

# A Brief Look At The History and Culture of Woody Island, Alaska

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This document is intended to be a brief lesson on the prehistory and history of Woody Island and the Kodiak Archipelago. It is also intended to be used as a learning resource for fifth graders who visit Woody Island every spring.

By Gordon Pullar Jr.

## Introduction

Woody Island is a peaceful place with a lush green landscape and an abundance of wild flowers. While standing on the beach on a summer day a nice ocean breeze can be felt and the smell of salt water is in the air. The island is covered by a dense spruce forest with a forest floor covered in thick soft moss. Woody Island is place where one can escape civilization and enjoy the wilderness while being only a 15 minute boat ride from Kodiak. While experiencing Woody Island today it may be hard for one to believe that it was once a bustling community, even larger in population than the City of Kodiak.

The Kodiak Archipelago is made up of 25 islands, the largest being Kodiak Island. Kodiak Island is separated from mainland Alaska by the Shelikof Strait. Kodiak Island is approximately 100 miles long and 60 miles wide and is the second largest island in the United States behind the “big” island of Hawaii. The city of Kodiak is the largest community on the island with a total population of about 6,000 (City Data 2008), and the entire Kodiak Island Borough population is about 13,500 people (Census estimate 2009). Kodiak’s economy is based primarily on commercial fishing, however, tourism is also an important part of Kodiak’s economy due to the many people who come to the island every year to hunt, sport fish, and sightsee.

There are six Alutiiq villages in the Kodiak Archipelago; Karluk, Port Lions, Akhiok, Old Harbor, Ouzinkie, and Larsen Bay. They range in population from 65 to over 300. The City of Kodiak was built on a village site and still has an active Native population, including a tribal government. The Alaska Native population in the Kodiak Island Borough made up 14.6% of the total population in 2008 (U.S. Census 2008).

There are ten federally recognized tribes in the Kodiak Archipelago. Three of the tribal villages, Woody Island, Kaguyak, and Afognak are no longer occupied as the village sites were abandoned in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The names of the tribes are Village of Afognak, Village of Akhiok, Kaguyak Village, Native Village of Larsen Bay, Native Village of Karluk, Tangirnaq Native Village (Woody Island), Village of Old Harbor, Native Village of Ouzinkie, Native Village of Port Lions, and the Sun’aq Tribe of Kodiak. Being distinguished as a federally recognized tribe means the tribe maintains a government-to-government relationship with the United States and that the U.S. has a responsibility to provide or pay for certain services such as health and education. Each tribe generally has an elected tribal council that manages its affairs.

## **Woody Island**

Woody Island is a small nearly uninhabited island less than two miles from the City of Kodiak and can be seen from Kodiak. While Woody Island is mostly uninhabited now, it was once a vibrant community where the Sugpiaq Village of Tangirnaq had been for thousands of years. The people of Tangirnaq called themselves Tangirnarmiut, meaning “residents of Tangirnaq.” During parts of the busy 1800’s there were more people on Woody Island than the City of Kodiak (Chaffin 1983). Gradually Woody Island lost its residents to disease, relocation, and even war. In late 2002, the last Tangirnarmiut left the island.

There are three names associated with Woody Island Village. The Alutiiq name for the village is Tangirnaq meaning “point of land.” The Russian name for the island is Leisnoi meaning wooded, and the original American name was Wood Island, but later became called Woody Island.

## Prehistoric Kodiak

Judging by village sites and artifacts that have been rediscovered by archeologists, it is estimated that people settled on Alaska's gulf coast at least 10,000 years ago and have occupied the Kodiak Archipelago for at least 7,500 years (Looking Both Ways 2001), which was long before the Russians came and spread their technologies and culture. Much is known about the prehistory of the Kodiak Archipelago due to years of research, such as analyzing petroglyphs, by archeologists at the Alutiiq museum and others (Alutiiq Museum). However, other than oral history and archeological evidence, there was no documented history prior to western contact of the Kodiak Archipelago which makes it difficult to know precisely what life was like before interaction with the west.



Archeologist Rick Knecht on Woody Island in summer of 2008. Photo by Gordon L. Pullar

The original name for people who are indigenous to Kodiak is Sugpiaq which comes from two words, Suk and Piaq. Suk means a “person” or “human being” and Piaq means “real”

or “genuine”. So Sugpiaq means a real or genuine person or human being (Pullar 1996). When Russians came to Kodiak, they referred to the Sugpiaq people as Aleuts because they classified them as people sharing a similar culture to people in the Aleutians even though they are in fact two unique cultures. Also, Alutiiq means Aleut in the Sugpiaq language. Therefore, the official name for people indigenous to Kodiak is Sugpiaq, but Alutiiq is commonly used in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Alutiiq people were the first known people to inhabit the Kodiak Archipelago and throughout their time in the area have developed a sophisticated culture. The development of Alutiiq culture, up until contact with western culture, is classified by some archeologists and anthropologists through four prehistoric periods. The periods are generally referred to as the Ocean Bay Periods I and II, the Kachemak Period, and the Koniag Period. The shift between each period was gradual with subtle changes over time, but once the Russians came, changes effecting indigenous people occurred significantly faster. As with the rest of the Kodiak area, all four periods are reflected in Woody Island’s archeological evidence.

### **1. Ocean Bay I Period**

The Ocean Bay I period ranged from approximately 7,500 years ago to 3,500 years ago. People living around Kodiak during this period are thought to have maintained a strong maritime hunter and gatherer culture. People migrated seasonally for subsistence. Their structures were probably slightly subterranean with skin stretched over poles (Mobley 1990 and Wooley 1998). During the summer people camped at the mouths of streams to exploit the salmon run, probably using traps and spears (Clark 1984). Leading into the Ocean Bay II period, people began using ground slate for tools (Clark 1984).

## **2. Ocean Bay II**

The Ocean Bay II period ranged from 4,500 to 3,500 years ago. Ocean Bay II was a continued maritime culture, but with growing populations and more sophistication of housing. Shell fish also became a more prevalent food during the Ocean Bay II period (Mobley 1990). Seasonal migration continued during Ocean Bay II. Also, during this period sharp edged ground slate tools began to appear (Clark 1984, Wooley 1998).

## **3. Kachemak Period**

The Kachemak period ranged from 3,500 to 900 years ago. Semi-subterranean homes began to appear in significantly larger villages. The Kachemak period also saw the introduction of new technologies for fishing and maritime hunting. Warfare intensified during this period as well. Also, ceremonialism, art, and many rituals appeared. The population continued growth through the Kachemak period (Mobley 1990 and Wooley 1998).

## **4. Koniag Period**

The Koniag period ranged from about 900 years ago to the year 1741 when the first Russian explorers reached Alaska. During this time period, contact with Northern Eskimo people began to occur. It is unclear whether the Alutiiq people migrated north or if Eskimo people came south. The two cultures did however blend during this period, the culture and language that formed from this combination became known as Koniag. The sophistication of housing and tools continued during the Koniag period. Sod homes called *cigluaqs* (or barabaras in Russian) also developed during the Koniag period (Mobley 1990). This was the culture that was present when Russians first arrived in Kodiak.

## Russian arrival 1763

Russians led by ship captain Stephan Glotov were the first to “discover” Kodiak Island in 1763 and attempted to set up an outpost on the south end of Kodiak for hunting sea mammals because of the sea otter pelts that brought high prices in China during the time. The Russians, however, were met with fierce resistance from the Alutiiq people on multiple occasions (Black 1992). Due to this military resistance, the Russians were unable to successfully set up an outpost on Kodiak Island until 1784 when Gregorii Shelikov arrived.

Painting by Mikhail Tikhanov. In museum of Russian Academy of Arts.



In August of 1784 a Russian merchant named Gregorii Shelikhov arrived at Kodiak to establish a colony at what is now called Three Saints Bay (near Old Harbor) with his partner Ivan Golikov. Their company was called the Shelikhov-Golikov Company, and the purpose of the company was fur trading, primarily for sea otter pelts. Shelikov arrived with more weapons and people than previous Russians, including cannons. He arrived in Three Saints Bay with two ships carrying about 130 men (Black 1992), but as he and his crew probably expected, they were met with resistance from the Alutiiqs. With their superior artillery, however, the Russians began killing the Alutiiq people forcing them to seek shelter on a large rock off the coast of Sitkalidak Island. Using cannons and guns that far outmatched Alutiiq weapons, the Russians slaughtered the Alutiiq people who had sought shelter on the rock. Due to varying accounts it is difficult to tell how many Alutiiqs were killed, but it is estimated that between 500 and 2,000 Alutiiq people were murdered that day on what is now referred to as Refuge Rock. So many people died in the

attack that the rock was also referred to by Alutiiqs as “Awa’uq” which in the Alutiiq language means “to become numb”(Knecht, Haakanson, Dickson 2002).



Refuge Rock. Photo by Sven Haakanson Jr.

The 1784 massacre at Refuge Rock was a turning point for Alutiiq people and Russian’s because it is considered the point in time during which Russians took control of Kodiak. This began a dark period of many atrocities committed by Russian fur traders against Alutiiq people that would last until 1818 when Baranov (Shelikhov’s successor) was replaced (Black 1992). This period included the rape and enslavement of many Alutiiqs. For example, Shelikhov ordered many high ranking Alutiiq men to each bring one of their male children into his custody as hostages (Black 1992). The reason for taking the children was to insure that the Alutiiq men would be enslaved to the Russians out of fear for their children’s safety.

Shelikhov was so cruel that at one point he had two Alutiiq men, whom he accused of murdering two Russians even though he had little evidence, tied them together and tried to kill

both with one shot from his gun. Shelikhov succeeded in killing the first man, but the second man was only injured so Shelikhov ordered the man to be beheaded (Black 1992). This gruesome event was one of many atrocities Shelikhov committed during his time in Kodiak. Between 1784 and 1786 Shelikhov systematically broke the Alutiiq resistance and permanent Russian settlement became a reality (Black 1992).

In 1786, Shelikhov dispatched ten or eleven of his 113 men to the Wood Island settlement to occupy it through the establishment of a trading post (Bancroft, 1886). The trading post became the first non-Native establishment on Woody Island. The Russians were attracted to the island because of the easy access to the spruce forest that they could use for boat building. On Woody Island a British shipwright and officer in the Russian service named James Shields built two small boats during the winter of 1794 and 1795 (Pierce 1990). Woody Island has perfect timber for boat building, so it was an ideal spot for the Russians to build them. They named the island Ostrov Leisnoi meaning Wooded Island (Pullar 2004).

The Shelikhov-Golikof company developed into the Russian American Company and after Shelikhov returned to Russia, the company became led by a new chief manager named Alexander Baranov. Alexander Baranov was sent by Shelikhov to administer the colony and arrived at Three Saints Bay in late June of 1791. He was 44 years old and sick with pneumonia when he arrived. As soon as he recovered, he took control and imposed a new order, part of which entailed securing the trust of Native people (Chevigny 1965). Baranov continued to use Alutiiq slaves for sea otter hunting. During the time span from 1784-1818 the population of



Alexander Baranov

Alutiiq people dropped considerably as a result of atrocities and disease.

Russian Orthodox religion (which remains in Kodiak today) was introduced to the Kodiak area during the dark period, and it was Russian monks that got word to the Czar about the atrocities being committed against Alutiiq people. In an effort to stop the atrocities, the dark period finally ended when at the direction of the Czar of Russia, Baranov was replaced as manager of the Russian-American Company. Following Baranov's replacement, the Russian American Company began to build schools and hospitals for Alutiiqs.

Between 1837 and 1840 over two-thirds of Kodiak's Native population was lost when a smallpox epidemic reached Kodiak Island. Between July and August, 1837, 738 people died of smallpox (Fortune 1989). The Russians sent medical help to vaccinate but the Native people resisted. The epidemic ended up having a major effect on families, communities, and Native culture. The survivors in Kodiak's 65 villages were resettled into seven villages, one of them being on the south side of Woody Island (Wooley 1997).

Lake Tanignak on Woody Island was used by the Russian American Ice Company which was owned by the Russian American Company for making ice which was valuable at the time to people from California to South America. California was in the middle of the gold boom at the time and many people could afford luxuries such as ice. At the time, it was being sent from Boston via Cape Horn at a very expensive rate and without sufficient quantity to meet demand (Chaffin 1983). So ice from Woody Island became more practical to ship along the coast. Between 1852 and 1872 the Russian American Ice Company packed around 10,000 tons of ice each year that was shipped down the west coast reaching as far south as South America. The ice was packed in sawdust to be shipped, and a water powered mill was built to produce the sawdust (Chaffin 1983). Logs were also produced during that time for housing, boats, and fortification.

Beginning from the time the atrocities ended in 1818 when Baranov was replaced, Alutiiq people adopted much of Russian culture, especially language and religion. Therefore, by the time Alaska was purchased from Russia in 1867, Alutiiq people had become very much bilingual and bicultural.

## **American Period**

By 1867 Alaska was sold to the United States in an effort led by U.S. Secretary of State William Seward. Alaska had become a staggering financial drain on the Imperial Russian Government. Populations of fur bearing sea mammals had drastically declined, and other business ventures such as agricultural activities and coal mining were a disaster, meanwhile, the cost of operating a Russian colony in Alaska significantly escalated (Stevens 1990). The sale of Alaska became known as Seward's Folly, the sale was unpopular at the time because many Americans believed Alaska held no significant value to the United States, and many believed Alaska was just a barren wasteland. Accordingly, Seward was heavily criticized for the sale. The total purchase price of Alaska was \$7,200,000 which came out to about 7 cents and acre (Stevens 1990, Chaffin 1983). Furthermore, \$200,000 of the sale was supposedly for the ice company on Woody Island (Stevens 1990, Chaffin 1983).

Nicolai Pavlov arrived in Woody Island in 1867 with the Russian American Company and later became the first Woody Islander to apply for American citizenship (Orphanage News Letter 1903).

Sheldon Jackson, who was both the U.S. Agent for Education in Alaska and a Presbyterian missionary coordinated with all of the major religious denominations in the U.S. to divide up Alaska so they would not compete against each other. He assigned the Kodiak area to

the Baptist Church. They chose Woody Island as a location to build an orphanage. So, the year 1889 was an important in the history of Woody Island because it was the year that the Baptists selected Woody Island as the site for their first mission in Alaska. The Baptist Mission received title to over 500 acres of land on Woody Island from the U.S. government.

In 1891 a United States Post Office was built on Woody Island and in 1894 the post office officially declared the island's name, Woody Island. Also in 1891 the North American Commercial Company that took over the holdings of the Russian American Company, was established on Woody Island. It became the second largest fur operator in the Kodiak area at the time. The company also set up trading posts on Afognak Island and Seldovia (Chaffin 1967 1983). There was not much structure left over from the ice company to use except for an old storehouse so the company constructed a wharf, an agent's house, a two story building for employees, a new store, carpenter and blacksmith shops, a warehouse and stables, and a small house (Orphanage News Letter 1908).

The first superintendent of the Baptist Mission was Dr. William Roscoe and he arrived at Woody Island on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1893. Upon Roscoe's arrival, construction of the Baptist Mission began. The mission was to be used primarily as an orphanage during that time. The mission brought primarily Native children from a large geographical area, and to live in the orphanage the children were forced to speak English only, which must have been difficult for the children who spoke only Russian and their Native language. Children were also required to perform hard labor to provide food for the mission, they were very self-sufficient, and for example, they used cows, farmed and fished for food. The mission was unpopular with Russian Orthodox Priests on Kodiak, and they even threatened Natives with excommunication if they helped work on the mission (McWhinnie 1912). Shortly after construction was finished, on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1893 a child

named Ofdotia is said to have been the first child accepted into the mission (McWhinnie 1912), although another account states that the first child accepted was a 13 year old boy named Alexander Naomoff (Roscoe 1992).



Children carrying wood at the Baptist Mission.  
Learn Collection.

During August of 1893 an influenza epidemic hit Woody Island and many Native people died, Dr. Roscoe and his wife also got sick. Almost a year later, the Roscoes left Woody Island because Mrs. Roscoe was still sick with influenza. Roscoe was replaced by Mr. C.P. Coe as superintendent (McWhinnie 1912). During the year 1893, the population of Woody Island was approximately 120 (Chaffin 1967, 1983).

During May of 1896 the Baptist chapel was completed on Woody Island becoming the first Baptist church constructed in Alaska, and initially had five members who organized it (McWhinnie 1912 and Roscoe 1992). The land and labor for building the Baptist Chapel were furnished by the North American Commercial Company (Chaffin 67, 83).



Woody Island Village in 1889. Albatross Collection

## Woody Island in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Woody Island experienced dramatic change during the 20<sup>th</sup> century such as the U.S. Navy wireless station being built, the Mt. Novarupta eruption, the Spanish Influenza pandemic of 1918, the establishment of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) station, the 1964 Great Alaska Earthquake and Tsunami, the closing of the school, the implementation of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, and finally the depopulation of the island.

## 1900s

On September 19<sup>th</sup>, 1900, Charles Bunnell took over as teacher at Woody Island's Longwood School, and he would later become the founder of the University of Alaska. At the time, the school consisted of about ½ Mission and ½ village children (Chaffin 1967, 1983).

In 1903, the North American Commercial Company closed its operation on Woody Island due to a decline in the sea otter industry (McWhinnie 1912).

During the summer of 1904 some Woody Island Natives were selected to travel to the World Fair in St. Louis to participate in an exhibit called the “Eskimo Village” display. Among those participating was village Chief Andrean Nanjack, his wife Heretina, and daughter Anna (Orphanage News Letter 1914). Famous Native American leader Geronimo, who was still officially a “prisoner of war”, was also on display at the 1904 World Fair, so it is likely that the people from Woody Island met him.



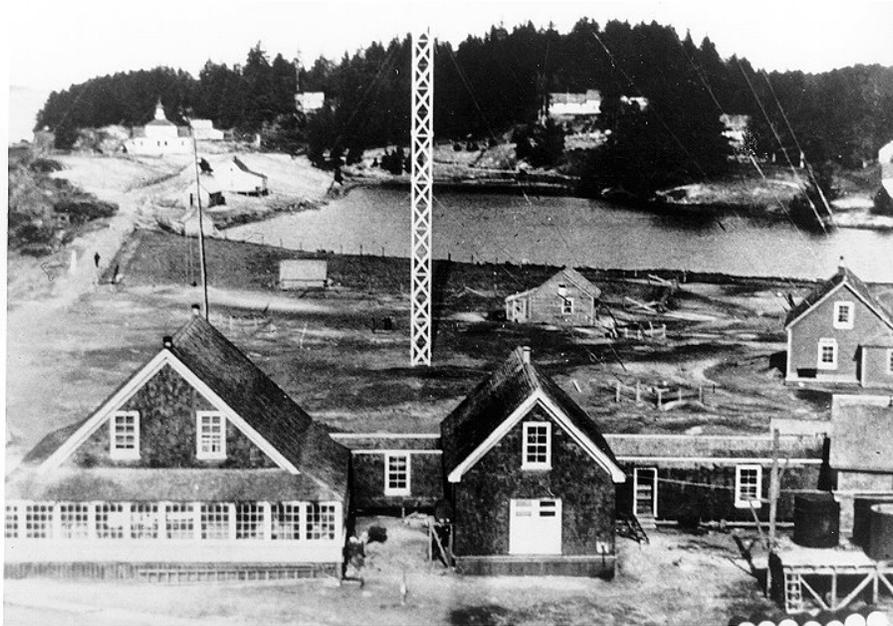
Woody Islander 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. Photo by Charles H. Carpenter, Field Museum.

In December of 1906 Hanna Breece became the principal of the school on Woody Island and a month later the whooping cough epidemic struck the Baptist Mission and killing eight children in the mission and every baby outside the Mission (Jacobs 1995).

## 1910s

The 1910 U.S. Census reported the population of Woody Island including the children at the Baptist Mission to be 168 people (U.S. Department of Commerce 1910).

In 1911 the U.S. Government built a wireless radio station on Woody Island for the Navy. Some of the leftover North American Commercial Company's buildings were used and two masts 225 feet high and 400 feet apart were constructed (Chaffin 1967, 1983). The towers were quite a spectacle at the time and could be seen from a long distance.



U.S. Navy wireless station on Woody Island. Russian Orthodox Chapel visible top left. Pavloff Collection.

On June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1912 a volcano on the Alaska Peninsula near the village of Katmai called Mount Novarupta erupted and was disastrous for Woody Island residents. More than 18 inches of ash covered Woody Island and Kodiak following the eruption. The wireless station's towers were struck by lightning which caused them to burn to the ground. The ash blanketing the area was so thick that people at the Baptist Mission (only 500 feet away) could not see the flames. (Hutchison) For three days following the eruption, Woody Island was in near darkness. The eruption would go down as one of the greatest in recorded history. The wireless station was then

rebuilt and modernized in 1914. The new station had a range of up to 1,000 miles on a clear day (Chaffin 1983).



Mt Novarupta

The year 1918 was a devastating one for the people of Woody Island due to the arrival of the worldwide Spanish influenza pandemic on a ship from Seattle. At least 27 villagers died as a result of the pandemic and some entire families were wiped out. Most of the people who passed away were buried in a mass grave behind the house of Ella Chabitnoy and Nickolai Fadaoff. Chabitnoy and Fadaoff did not fall ill to the flu and were responsible for tending to many people who were ill. Deputy United States Marshal Karl Armstrong Sr. ended up restricting travel of Natives from village to village, which probably reduced exposure to the flu (Arrow Tech, Inc. 1998).

In 1919 a concrete building was constructed as a power house for the U.S. Navy Wireless Station on Woody Island (Arrow Tech, Inc. 1998). The building served multiple purposes throughout the years and remained until about 2001 when it was torn down.

## 1920s

The 1920 U.S. Census reported the population of Woody Island to be 104 (Department of Commerce 1920).

On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1925 there was a fire at the Baptist Mission and the main building was completely destroyed. By the summer of 1926 a new \$50,000 building went under construction to replace the one that burned (Arrow Tech, Inc. 1998).

On March 20<sup>th</sup>, 1927 it was decided that the Longwood School would offer high school classes for the first time the next school year. In 1935, the Longwood School had its first high school graduate, Olga Rossing.



Longwood School, National Archives Photo

## 1930s

The Navy wireless station was decommissioned in 1930 and the last signals were sent out on the night of February 28<sup>th</sup>. The North American Commercial Company structure from 1890 that was used by the Navy wireless station was taken down and the wood was used for packing crates, but the other buildings were kept intact and used by the Longwood School (Arrow Tech, Inc. 1998).

The Woody Island Baptist Mission burned down again in 1937 in a fire caused by a boiler catching fire. According to Leisnoi shareholder and former mission child Dorothy Bactad, one of the matrons named Adena Sorenson, who had a reputation of being very strict, told a boy named Andrew Grassmoff to go into the basement to turn up the furnace, which was an oil furnace. He

turned it up too high which caused it to overflow and ignite (Watson 1997). Following the fire, the mission was relocated to Kodiak and the remains of the old mission on Woody Island were abandoned, but the concrete foundation and some metal objects that didn't burn remain visible today.

On October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1937 an unexpected Naval ship named Lapwig arrived on Woody Island. Officers measured the buildings used by the Territory and the school and informed the people of Woody Island that they were establishing an aviation base at the location. The Naval officers claimed that the buildings would have to be vacated by April 1, 1938 (Watson 1997).

### **1940s**

Between the years 1939 and 1945 the population of Kodiak expanded from 450 to 4,000 people due to the influx of military troops needed for World War II, but by the end of the war, the population declined to about 2,000 (Chaffin 1967, 1983). A number of people from Woody Island served in the military during WWII, among them were Edson Fadaoff, Martin Pavloff, Wilfred Pavloff, and William Nome.

In 1941 the Federal Aviation Administration established an airways communication station on the east side of Woody Island. During 1942 the United States Army came to Woody Island and constructed a saw mill that was used to harvest timber and was shipped to the Aleutians to be used for military fortifications. A submarine sounding station was also built on the West side of Woody Island (Chaffin 1967, 1983).



Woody Island 1949. Woody Island Tribal Council Collection

## 1950s

The Fedair IV was an FAA boat that was brought to Kodiak in 1949 and used to provide daily ferry service from Kodiak to Woody Island during the 1950s and 1960s. It would also be used to transport children from Woody Island to school in Kodiak.



Fedair IV. FAA photo.

The 1950 census figures recorded the population of Woody Island at 111 people (United States 1968). Also, the total population of the entire Kodiak area was about 3,000 (Chaffin 1967, 1983).

The 1950s brought a large amount of people to the Kodiak area due to the King Crab boom. The crab fishing industry accompanied by salmon and halibut would become the key to economic growth in the Kodiak area (Chaffin 1967, 1983).

### **1960s**

The 1960 census showed a decline in population on Woody Island. According to the census, there were 78 people living on the island (Department of Commerce 1973).

On March 27<sup>th</sup>, 1964 which was Good Friday, a major earthquake shook south-central Alaska. The earthquake would become known as the Great Alaska Earthquake or the Good Friday Earthquake. Woody Island was significantly affected by the quake and the following tsunami. The entire island sank several feet and the running water system was destroyed. Village residents left the village and all gathered at the FAA site because they feared a tsunami would wipe out the village which was close to the shore. Due to the change in landscape following the quake, many old Alutiiq village sites and artifacts were exposed, and looting of these areas was common (Chaffin 1965). The water system was not repaired following the quake which is one of the reasons people eventually left the island permanently.



Daniel Harmon. Photo from Harmon collection.

Woody Island did not go unaffected by the Vietnam War. On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1967 Daniel Harmon was killed in battle in Vietnam. His death was heroic and his story can be found published in a book about Vietnam War stories titled L.R.R.P. (Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol) The Professional (Camper 1988). Harmon was only two days away from returning home when he was killed. His brother Maurice selected a gravesite near the old Russian Church because it was the site that Harmon had wanted to build a house when he returned home from the war (Chaffin 1982). A year later the Kodiak Disabled American Veterans named its post after Harmon. The Kodiak Mirror stated Harmon was “A youth of one of Kodiak’s oldest established families.” Also, “He was already a much decorated young soldier when he was killed on the front in Vietnam.” (Kodiak Mirror 1968). In May of 1971, Freddy Simeonoff, a childhood best friend and first cousin of Harmon, was killed while flying a helicopter mission in Vietnam. He was buried in Kodiak.



Freddy Simeonoff. Pagano Collectio

Three members of Harmon's outfit in Vietnam came to one of the Leisnoi Village tribal retreats which started in 2002. One was Ron Coon, who was mentioned in the book *L.R.R.P. The Professional*, and credited Danny Harmon with saving his life. It wasn't until the internet was going full force that Coon was able to locate Danny's family. The lieutenant who was in charge also came up for the ceremony. He led the effort to get a Bronze Star with a "V" for valor on it posthumously as his recommendation for it at the time was lost. There was a ceremony in Kodiak and Woody Island in the summer of 2007 that included the General in charge of the Army in Alaska and Congressman Don Young. Coon and the lieutenant also came up for that (Gordon L. Pullar, personal communication 2010).

### **1970s ANCSA**

On May 27<sup>nd</sup>, 1969 the Woody Island School closed because the FAA personnel were removed from their site on Woody Island and moved to Kodiak. The population of Woody Island dropped even more by 1970, 41 people lived on the island at that time (U.S. Department of Commerce 1973). Also in 1970 Fedair IV became no longer available for civilian use and therefore Native students could not use it to attend school in Kodiak (Island Times 1970).

December 18<sup>th</sup>, 1971 would become one of the most significant days in Alaska's history because it was the day the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act was signed into law by Richard Nixon. ANCSA became the largest land claims settlement in U.S. history.

The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act was significant to Alaska Natives because it settled aboriginal land claims. The ANCSA created 12 regional Native corporations at the time (and later a 13<sup>th</sup>) and transferred land titles to each corporation. There also became over 200 village corporations that also received title to land. The regional corporations became owners of the subsurface rights to land the village corporations selected, and the village corporations became owners of surface rights to land they selected in their region. The regional corporation for the Kodiak area became known as Koniag, Inc. and the village corporation for Woody Island became Leisnoi, Inc.

On January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1973 Karl Armstrong of Woody Island wrote to Morris Thompson, the area director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and requested that a 25 township withdrawal be designated for Woody Island so that the land selection process could begin. Armstrong included a list of 33 enrollees (Armstrong 1973). On March 23<sup>rd</sup> of 1973, the first meeting of the Woody Island Village is held and called to order by Armstrong who was then elected as temporary chairman. They decided their village corporation should be called Leisnoi. They also initiated resettlement of the old FAA quarters (Redick 1973). By April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1973 Lesnoi, Inc became incorporated (Department of Commerce 1973). On September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1973 the Native Village of Woody Island was determined eligible for land benefits under ANCSA and was authorized to select 115,200 acres of federal land. By October, the first Annual Shareholders Meeting of Leisnoi, Inc was held (Leisnoi, Inc. Resolution 74-1-1 1974).



Village truck

In 1976 a local cattle rancher filed the first of several lawsuits challenging eligibility of Leisnoi, Inc. under ANCSA. The case stayed in the courts until June 2009 when the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the case thus finally confirming Leisnoi eligibility. The cattle rancher challenged Leisnoi, Inc because of the definition of “village” in ANCSA which required a community to have at least 25 full time residents on the day to be eligible.

In the definition section of ANCSA it states the definition of a village: “Native village’ means any tribe, band, clan, group, village, community, or association in Alaska listed in sections 11 and 16 of this Act, or which meets the requirements of the Act, and which the Secretary (of Interior) determines was, on the 1970 enumeration date (shown by the census or other evidence satisfactory to the Secretary, who shall make findings of fact in each instance), composed of twenty-five or more Natives;” (Arnold 1976:302).

## **Woody Island Village Today**

Under federal law, each Alaskan village is considered a tribe with certain rights. In 1994 Lesnoi (new spelling) Village became listed in the Federally Recognized Tribe List Act passed by Congress confirming its tribal eligibility.

In 1998 a formal tribal council was elected which became the first in nearly 100 years. Shortly after, the Woody Island Tribal Council began offering services to tribal members. One of the most notable services offered to tribal members are higher education scholarships. Currently the tribe has over 250 enrolled members. In recent years the tribal council has also organized tribal retreats on Woody Island to get together to talk about their culture and history.

In 2002 Johnny Maliknak left Woody Island and moved into senior housing in Kodiak due to failing health and died about a year later. He was the last village member to live on Woody Island. Maliknak was born on Woody Island on upper Lake Tanignak in 1933 and lived on the island his entire life. He saw Woody Island go from a bustling community to the vacant land it is today (Pullar 2004).

In 2002, 2003, 2006, and 2008 Tribal retreats were held on Woody Island. The retreats are focused on celebrating culture and history of Woody Island Natives. The retreats consist of workshops on genealogy, wood carving, beading, basket making, and Alutiiq language.



Tribal retreat 2002. Pullar collection.

### **Woody Island Village Relocation**

The tribe holds an annual meeting every other year in Kodiak and every other year somewhere in the Pacific Northwest, such as Seattle. The most common topics/questions covered in the annual meetings are, what should the tribe be doing? How can we get healthcare? How should we manage scholarship funding? A topic that has come up recently is would it be possible to relocate the village?

Aside from the annual meeting, there have recently been meetings between the tribe, corporation, and housing authority to specifically discuss the relocation of the village. Some questions they have come up regarding the relocation are: What would it cost? Where would it be? Who and how many people would live there? Would it be a year round village?

It seems that the main reasons for relocating the village are spiritual, cultural and to strengthen the identity of the village. The Kodiak Island Housing Authority is currently looking

at the best location for houses. Woody Island has been considered, but it seems more feasible and likely that the village would be relocated to a location on the road system, with access to the City of Kodiak.

Village relocation is not a new concept. The village of Chenega in Western Prince William Sound was relocated following a tidal wave that resulted from the 1964 earthquake. While it took about 20 years for Chenega to be relocated, it was successful which shows that it may be possible for Woody Island to also relocate successfully.

If the village is relocated, it could possibly take on a new name similar to how the village of Afognak took on the name Port Lions after it was relocated following the 1964 earthquake.

## **Conclusion**

From the prehistoric periods, to Russian contact, and then American period, Woody Island has been home to many people throughout the past 7,500 years and the Tangirmiut have experienced many events on the island during that time. From the first sight of white people, to new religions Orthodox and Baptist, schools, to businesses such as the fur trade and ice company, devastating epidemics, and even one of the largest volcanic eruptions in recorded history. Woody Island certainly looks completely different today than it has in the past few thousand years, but possibly more similar to the way it looked before people. Perhaps one day Woody Island again will be a bustling community.

With an ocean breeze blowing across the beach and green landscape covered with wildflowers to the quiet spruce forest and lakes covering the interior of the island, it is hard to believe that in the past, Woody Island was the home to so many people and so much history.

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## Appendix I

<b>Historical Timeline: Woody Island and the World</b>
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Year	Woody Island Events	World Events
4730 BC	Native people living on Woody Island (determined by archaeologist Rick Knecht by carbon-dating in 2008) - Ocean Bay I Period	Neolithic Age (the latter part of the Stone Age) underway in Europe
2330 BC	Native people have occupied Woody Island for at least 2,400 years – Ocean Bay II Period	The Great Pyramid of Giza built in Egypt
20 AD	Native people have occupied Woody Island for at least 4,750 years – Kachemak Period	Jesus Christ is reaching young adulthood
476 AD	Native people have been living on Woody Island for over 5,200 years	Fall of the Roman Empire
1492 AD	Native people have been living on Woody Island for over 6,200 years – Koniag Period	Christopher Columbus “discovers” America
1741	Native people have been living on Woody Island for nearly 6,500 years	Vitus Bering, a Dane working for the Russian Navy, makes first landfall in Alaska
1776	Native people have been living on Woody Island for over 6,500 years	United States Declaration of Independence

1784	Native people have been living on Woody Island for nearly 6,550 years	Russian fur traders led by Shelikhov massacre Natives at Refuge Rock
1786	First Non-Native establishment on Woody Island, a Russian trading post.	Gavriil Pribylov “discovers” St. George Island of the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea
1794	Two boats are built on Woody Island due to perfect timber for boat building	The first session of the United States Senate is open to the public.
1837	Kodiak’s 65 villages are resettled into 7 due to small pox, and Woody Island is one of them	738 people die from the smallpox epidemic in Kodiak
1852	The Russian American Ice Company begins operations on Woody Island	Franklin Pierce becomes the 14 <sup>th</sup> President of the U.S.
1865	Native people have been living on Woody Island for over 6,600 years	American Civil War ends. President Abraham Lincoln assassinated
1867	Native people have been living on Woody Island for over 6,600 years	U.S. purchases Alaska from Russia
1889	Baptists choose Woody Island for their Mission and receive 500 acres of land from the U.S. government	Former Civil War General Benjamin Harrison becomes the 23 <sup>rd</sup> President of the U.S.

<b>1904</b>	<b>Some Woody Island residents participate in the “Eskimo Village” display at the World’s Fair in St. Louis</b>	<b>Famous Apache leader Geronimo is on display and signs autographs at the World’s Fair in St. Louis and accepts newly elected President Teddy Roosevelt’s invitation to lead his inaugural parade on horseback</b>
<b>1912</b>	<b>Mount Novarupta erupted and is disastrous for Woody Island residents.</b>	<b>The Titanic strikes an iceberg in the North Atlantic Ocean and sinks</b>
<b>1918</b>	<b>The Spanish Flu pandemic reaches Woody Island killing 27 people in two weeks time</b>	<b>Over 20 million people die worldwide from the Spanish Flu</b>
<b>1925</b>	<b>The Baptist Mission building is destroyed by a fire</b>	<b>F. Scott Fitzgerald publishes <i>The Great Gatsby</i></b>
<b>1930</b>	<b>The Navy wireless station is decommissioned</b>	<b>The beginning of the Great Depression</b>
<b>1941</b>	<b>FAA establishes an airways communication station on the east side of Woody Island</b>	<b>The U.S. is drawn into World War II after Pearl Harbor in Hawaii is attacked</b>
<b>1949</b>	<b>An FAA boat called Fedair IV is brought to Woody Island and used as a ferry from Woody Island to Kodiak during the 1950’s and 60’s</b>	<b>de Havilland Comet, the world’s first commercial jetliner flew</b>
<b>1964</b>	<b>The Great Alaska Earthquake and Tsunami have a significant effect on Woody Island</b>	<b>The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed in an effort to end discrimination against minorities</b>

<b>1967</b>	<b>Woody Island resident, Daniel Harmon, dies heroically at war in Vietnam</b>	<b>Near the height of the Vietnam War</b>
<b>1971</b>	<b>Freddy Simeonoff of Woody Island is killed during a combat mission in Vietnam</b>	<b>The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act becomes law</b>
<b>1973</b>	<b>Woody Island's village corporation, Leisnoi, Inc. becomes incorporated</b>	<b>Vietnam War ends</b>
<b>1976</b>	<b>A local cattle rancher challenges Leisnoi's eligibility under ANCSA</b>	<b>Jimmy Carter becomes the first president from the deep south since the Civil War, and the Seattle Seahawks play their first football game</b>
<b>1994</b>	<b>Lesnoi (new spelling) Village is listed in the Federally Recognized Tribe List Act passed by Congress confirming its tribal eligibility</b>	<b>Nelson Mandela is inaugurated as South Africa's first black president.</b>
<b>1998</b>	<b>A formal tribal council for Woody Island is elected which becomes the first in nearly 100 years</b>	<b>Bill Clinton denies having "sexual relations" with Monica Lewinsky</b>
<b>2001</b>	<b>Woody Island has been inhabited by Alaska Native people for over 6,700 years</b>	<b>Almost 3,000 people are killed in an attack on the World Trade Center in New York City</b>
<b>2002</b>	<b>The last Native Woody Island resident leaves Woody Island</b>	<b>U.S. invasion of Afghanistan begins</b>

**2008**

**Archaeological excavation on Woody Island led by Rick Knecht proves, through radiocarbon dating that people have been there for at least 6,740 years (+/- 50 years)**

**Barack Obama is elected as the first black President of the United States**