’d like to have it come back again; it probably never will to the extent that we had it but maybe people can start relating to one another....<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Unpublished interview with Julie Knagin (August 14, 1999). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak. *Dig Afognak Camp*. Afognak, Alaska.

As the generations of people who lived in Afognak age, the importance of projects like Dig Afognak grows. The Old Village site, faces new crises with the passage of time. If the younger generations do not learn and appreciate the history and cultural values, the Afognak Alutiiq people may lose physical landmarks from their people's past before they realize the items are gone. Two important current examples include the Old Village cemetery and the Russian Orthodox Church.

In 1945 Gertrude Raumaker described the peaceful beauty of the Afognak cemetery, "The cemetery was beautiful and surpassingly peaceful, there above the rocks and reef on which the restless breakers tossed endlessly. It seemed the ideal place for fishing folk to lie forever."<sup>47</sup> Fifty-four years later, Ruth (Olsen) Dawson describes the state of the cemetery, "...some of the



Fig. 13: Afognak Cemetery, 1943

graves...are washing out with the winter storms and that's, that's really too bad. I feel really saddened about that..."<sup>48</sup> Each year more and more remains are being unearthed by harsh weather and tidal erosion. The Afognak people are concerned about the future of their ancestor's last resting place and the people disagree about how to address this. Some believe we should let

<sup>47</sup> Raumaker, G. (1945). "Full Moon Over Afognak". P. 33. *The Alaska Sportsman*.

<sup>48</sup> Unpublished interview with Ruth Dawson (July 18, 1999). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak, Kodiak, Alaska.

nature take its course while others want to stabilize the cemetery and prevent future erosion. As this is debated the graves continue to wash out to sea.



Fig. 14: Afognak Russian Orthodox Church, 2003

The historical prominence of the Russian Orthodox Church made it extremely difficult for the Afognak residents to view it in its current state. “I think it’s a beautiful church and it really is disheartening that the Orthodox Church over there is just left to rot

and the winter winds, storms are, its just going and I think it’s a shame. I wish we were able to do something about it but so far we’ve been unable to.”<sup>49</sup> The Church is being battered by tidal erosion and weather and each year deteriorates more. Several years ago some men from Port Lions temporarily stabilized the church, using railroad ties, to keep it from washing away. Despite their efforts, the church collapsed a few years ago. This was disheartening to the Afognak people. Even those who have changed religions were deeply affected by the decay of the Church. The Church came to represent the strength of the people and the sense of community they shared. Now when they travel to the Old Village they see that it is falling to the ground. Many people have called upon the Kodiak Russian Orthodox Church to help save their beloved Church. In response, the Kodiak Russian Orthodox Church has plans to dismantle the

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<sup>49</sup> Unpublished interview with Ruth Dawson (July 18, 1999). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak, Kodiak, Alaska.

church and use the wood to create a new bell tower in Kodiak so that the Afognak people will know their Church still stands, in part.

Shauna (Lukin) Hegna, my twin sister, is too young to have lived in Afognak. Like me, she spent much of her childhood in Port Lions. During a panel discussion in the opening of the Museum Exhibit “Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People” at the Anchorage Museum on January 30, 2003 Hegna gave the following speech, sharing her perceptions of the Old Afognak Village, her identity to the Old Afognak Village. In the speech, she explains how her identity is rooted in the Old Afognak Village, and she discusses the future of the Afognak Community:

In 1964 Afognak [village] was brutally destroyed by an Earthquake so strong that the earth rolled like waves, flinging the spruce trees like blades of grass. Then came the tidal waves, rushing into the beach like a skiff at full throttle...Homes, personal belongings and lives were scattered, thrown and dismantled.

Of course, I do not tell you these things first-hand. I didn't witness the horrifying effects of the earthquake and tidal wave because they happened 14 years before I was born....People [have] shared stories of what it was like to live in Afognak: the one-room school house, the importance of the Russian Orthodox Church, and the infamous community-wide dances that were so popular that people from all over the island would come to attend.

Afognak was a beautiful community, curved around a black sand beach. There was a single long road connecting two distinct parts of the village, Aleut Town and Russian Town. My family lived in Aleut Town. There was no running water or many vehicles so people had to work hard for what they had.

Following the events of 1964, government officials visited Afognak to inspect the damage. Residents were told that it was not safe to live in there because the Island was sinking. Government officials and private non-profits worked with Afognak residents to relocate them to Port Lions, a new community closer to Kodiak City that would have all of the modern amenities like running water, electricity, more roads, and television. Some residents resisted the move and many decided to move to other communities rather than Port Lions. They moved as far away as Seattle. Likewise, since 1964, many people have moved to Port Lions that were not from Afognak.

Port Lions is my home – it's where I grew up. There are dense spruce trees covering the large hills, huge bays that expand on either side of the village and mountains that stretch



Fig. 15: Native Village of Port Lions, 2003

into the sky. It is truly an awe-inspiring place. Over the last 40 years Port Lions has grown it's own community identity. But what has happened to Afognak?



About five years ago I returned to Afognak. I walked through the house that my father grew up in. I saw trees growing between the porch railings, my aunt's doll lying on the floor, a Reader's Digest from March 1964 that was soaked from the recent rain. I saw life in the houses, spirit in the community. If the walls could talk, what stories they would tell? Some might say Afognak is a 'vanished village' a 'ghost town'. I see it as a pause in time, a sort of three-dimensional scrape book of the memories that link people from Afognak.



Fig. 16: Old house at Afognak Village after 1964

...one amazing thing that...I [have] found...[is] that no matter if people...[live] in Seattle or Port Lions they still had a sense of community, a sense of connectedness. It ...[doesn't] matter that they last lived in Afognak 40 years ago or that some people will never move back. What [matters is]... that these people once were a part of a community and because of that they ...[will]... always belong together.

So strong is this sense of identity, that ...people want to move back to Afognak, they just don't have the resources to do it yet. You're probably thinking, 'why do that after 40 years?' When I asked my father about Afognak he said, 'A community is like a marriage, you're bonded to that relationship in your heart.'

Afognak will always have a special place in my heart. It took everything we had to move our people to a safe place. To leave our home and know that we would never go back there.'

...When I asked my father what made Afognak so special he replied, 'I think it is harder to leave a small community because you rely on the land for your survival. You are bonded to the land, the ground you live on. You know all the ins and outs of the land, every bay, the best places to gather driftwood, the best places to get berries. All of a sudden you have to start over. You have to relearn to survive somewhere else.'

Afognak people did learn to survive. They learned to enjoy and rely on the modern conveniences in their new communities. They learned the ins and outs of their new lands and the resources available there. Although people from Afognak and their descendants are spread across the Pacific Northwest, they are still connected through our Tribal Council, Native Corporation, family relations, and most importantly, the memories and stories of the village.

Afognak people still mourn the loss of their home. Perhaps it is because the houses are still there, slowly decaying, like a wound that never heals. The graves are eroding. Our ancestors are being swept into the



Fig. 17: Home decaying at Old Afognak Village

ocean. Or perhaps it is just the anger of being forced, by nature and man, to leave your home.

Although I never lived in there, I will always be from Afognak. Afognak links me to my ancestors and my family living outside of Port Lions. I am part of a community that spans over cities, boroughs, oceans, and states. Although Afognak is physically vanishing it's still very much alive in the hearts and memories of the people. Afognak village is a sense of belonging, a sense of connectedness among relatives, friends and neighbors.<sup>50</sup>



Fig. 18: People learning Alutiiq dance at *Dig Afognak* Camp

Hegna's speech captures, in many respects, our spiritual connection to our land and emphasizes how sacred the Old Afognak Village is to our people. The Old Afognak Village is decaying. No one lives there, but it is still very much a part of our every day life. So strong is our connection to place that the Afognak Native Corporation and Native Village of Afognak Tribe developed a cultural camp, *Dig Afognak*, in 1993. Every summer Elders teach youth our culture, traditional ways, values and beliefs. Ruth (Olsen) Dawson, a member of the team who started the camps, discusses the cultural impact of the camp, and how she hopes future generations will view her traditional village:

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<sup>50</sup> Hegna, Shauna (January 30, 2003). Speech presented during a panel discussion in the opening of the Museum Exhibit "Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People" at the Anchorage Museum. Anchorage, Alaska.

...I go over for Dig Afognak it's just, you can just see how primitive it was when you get into the pre-historic site. And it just gives you a lot of appreciation for those people 'cause they worked hard just to survive. And that's what life was just plain old survival and it really is an eye-opener and it really puts me, it's a spiritual awakening to go over there and to learn those things of the past. I thoroughly enjoy it that's very important to me and its important to me to pass things like that onto my grandchildren because they will never know stuff like that if we didn't record it, if we didn't have the museum to put these things in. So hopefully some of my things that are important to me ...will someday be important to my grandchildren.<sup>51</sup>



Fig. 19: Archeological Dig at the *Dig Afognak* Cultural Camp

The Tribe is also writing a book on the history of the Old Village and has conducted archeological digs around the Village for several years. We hope to publish the book soon, so our members can read about their home and remember their traditional home and to keep the village alive in future generations. The Tribe hopes that the archeological digs will preserve our ancient history, the time that we have forgotten, so that our children will know all of their heritage. The Tribe strives through these efforts to be sure our children will know that the Afognak Alutiiq people were strong people, a people who faced challenges, devastation, and adapted to survive. The Afognak Alutiiq people continue to survive

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<sup>51</sup> Unpublished interview with Ruth Dawson (July 18, 1999). In the possession of Native Village of Afognak, Kodiak, Alaska.

despite invasion, disease, integration, natural disaster, and modernization, all while maintaining our identity, our traditional values of sharing, reciprocity, respect and sense of community.

As our people make their annual pilgrimages to the Old Village – for blueberries, for Dig Afognak, or to walk the old site and the Elders walk the village with youth, telling stories of their childhood and passing their knowledge to the next generation we survive into the future. Native leader Ruth (Olsen) Dawson says “when I walk the Old Village I can feel our ancestors’ spirit. They talk to us. It will always be sacred.” The Afognak people’s connection to their traditional land is powerful. Even those of us who are younger, and did not grow up in Afognak, know what Afognak means. I never lived there, but I am Afognak Alutiiq. As my three-year-old son grows up, he will learn from his mother, aunts, and grandparents what it means to be Afognak Alutiiq.

## **IX. Applications for Other Relocation Efforts**

Communities should consider several of the lessons learned by the Afognak Alutiiq community’s experience with relocation. Foremost, to keep the indigenous culture and community healthy, vibrant and alive, community members should be involved in all aspects of planning and decision-making. They should work together as a community to choose the appropriate location and map out exactly what they want versus need in a new village.

When choosing a new location, the community should try to select an environment similar to their traditional home. This will decrease the cultural shock of moving to a new village. For instance, if the traditional village was along the ocean shore and had a mild climate,

then the village should not be relocated to an inland location where temperatures are cooler. The people would feel disjointed and would most likely have a difficult time adjusting to the new environment and change in subsistence resources.

The villagers should consider the spacing of the community and if transportation will be required to travel the area. Additional considerations may include road maintenance, who will pay for it over the long term; noise level of vehicles, what is tolerable; and the location of the landfill, and place it in a spot that is hidden from view and downwind from the community.

The villagers should consider drastic changes to their lifestyle and how they may affect the economy and culture of the community. For instance, if electricity is available, villagers will be able to store their subsistence foods in freezers, decreasing the need for frequent subsistence trips and the dependence on the more traditional dried and salted meats. Would the traditional foods be made less often because they were no longer required for survival? The community could see an increase in the use of frozen meats and a change of diet.

The community members should work together to determine ahead of time the desired layout of homes, appropriate distances, and preferred views. Many rural Alaska Native villages live their lives by the subsistence seasons and thus prefer to have the best view possible of changing weather conditions and patterns. Traditional divisions in the community should be evaluated to determine if they will continue to be followed or changed. Any kinship ties should be noted and the community members will need to decide if families prefer to be close, or farther apart when designating lots.

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