

# The Invisible People

By Tom Kizzia

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*Author's Note: Kenai's "Bicentennial Year" was drawing to a close when the following piece first appeared, in December, 1991, as an eight-part series in the Anchorage Daily News. For this version, I have made minor edits and revisions, attempting to trim some of the repetition that comes with a multi-day newspaper series. I have not tried to update the account, preserving its depiction of historical consciousness among Kenai's civic leaders and Kenaitze people at the time.*

*Editor's Note: I retained the spelling of names and terms in the original article, even where they differed from those used during the 2017 conference. The illustrations were added to this edition and were not part of the original newspaper series.*

## One: A Death in Old Town

The last snows of another long winter were melting fast. In old town Kenai, close by the river and the Russian church, two women drove slowly past a vacant field, reciting out loud the morning's clue in the KSRM Easter Egg hunt:

"Not far away are people in high places. A circle of bark in unchanged places."

At first the women thought the body was a mannequin. It lay on its side in tall brown grass near a few trees. But as they looked closer, they saw the waxen skin of a dead man, dusted with ash from Redoubt Volcano's winter eruptions. They hurried to a nearby apartment building and called police.

The next day's *Peninsula Clarion* reported that police identified the man as "Daniel A. Ivanoff, a 47-year-old Native." He had been missing since December. He was last seen leaving the American Legion on the night of a heavy snowstorm, wearing the same sweatshirt and denim jacket. He had made it a few hundred yards.

A Navy helicopter mechanic during the Vietnam War, a decorated veteran, Ivanoff had grown up in Kenai and lived a quiet life, tinkering with trucks. People said he was so quiet it was hard to tell when he'd had too much to drink.

The death of Daniel Ivanoff was not an event that stirred much attention in Kenai. A small funeral was held at the Russian Orthodox church, two blocks from where he'd been found. Then his sister and two brothers buried him under a spruce tree in the Russian cemetery, beside their parents.

In April 1990, people were grappling with other matters – the effects of blowing volcanic ash on spring track programs, or what to do about a new dump. The KSRM Easter Egg was found in Soldotna. And in Kenai, political and business leaders were making plans for the town's Bicentennial year. The 200th anniversary of Kenai's founding was fast approaching.

The same week Ivanoff's body was found, at a gallery in a mall on Willow Street, a local artist began work on a mural depicting the arrival of Russian fur traders at the mouth of the Kenai River in 1791. The mural was sponsored by the Kenai Bicentennial Visitors and Convention Bureau, which had come up with a slogan for the year: "Village with a Past; City with a Future!" The Bicentennial's official emblem incorporated both dimensions, coupling an offshore oil derrick with the onion dome of the Chapel of St. Nicholas, a small shrine in the old part of town, near Kenai's Church of the Holy Assumption.

The St. Nicholas chapel was one of the last buildings to survive from the early days, before the discovery of oil and gas brought sweeping change to the village with a past. For a few residents, however, the chapel was more than a quaint architectural relic of imperial Russia. A few old families still told the story of Igumen Nikolai, the priest who built Kenai's first church: how he died in 1867, heartbroken and homesick for Russia, just as control of Alaska was being transferred to the United States. And how, a generation later, the impoverished Indian village of Kenai built the memorial chapel over his grave.

If few people in modern Kenai knew the story of the chapel's origins, fewer still knew there was a second grave under the chapel – the resting place of a mixed-race Russian-Native "creole." The Native man had been honored as a hero because he carried smallpox vaccine, on foot and in paddle boat, to inoculate all the villages of Cook Inlet, back at the time of the American Civil War. And among the old families who knew of the second grave, how many would have recalled that the hero's name was Makary Ivanov? And that his descendants lived in Kenai today – that Daniel Ivanoff, found that Easter in the melting snows of old town, was the hero's great-grandson.

Indeed, most Kenai residents – recent arrivals themselves – didn't know that the empty field surrounded by apartment houses, where the body was found, had once been the heart of the community, a dense neighborhood of interrelated Russian and Indian families within sight of the Orthodox church's cupola.

The thing is, Daniel Ivanoff almost made it home that night. The place where he came to rest was once his family's own yard. The nearby "circle of bark," two spruce and a cottonwood, had been planted as saplings by Daniel's father. Of the old neighborhood, the trees were all that remained.

Kenai in 1991 is a town of 6,300 people, with shopping malls and baseball parks set back from an attractively landscaped five-lane main street known as the Kenai Spur Highway.

The descendants of the old Russian and Indian families live scattered throughout the subdivisions and are, to most residents, unseen.

"Visitors look around and say, 'There are no Native people here,' " said Clare Swan, chairwoman of the local Kenaitze Indian tribe. "Well, we've been right here for 200 years, but nobody ever paid attention."

The Dena'ina people were the only Athabascan Indians ever to live on any seacoast. They migrated onto the Kenai Peninsula and displaced an Eskimo culture while adopting its harpoons and kayaks. They were there when a ship named *St. George the Victorious* landed at

Kenai 200 years ago. They have seen waves of Russian traders, American storekeepers, cannery superintendents and Scandinavian fishermen, prospectors and big-game hunters, soldiers, homesteaders, oil field workers, and now tourism promoters – the whole epic of Alaska, parading through the tiny settlement at the mouth of the Kenai River.

And all the time, a second history was passing unnoticed, its secrets never written down, only whispered in Dena'ina and Russian by old ladies watching, over tea, from behind lace curtains.

In April, 1991, one year after Daniel Ivanoff's funeral, Mary Ann Tweedy was getting worried as she prepared to speak to the Kenai city council.

When she first heard that the planning commission had approved a touristy gift shop in the back yard of the Chapel of St. Nicholas, Tweedy had been angry. It was anything for a buck and this time across from the Russian Orthodox church, in the last place with any feeling of the old town left!

Tweedy was no crusader. As always, she was running in a hundred directions, between her kids and work on the house and her social service job at the Kenaitze tribal office. She liked progress. Kenai was a lot more comfortable than when she was a little girl, growing up in old town.

But occasionally something like this would get under her skin. The idea of a garish "gallery" with Santa Claus displays in the church neighborhood made her so mad she wrote a letter to the Clarion, urging the old families to turn out for the April 17 city council meeting, where a final zoning decision would be made.

"Are we willing to allow our 'culturally and historically rich' area (a description used in our tourist publications) to disappear because our city planning commission has failed to do their homework?" she wrote.

So far, the only opposition to the gallery had come from the local Orthodox priest, Father Macarius Targonsky. But Father Targonsky's protest had been cut short by the mayor's gavel. It had to be admitted, the eccentric priest had a difficult personality. His regular congregation had dwindled to barely a dozen people.

Mary Ann Tweedy was one of those who had stopped going to church. How would she find words to convey to the council – none of them born in Kenai – why it was important to preserve the atmosphere of the church's quiet cul-de-sac?

She could talk about how the church was built in 1895. But when Mary Ann Tweedy thought about the Holy Assumption Church, she didn't think about the National Historic Landmark. She thought about her hair on fire.

Mary Ann had been baptized there under the benevolent gaze of the icons and her grizzled grandfather, Nick Kalifornsky, the congregation's songleader. Her *chada* (grandfather) came from an old, old Dena'ina family. Nick's father had been the last Kenai Indian born under the Russian flag, and his great-grandfather, the first Kalifornsky, had been one of the first Dena'ina to accept the Orthodox faith.

As a little girl in church, Mary Ann would grow bored and fidget with the other children until whack! whack! the grandmothers standing behind cuffed them on the head and reminded them to behave. One Easter, Mary Ann promised her mother to be good. The service was especially long, and the little girls held lighted candles for what seemed hours. Mary Ann strained to pay attention as the priest droned away in Slavonic. When the grandmothers started

whacking her on the head she wondered why, what have I done? Then she realized she'd nodded into the flame and set her hair aflame.

Mary Ann Tweedy was not alone in noting the irony that the fight over the church neighborhood should occur in the midst of Kenai's Bicentennial year celebration.

"This will be a real plum where there used to be an old prune," the gallery developer had said. "This is going to *be* the Bicentennial."

Opponents of the gallery were getting no help from the Kenai Bicentennial commission. Business leaders on the commission refused to take a stand for or against tourist salmon bakes across the lane from the church; the group's executive director said it was a dispute over private property, not history.

The city had come up with nearly two million dollars to build a Bicentennial visitor center to promote tourism. But in old town, where the St. Nicholas chapel needed a new roof, the Kenai Historical Society was passing the hat to buy shingles. The city wouldn't invest a dime in the chapel on the Bicentennial logo. The city manager had said, What if the Baptists wanted a roof next?

On the weekend before the city council hearing, the official birthday party had kicked off with an event that underlined the distance between those celebrating Kenai's history and those whose families had actually lived it. The chamber of commerce held a Masquerade Ball at the armory. Organizers said they got the idea from Anchorage's annual Fur Rendezvous Miners and Trappers Ball.

They seemed unaware that masked balls had long been a part of life in Kenai. By the 1960s, with Kenai growing fast, the Orthodox Church sisterhood's annual masked ball was the only party where you'd be sure to see the people who were "part of you," all the "really Kenai" people, as Mary Ann Tweedy called them.

Tweedy hadn't gone to the Bicentennial masked ball. Neither, as far as she knew, had any of the "really Kenai" people who used to go to the annual Sisterhood masquerade.

It looked as if the approaching year was merely going to celebrate, once again, the gulf between the City with a Future and the Village with a Past.

The city council hearing could change all that, Mary Ann Tweedy thought. But as she prepared her testimony, she had her doubts.

Would the old families adhere to tradition and back off, vexed but hiding their feelings, as they had when the cross was shot off the church's steeple, and when the Russian school was cut up into firewood, and when the Indian graves were bulldozed and spread on the gravel roads?

As some of them had tried to hide their Native heritage even from one another, claiming Russian or Scandinavian ancestry and hanging blankets in the windows when they ate freshly killed seal?

There was good reason to wonder if the protest would fizzle. In 200 years, it seemed, Kenai's first people had become invisible even to themselves.

## Two: The Good Land

The Bicentennial Bureau seemed to have in mind a majestic sailing ship, heaved to in the river mouth, a longboat of Russians approaching the beach, looking up at the land they would soon claim for civilization. Their artist had in mind something different.

Kenai's 200-year record of continuous European occupancy is indeed remarkable. Of the Alaska posts established when the Russians landed at the Kenai River in 1791, Kodiak later moved, Unalaska was abandoned and resettled, and Kasilof deserted. Only Alexandrovsk, living on as the Alutiiq village of Nanwalek, has remained settled as long. There are few non-aboriginal communities west of the Mississippi older than Kenai, Alaska.

But Olivia Schemanski didn't want to invoke storybook versions of Columbus or the Mayflower in her painting. She felt any celebration of Kenai's history should begin with the creation myth of the Natives who were here first. Since she had agreed to donate her time to paint a series of Bicentennial murals, she had considerable say in the matter.

It was, in a sense, a struggle between two creation myths. In the end, the two sides compromised.

The outdoor mural, unveiled on a wall of the Peninsula Oilers bingo hall on June 2, 1990, depicted the arrival of the Lebedev company ship *Sv. Georgii Pobedonosets*, but from the vantage point of the Indians.

The ship is a small intrusion in the big water. In the foreground, on the bluff where the city of Kenai would eventually stand, the Dena'ina watch – some with curiosity, some with worry. One of them is already writhing in the sand with dread. He is a shaman, and he has seen what is coming.

They were always an invisible people.

To the dismay of archeologists, the Dena'ina left little record of their aboriginal life on the Kenai Peninsula. They cremated their dead and burned or destroyed their trash. Leaving signs of themselves was considered disrespectful of the spirit in nature. By showing proper respect, they believed, they would ensure that the land renewed its promise forever.

They called it The Good Land. It was rich country for a subsistence culture, with its mix of inland game animals and salmon runs and marine mammals. This is reflected in their name: among the Dena'ina Indian bands who lived around Cook Inlet when the Russians arrived, the Kenai band was known as *Yaghanenht'ana*, the Good Land People.

The Dena'ina were well aware of the Europeans before the 1791 landing. They called the Russians *tak'na*, or underwater people, having at first no better explanation of where they came from. But they had traded with Captain James Cook in 1778, and two rival Russian companies seeking furs had established forts elsewhere on Kenay Bay, as the Russians called Cook Inlet.

The Russians came with names gleaned from the Alutiiq people of Kodiak Island and the Pacific coast. The river known to the Indians as Kahtnu became the Kenay, and the *Yaghanenht'ana* people living by its mouth the Kenaitsy, (or Kenaitze, as the local tribal organization now calls itself).

The Russians also came with attitude. Grigorii Konovalov, hired to lead the new garrison of 62 Russians, was a thug. He beached the *St. George* in a creek by the mouth of the Kenay River, probably not far from where the city sewage treatment plant sits today. After establishing a defensible winter camp, he made his move.



Study sketch for the Kenaitze shaman in "The Landing" mural, drawn Feb. 2, 1990. Image courtesy of the artist, Olivia "Livvy" Shemanski.

Trade relations on the unconquered mainland were a delicate business for the Russians, often involving a voluntary exchange of Native "hostages" for earnest money. Accounts would be settled with the delivery of furs. Konovalov threw the system into disarray by stopping a band of inland Dena'ina headed down the Kenay River and stealing, at gunpoint, furs bound for the rival post at Kasilof.

According to Russian letters written over the next few years, Konovalov and his crew respected no prior agreements, took masses of hostages, beat and raped them, and kidnapped Natives cooperating with Kasilof.

"This causes a feeling of despair" among the Dena'ina, the Kasilof post manager wrote. "The Natives are angered at him every day."

The founder of Kenai moved to the top of the bluff a mile or so from the Kenaitse village of Ski'tuk. He built a log-walled perimeter in the neighborhood of the present-day Russian church and named it Nikolaevsk Redoubt after Saint Nicholas.

In 1794, English sea captain George Vancouver visited Nikolaevsk and was disgusted by the living conditions. He climbed a trail through masses of animal guts and rotting carcasses, "a fluid mass of putrid matter" that filled the fort with a stench "so extremely offensive, that every sensation that is unpleasant was excited, excepting that of hunger."

Dena'ina society had been thrown into turmoil by the arrival of the Konovalov's Russians. Some families left Ski'tuk and other Kenai Peninsula villages, dispersing to the mountains or joining bands on the west side of Kenay Bay.

In 1797, they took revenge.

The uprising started in the west, where Russian outposts at Iliamna and Tyonek were wiped out. The Dena'ina then laid siege to Nikolaevsk. The neighboring outpost at Kasilof had already been abandoned, but a call for help reached the rival Shelikov post at Alexandrovsk. The Shelikov commander made it to the Kenay River and saved his fellow Russians as the attackers prepared to set the redoubt on fire.

The Dena'ina revolt was the end for the Lebedev company in Alaska. They withdrew from Kenay Bay, leaving the region to Shelikov. But warfare continued, with reports of nearly 100 Russians killed in the Kenay area over the course of a decade. Plots to exterminate the Russians were continually being turned up in the villages, leading to the execution of Indian "rebels."

Dena'ina resistance and the depletion of otter populations in Cook Inlet finally prompted a Russian retreat, leaving the Native villages to organize trade with the one remaining post at Kenai.

For the Kenai Dena'ina, this must have been a proud era, those few undocumented decades between the defeat of the Russians and the coming of smallpox.

Today, on the windy bluff above Kenai's cannery row, there is no sign of the original village of Ski'tuk. Much of the area was bulldozed into the river in the 1940s. A lumpy fringe of scrub woods is littered with toilet paper and broken glass left by fish plant workers who camp there in the summer.

But in the summer of 1791, the Kenaitsy village at the mouth of the Kenai River was probably home to several hundred Indians living in traditional split-log homes. The village had a chief, and the chief had a son named Qadanalchen, which meant "Acts Quickly." Born in the year of America's Declaration of Independence, the chief's son was 15 when the Russians landed.

His activities during the wars are unknown. Sometime about 1812, according to a story handed down in the family for generations, Qadanalchen sailed aboard a Russian ship, past the Russian-American Co. headquarters in what became Sitka, to the warm Pacific coast claimed by Spain. The Russians had established an outpost at Fort Ross, north of San Francisco, as an agricultural colony with orders to grow wheat for Russia's Alaska settlements. Most of the laborers were Alaska Natives.

Whether Qadanalchen went to California willingly is uncertain. He accepted the Orthodox faith there, and was baptized. But a song he wrote, remembered by his descendants, is a plaintive lament of exile:

"Another dark night has come over me.  
We may never be able to return home.  
But do your best in life.  
That's what I do."

In 1821, he was able to return. His father, the chief of Ski'tuk, had died during his absence, and the village asked him to become the new chief. But a faction in the village apparently would not accept an Orthodox chief. He would not give up his new faith.

People were now calling him Kalifornsky, the Russian name for the faraway place he'd been. As Nikolai Kalifornsky, he left Ski'tuk with family and friends to start his own village in the wilderness.

They headed south down the beach. At the last creek before the Kasilof River they built their homes on the bluff above Cook Inlet. In time, the settlement became known as Kalifornsky Village, and the place called Kalifornsky Beach.

For the next hundred years, while the people of Ski'tuk were absorbed into Russian and then American economic life, the village of Christian exile became the place that preserved traditional Dena'ina culture.

### **Three: The Priest and the Songleader**

On a blustery gray day in the spring of 1991, Kenai's civic leaders gathered where the Kenai Spur Highway cuts through the edge of old town.

"This is a most auspicious occasion," boomed Kenai Mayor John Williams as he distributed new shovels spray-painted gold to several dozen business and city council leaders. "We are gathering to celebrate not only our past but our future."

The grassy park next to the chamber of commerce log cabin would be the site of the new Bicentennial Visitors and Cultural Center. In their application for federal funds, promoters described the project as "one of the great stepping stones to a stable economic base for the Kenai Peninsula." Sue Carter, the former chamber head now running the Kenai Bicentennial Visitors and Convention Bureau, noted that historical sites were becoming the number one tourist draw, surpassing recreational assets.

Unfortunately, decades of bulldozing had left little of Kenai's past for tourists to see. The new visitor center would provide a destination. It would house cases of historical artifacts now in the city museum. Large areas would be devoted to the city's commercial fishing and oil industries. The building could also seat busloads of visitors for nature documentaries or even small conventions. The city's application had predicted a spin-off benefit of 80 new jobs.

On the way to the groundbreaking site, Mayor Williams walked alongside Carter.

"Where's Father Targonsky?" he asked.

"He's not here yet," she replied.

They both stopped and looked toward old town, in the direction of the Holy Assumption Church.

Father Macarius Targonsky, the Pennsylvania-born son of Russian immigrants, was the eighth Orthodox priest to serve in Kenai since 1845. At 62, he'd been Kenai's priest for 17 years.

Father Targonsky had been invited to give the invocation at the lunch-hour groundbreaking. But the petulant and perpetually black-robed priest was not on good terms with the city. He was mad about the arts and crafts shop opening by the church. He had blocked efforts to pave a street that crossed church property. He was also sore about the roof of the St. Nicholas chapel.

"The Kenai Bicentennial Commission, the chamber of commerce, the city don't help a bit," Targonsky had said. "Their whole goal was to get that visitor center built."

City leaders returned the affection. The Bicentennial Commission had complained to Bishop Gregory in Sitka about Targonsky's insistent dunning of church visitors for donations, saying it was hurting tourism.





The Kenai visitors' center in 2017. Photo by S.F. Loshbaugh.

Father Targonsky never made it to the groundbreaking that day. But such a display of discord was, if anything, perfectly appropriate to the historic occasion. For 150 years, battles between the Church and local merchants had been a recurring theme of life in Kenai.

A chill wind whipped across the park. Lunch at King Oscar's beckoned. While photographers recorded the moment, the dignitaries lined up before a billboard touting "Jobs for Your Community" and golden shovels bit into the Good Land.

Russian Orthodox priests always loomed large in the lives of Kenai's Natives. The priests are especially prominent in any retelling of those years, because their journals provide a rare if sometimes self-serving look at the Kenaitze people, and at drunken Russian traders and pistol-packing frontier Americans, in 19th-century Kenai.

The first resident priest didn't sail for Kenai until after the smallpox epidemic of 1835-40 swept across Alaska, killing a third of the Natives in its path and perhaps half of all the Dena'ina in Cook Inlet. Survivors straggled to the Russian fort of Nikolaevsk, at the Kenai River's mouth, where two villages were growing: a community of mixed-race creoles near the log fort, and the Dena'ina village of Ski'tuk a mile distant on the bluff.

Nikolai Militov, the 39-year-old monk who reached Nikolaevsk in 1845, served both communities from a small church inside the fort. Nikolai was a "high" Russian who stood apart from the rough trading company men. He was well received by Natives as far away as Chugach Bay, as the Russians called Prince William Sound.

By the time the Sitka bishop visited Kenai in 1859, Nikolai had been promoted to abbot, or "igumen." It was a good visit, Igumen Nikolai wrote, but the moment the bishop left on a steamer employees of the Russian trading post launched a drunken binge that went on for days. Indians who had come to the post with furs waited impatiently for business to resume so they could go home. Finally, Nikolai locked the liquor store and apportioned small drinks until the Russians sobered up and, he said, thanked him.

In Russian Kenai, the priest and the traders fought constantly, even though the Russian-American trading company, under its monopoly agreement, was paying to support the church. Drunkenness and the unmarried coupling and abandonment of Native women seemed to be the two biggest problems. "The missionaries must be unyielding," Nikolai wrote, "otherwise everyone will take a girl."

But it was a company manager arriving from Russia in 1859 who announced a major effort at smallpox inoculations. The job in Cook Inlet would fall to Nikolai's young Native assistant, the congregation's songleader.

Church records say Makary Ivanov was born about 1835, in the time of the first big smallpox epidemic, probably of a Russian father and Native mother. No birthplace is listed. He attended school in the Nushagak region before coming to Kenai. In 1855, he married Marfa Panfilov in the Kenai church, and they had at least six sons and a daughter.

Between 1860 and 1862, Ivanov traveled to 20 villages between Iliamna and Knik. He carried a vial of vaccine shipped from Russia, and would place a drop on each person's skin, scratching it with a needle. In church records today, one can find Ivanov's neat, handwritten ledger of those journeys, in which he recorded the name and age of everyone he vaccinated.

Nikolai described one of Ivanov's trips, a 100-mile journey on foot in November from Kenai to a village at Skilak Lake. He returned after three weeks, exhausted. "No wonder," Nikolai wrote, "such a distance, without a road, in the inclement autumn weather: even a horse would be exhausted." As a reward for his effort, the company gave Ivanov glass for his house and a thousand stove bricks made in a Kenai factory from Cook Inlet clay.

By 1867, when the United States acquired Alaska, the Indians and creoles of Kenai had become immersed in Russian culture. Even 40 years later, Kenai parishioners could be found praying for Czar Nicholas Alexandrovich's victory in the Russo-Japanese War. The Russian language could be heard in certain Kenai homes into the 1950s.

The transfer of power was therefore upsetting to the Kenai Natives. The community was further shaken when Igumen Nikolai, pouring his homesickness for Russia into his journal, died on July 31, 1867, one month after ratified treaties were exchanged between his homeland and the United States.

Songleader Ivanov was left to mind the congregation. According to his grandson, Makary Ivanov served for a decade, until he was shot and killed by Ski'tuk hunters who mistook his boat passing on the river for an animal. A grateful population buried him next to Nikolai, the first priest, under the church they had built together.

#### **Four: Pistol in the Church**

In 1887, nine years after Makary Ivanov's death, his son returned to Kenai and opened a Russian school. Alexei Ivanov was 22 and had come from San Francisco, where he attended the Cathedral School. He returned at a difficult time: a flu epidemic three years earlier had carried off nearly every child under two around Cook Inlet.

But the life of the Church was picking up again, for Kenai finally had a new priest. Work had begun on a log rectory for the priest to live in; today the two-story gabled home by the church is the oldest building in the Cook Inlet region.

By the time he was 28, Alexei Ivanov was songleader for Kenai's tiny church, assisting the priest during services and in social work. Like his father before him, he was the congregation's leading lay person. Those duties put him in the middle of the fight between Father Alexander Yaroshevich and Alexander Ryan, the village bully.

Kenai was a lawless frontier town. There was not yet a marshal or U.S. commissioner. An Army artillery battery had been stationed in Kenai soon after the Alaska purchase, but the soldiers had been withdrawn after 18 months to fight Indian wars down south. With no civilian or military authority, the American keeper of the Alaska Commercial Co.'s Kenai store, Alexander Ryan, ran the town, especially after the cannery ships left for winter.

According to contemporary written accounts, as well as stories recalled by Kenai's oldest residents, Ryan and his friends kept the community plied with illegal vodka. Their parties spilled over to Ski'tuk village, where they awoke residents in the middle of the night. Sometimes people hid in the woods when they saw Ryan coming.

The priest was the only one who would stand up to them. For the white Americans, he must have seemed an alien agent, as full of un-American hocus-pocus as the unkempt Indian villagers. The Americans once took target practice at the church's dome until they shot down the Orthodox cross.

Ryan threatened villagers with his pistol and let it be known that he had authority to hang lawbreakers. Everyone knew he had hung a Copper River Indian at Knik in 1893. Tension grew so bad that Ryan refused to sell the priest food from the town's only store.

Father Yaroshevich had designed a new church to replace the small one built inside the fort back in the 1840s. Kenai had received \$400 from St. Petersburg to help with construction. But the project irritated Ryan. One Saturday in April, 1895, Ryan tried to stop several villagers from hauling logs up from the Kenai River to the construction site. He told them they should be hunting fur instead.

When the men by the river resisted, Ryan left to get his gun, according to a lengthy complaint filed later with a federal judge. The villagers ran to Alexei Ivanov, who rushed to the old church. Father Yaroshevich was in the midst of a service. Ryan burst through the door "with his hat on," a blatant blasphemy, according to the complaint. Then he pulled out his pistol.

"What you are pointing at me, that is what you are going to finish with," the priest said to Ryan, according to Kenai old-timer Paul Shadura, who heard the story as a boy.

A struggle followed, and Ryan was disarmed. Alexei's brother, Ivan, went outside and fired off the bullets while Ryan, struggling, threatened to kill him.

Kenai's new log church, named The Church of the Holy Assumption of the Virgin Mary, was finished two months later. That summer, Alexei Ivanov married Anna Komkov in the new structure. Their son Alexander, born the next year, would grow up to become the third generation of the Ivanoff family to help lead the Kenai parish.

The struggle with Ryan proved too much for Father Yaroshevich. He asked to be transferred to Juneau, and by the time of the church's dedication the next summer he was gone.

No legal action was taken against Ryan, despite the village's formal complaint. Eventually a critical report by a high church investigator prompted the Alaska Commercial Co. to fire him as storekeeper. But it was not the last Kenai would see of Paddy Ryan.

The turn of the century was especially difficult for the Kenaitze, whose problems were detailed in the journal of the sympathetic new priest, John Bortnovsky.

White ruffians ruled the town. Widespread fires set by prospectors from Hope and Sunrise disrupted hunting. The coming of salmon canneries and their fish traps forced families out of their traditional summer camps. Prices for furs, the only local source of cash, plummeted. Cook Inlet had become a social backwater. Drinking among Natives was on the rise.

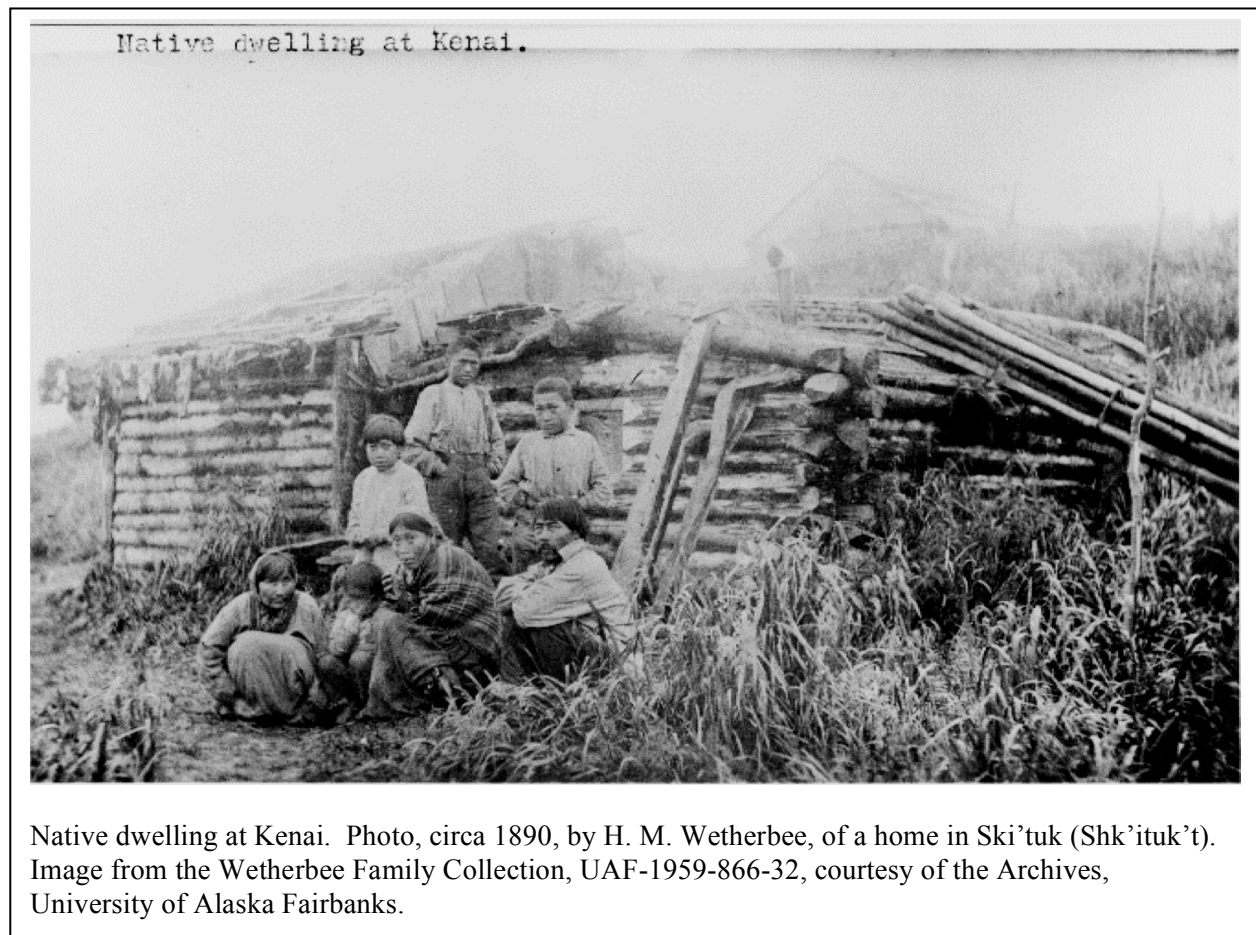
Yet Kenai had a certain charm, especially for travelling church officials pleased to hear Russian as the everyday language. One official passing through in 1901 was charmed by the old-country appearance: "The poplars, birches, flowers and grasses, and soft sands have all the elements of a Russian vista."

In 1906, the Russian church took up a collection to build a memorial chapel to Igumen Nikolai, Kenai's first priest, and Makary Ivanov, his assistant, whose graves had been exposed when the old church was torn down. Each family was asked to contribute five logs.

Because it was built on the site of the original 1849 church, which was known to have been in the northwest corner of the Russian fort, the chapel today provides the only physical clue to the location of Kenai's first white settlement.

The weave of Russian and Native spiritualism was complex. Orthodoxy had not stamped out the old Dena'ina practices. Nor, by most accounts, did it try to. Though the priests wrote extensively of their battles with shamanism, their mystical Christianity coexisted, even blended, with many pre-scientific Native beliefs.

But the American era was not so open to Native ways. A few old-timers today remember the story of the last Dena'ina funeral potlatch in Kenai. It took place in the year the chapel was built, on the beach below Ski'tuk. Families gathered one night with blankets and other gifts to honor the son of a Knik chief. The potlatch was broken up by Americans who threw the blankets in the bonfire.



Native dwelling at Kenai. Photo, circa 1890, by H. M. Wetherbee, of a home in Ski'tuk (Shk'ituk't). Image from the Wetherbee Family Collection, UAF-1959-866-32, courtesy of the Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Alexander Ryan, or Paddy Ryan, as he was sometimes known, shows up in church records several more times. In 1897, he stopped over in Kenai on a trip from Knik to beat up the Wilson brothers. In 1907, he was back in Kenai, petitioning for permission to marry Alexei Ivanoff's 15-year-old cousin.

Then, on April 8, 1918, the prophecy of Father Yaroshevich came true.

The story of the election-day shootout is nearly forgotten in Kenai. The following account is drawn from contemporary accounts, old-timers' memories and documents in state archives.

Not everyone disliked Ryan. Two sisters who wrote about their years as federal schoolteachers in Kenai from 1911 to 1914 remembered an "Alex," apparently Ryan, as "a fine intelligent citizen." But Paul Shadura, who came to Kenai in 1907 when his father became the new priest, remembers Paddy Ryan as "boss of the whole area. People ran from him."

A teacher who followed the sisters to Kenai didn't think much of Ryan either. But then, to hear some of the things people said later about the new teacher, he may have hated Ryan simply because the town was not big enough for two bullies.

In addition to being a teacher and principal in a school with 105 students, Cleveland Magill was the U.S. commissioner responsible for law enforcement in Kenai. In late 1916, Magill wrote to the territorial governor complaining that a bad element of whites, "the seducers of these Native-Creoles," was trying to take over the school board.

"We have here in Kenai five ex-convicts who with a number of others are continuously plotting and fermenting trouble," Magill wrote. "Experience last year has taught us that the majority of white men living here are not to be trusted in any way."

Paul Shadura was a student and remembers that Magill dismissed school early on the day of the school board election in 1918. Magill knew there was going to be trouble, because he told the students he might not see them again.

The voting took place at the school in old town. It is unlikely that many Kenaitze Indians were allowed to participate that day: the territory had only just given Natives the right to apply for citizenship – if they could get endorsements from five white people and prove they had "severed all tribal relationship and adopted the habit of a civilized life."

Ryan had been warned to stay away – he'd been in prison once, and Magill wasn't going to let an ex-felon vote. Ryan came through the door, Magill pulled out his gun and shot once into the ceiling of the school. Then he shot Ryan dead.

Ryan's body lay under a sheet at the school while balloting took place. That evening, Magill walked to Dawson's store, where Ryan's friends were waiting. Charley Coach, a man Magill once helped through an illness, told the commissioner to drop his gun. When Magill went for his pistol, Coach shot him through the shoulder. He finished him with a shot to the head.

An inquest jury in Kenai urged that Coach be exonerated and commended. For three years, they said, Magill had used his official positions to oppress the community.

The next spring, Charley Coach's body was found on the west side of Cook Inlet, where he had a trapline. He'd ended his own life with a shotgun.

Today, the gully behind the Kenai Senior Citizens Center is called Ryan's Creek, and until the Bicentennial year there was a Ryan's Drive off the Kenai Spur Highway. But the city was asked by the Uptown Motel to change the name to Spur View Drive.

Mayor John Williams did at least try to find out who Ryan was before the change was made.

Williams reported to the council that Ryan was a beloved community leader, gunned down while trying to exercise his American right to vote. No one told Williams about the man who terrorized Kenai's Natives and pointed the pistol in the church. The Kenai city council went ahead and erased the historical name from the street. But they voted to erect a Bicentennial plaque by the creek to honor the memory of Paddy Ryan.

### **Five: One Hundred Years of Solitude**

In 1981, Mary Ann Tweedy visited her mother's village for the first time. Guided by her mother's brother, Uncle Pete, she drove south from Kenai on Kalifornsky Beach Road. They walked in through the trees until they came to the whitewashed Russian crosses marking five generations of Kenai history.



What came over her that day in Kalifornsky Village was a feeling of utter peace.

Mary Ann, who grew up in Kenai in the 1940s and 1950s, thought she had known small town life. But back in the days of Kalifornsky Village, Kenai had been the big city to some people. On Saturdays, young villagers seeking a night on the town would jog ten miles up the beach and pay the skiff man at the cannery to take them across the Kenai River.

Only a few house foundations could still be seen in the tall grass. There had been more, but they were "out there," her uncle said, pointing at the Cook Inlet clam flats, beyond the fast-eroding lip of the bluff. In a dark grove of spruce, a cross marked the site of a chapel that vanished overnight in a storm.

Mary Ann was in charge of a crew commissioned by the Kenaitze tribe to clean up the place. They went to work building a picket fence around the crosses of the cemetery. One of the crosses, she knew, marked the grave of her mother's grandfather, Alexei Kalifornsky. Somewhere close by, too, would be the grave of Alexei's father, and of his grandfather, Nikolai Kalifornsky, whose Dena'ina name was Qadanalchen, son of a chief of Ski'tuk.

It was no accident that when an effort began in the early 1970s to recall Dena'ina traditions before they were lost forever, the keepers of memory should have been Kalifornskys, the children of a village isolated for a century: Mary Ann's mother, Mary Nissen, and her mother's younger siblings, Fedosia Sacaloff and Uncle Pete.

Mary Kalifornsky Nissen once told her daughter about how the family finally left Kalifornsky Village back in 1914.

Mary's young mother, Agrafena, died that year of influenza. Her heartbroken father, Nick Kalifornsky, led the family up the beach to Kenai. Three-year-old Peter was carried. Mary was five and had a new pair of shiny rubber boots. Walking along the sand, she carried a big wooden clock that her father had ordered out of a catalogue for Agrafena, who fell sick and died before the clock arrived on a steamship. Today, the clock sits on a shelf in Mary Ann Tweedy's living room.

The little village girl with the shiny new boots grew up in Kenai, passing from auntie to auntie. In the summer of 1919, her father vanished altogether and Mary stayed at a subsistence camp on Birch Island up the Kenai River. No one would tell the worried little girl her father was in the railroad hospital in Anchorage with a ruptured appendix.

Peter, meanwhile, spent his early years on the wilder west side of Cook Inlet, under the care of his mother's brother. In Dena'ina culture it was traditional for a maternal uncle to look after a boy's education. For Peter, this meant prestige because his uncle was Theodore Chickalusion, traditional chief of the western Inlet Dena'ina.

Mary was always honored, too, especially in places like Tyonek or Anchorage. She said the respect puzzled her, until she learned it was due to her mother's family.

During his years at Kustatan and at clam camp at Polly Creek, Peter learned of Dena'ina traditions and the *sukdu*, the old stories. His uncle's father-in-law, Old Man Karp, taught Peter outdoor skills and also the traditional songs that were hummed to concentrate the mind.

"Like prayer, something like praying all the time," Peter recalls. "You start with the morning wake-up song, keep going with your movements all day, and then end with bedtime song."

In 1921, Nick Kalifornsky remarried and gathered his children back to Kenai. Before Peter left the west side, Old Man Karp took him into the steambath for a cleansing ceremony. The old songs would confuse Peter and make him unhappy as he tried to lead a modern life in Kenai, the old man explained.

Peter does not remember the cleansing ceremony itself, only that Old Man Karp seemed pleased.

"It's like I just kind of woke up after a while," he says. "I asked him, 'Where are those songs? I can't remember it.' He told me, 'That's good. That's what I did.'"

In Kenai in the 1920s, young Peter was a country bumpkin. He remembers one friend who traded him a big nickel for two tiny dimes.

Peter attended American school in Kenai for five years and was instructed in Russian ways at church, where his father assisted as a reader. His Dena'ina education continued as well, chiefly through the stories of an old man who was the last of the Indians from Russian River.

Mary and Peter returned to Kalifornsky Village occasionally to visit their grandfather. But after Alexei Kalifornsky died in 1926 the village died, too. It was a time of profound upheaval throughout Cook Inlet, as the small Dena'ina settlements of Kustatan, Susitna and Knik were deserted in the aftermath of yet another influenza epidemic. The survivors gathered at Tyonek on the west shore, Eklutna in the north, and Kenai.

Some said the abandoned villages were haunted. Peter wondered about that himself, especially after the chapel disappeared.

With the settlement abandoned, a man in Kenai bought the Kalifornsky Village chapel for house logs. He hired Peter and two others to dismantle the holy building and float the logs up the Inlet. They made a raft of square, dovetailed logs and tied it off to a piling at Father Shadura's fish trap. A violent storm arose and when it was over, the raft was gone. They searched up and down Cook Inlet by boat, but never found the logs. People said it was because God did not want sacred beams used for anything but a church.

Later, Peter heard, a white man who had moved into a house in Kalifornsky Village left because he heard strange noises. After that, a fire got away from a homesteader burning grass to improve his pasture, and the houses of Kalifornsky Village went up in smoke. The wilderness closed back in.

Over time, Peter and Mary Kalifornsky blended into the Kenai scene. Mary was wooed and won by a Danish adventurer and fox farmer named Louie Nissen ("From Dena'ina to Dane, that's a long way," her brother liked to say). In later years, Mary became a ticket agent for Pacific Northern Airlines. Peter was a trapper, itinerant laborer and boatbuilder, constructing dories like the one he rowed across Cook Inlet to see his uncles.

There became little to distinguish the two Kalifornskys from others in the quiet Russian-Indian population during the boom years, as old town Kenai began to make way for homesteading and road building and oil drilling.

Except one thing. In 1972, when a linguist from the University of Alaska arrived in Kenai to research the Dena'ina, he discovered that Peter and Mary were two of the last people fluent in the original language of the Kenai Peninsula.

After Peter Kalifornsky began working with linguist James Kari and writing down the Dena'ina stories, he set out to find the village of his birth.

By 1974, there was a road south from Kenai. But no road had existed in the 1920s, so Peter didn't know where to park and begin walking. Instead he hiked on the Cook Inlet beach until he recognized the creek and climbed up the eroded bluff.

He walked through the brush for a long time, looking for a familiar sign. Trees had crowded into the clearing. Then he dropped to his knees. Under the weeds, collapsed in a pile, was a spirit house Peter himself had built many years ago out of scow lumber.

He had found the grave of his grandfather.

The resurrection of Kalifornsky Village and its forgotten way of life proceeded slowly. First came the matter of the name itself. The area had come to be known as Kalifonsky Beach, without an "r," due to an error by a government mapmaker in 1916. The highway passing near the old village site was called Kalifonsky Beach Road.

In 1976 a proposal to restore the "r" was rejected by the State Board of Geographic Names. Residents of the area were used to the new spelling, and few knew the story of the young Kenai Indian who voyaged to California in Russian times. Nor were they aware of the continuing presence of the family that gave its name to the beach. Indeed, one of Peter's cousins in Tyonek, who could not read or write, found his surname changed on state records to conform to the mistaken spelling.

Then, in 1979, the Kenai Peninsula Borough decided to sell off the village site as scenic bluff frontage property. Land disposal fever had reached its peak on the Peninsula, and not even



a protest from Father Targonsky in Kenai could stop the sale. But a state judge halted the disposal at the last minute because the borough had imposed an unconstitutional one-year borough residency requirement on bidders.

The attempted sale of Kalifornsky Village had an unexpected result. The controversy spread the story of the village's origins and created sympathy. In 1981, the state board reversed itself and restored the "r" to Kalifornsky Beach – though local usage, from state Fish and Game documents to pronunciation by radio announcers, often still neglects the "r."

Mary Nissen died in 1979, Fedosia Sacaloff in 1989. Peter Kalifornsky continued working with James Kari and Soldotna anthropologist Alan Boraas, perfecting a written system for the Outer Inlet dialect of Dena'ina, the language spoken on the Kenai Peninsula when the Russians first arrived. He put down on paper "that which is written on the people's tongues," the old Dena'ina stories that came from so long ago that animals spoke. He also wrote original accounts of landscapes, people and ideas that won him recognition as a creative writer.

In November, just after his 80th birthday, Kalifornsky's collected works were published by the Alaska Native Language Center under the title *K'tl'egh'i Sukdu, A Dena'ina Legacy*. Remarkably, the world had been given a literary record of a people whose language was about to disappear.

Through it all, Peter returned regularly to Kalifornsky Village. Someday, he said, he hoped to be buried there.

On a fall afternoon in 1990, he went with Father Targonsky to bless the restored cemetery on the feast day of the village chapel, the Nativity of the Virgin Mary.



Peter Kalifornsky (1911-1993). Image from the video of the 1974 history conference, where he read the first story he composed in Dena'ina. After he died, he was buried at Kalifornsky Village.

"Bles-sed are those that are taken," Father Targonsky moaned, singsong, as he moved from grave to grave in a gold robe, swinging an orb of burning incense. "Bles-sed from generation to generation."

Peter stood by the cemetery gate, where a candle burned on a fencepost. Occasionally he unclasped his hands to wipe a bug off his ear.

"They have found the door of Paradise," Father Targonsky sang. "Oh Maxim, Nikolai, Sergei, Pavel, Feodor, Alexei, Anna, Pietra, Aleksandra . . ."

The rolling of the Cook Inlet surf filled the silences as the priest moved among the white crosses. A musty autumn smell of leaves and yellow grass was in the air. Peter crossed himself.

"All those servants who have fallen asleep," sang the priest, "make their memory eternal."

## Six: A Village With a Past

The winter of 1941 got off to a mild start and by Christmas the Kenai River hadn't iced up. Military barges were able to pull beyond the little village and unload at the canneries. Though it was December, the earth yielded easily to the bulldozers as they scraped through the mounds of the old Indian village.

When the blades turned up the first human skulls, Alex Ivanoff put down his shovel and went to consult with the priest.

Short, dark and strong, by heritage both Native and Russian, by trade a cook, Ivanoff was 45, married with a large family, and a religious man. He was one of the few villagers lucky enough to be hired to do shovel work and cleanup on the airport job. Pearl Harbor had just been bombed, and the Army was constructing a major airstrip atop the bluff. Bombers would soon be able to land at Kenai when bad weather kept them from reaching Elmendorf.

But now they were cutting roads and preparing to build airport housing where the old Dena'ina village of Ski'tuk used to sit. Ivanoff could not simply look the other way while an Indian burial ground was bulldozed over the cliff.

The local hired men talked about the bones as the bulldozers pushed on. Today, such a discovery would bring an immediate halt to work. Native elders would be convened, teams of archeologists summoned. Not in 1941. The Kenaitze men did not protest. Instead, as the bones of their ancestors were churned up in the dirt, they stooped over and set them aside.

"If we didn't see it, they just spread them on the road," recalls George Miller, a laborer in the group.

Every so often, Ivanoff would gather up the bones and slip into the woods with his shovel. Under spruce trees, he reburied the first Kenai people and prayed for their souls.

Thus did the war come to Kenai.

Like his father and grandfather, Alex Ivanoff was a lay reader in Kenai's Orthodox church. Eventually he would rise higher than his forebears, becoming a deacon.

But unlike his grandfather Makary, hero of the smallpox inoculation effort, or his father Alexei, who helped build the Holy Assumption church, Alex Ivanoff presided during the hard years of the Orthodox congregation's decline.

Modern times came to Kenai in the summer of 1950, when an engineer for the federal Bureau of Land Management spent a month surveying the village.

That summer, Kenai was a community of 350 residents, two general merchandise stores, one inn, a lunchroom and variety store, Kenai Joe's roadhouse, a dance hall and movie house. Nobody had title to their land or owed the bank for their homes. Kenai had fewer than 50 small houses, most of them jammed together and linked by footpaths once described as looking like the work of a hungry malamute.

But there was a logic to the layout of homes that would have been invisible to the federal surveyor.

A few old-timers living near the Orthodox church still referred to themselves as "The One Hundred," while the neighborhood farther away they called "Dogtown." It was a disparaging holdover from the 19th century, when the mixed-race creole elite had a "Russian" village near the fort separate from the "Indian" village of Ski'tuk.



Aerial image of Kenai, 1949, overlain by surveyors' marks showing preexisting private land. This was used to prepare for the survey of old town home lots. Bureau of Land Management image via the National Archives.

Race, language and skin color were socially important. Some children grew up calling themselves Scandinavian or Russian, only to learn late in life that they were more than half Native. A few people in the old village spoke primarily Russian, like Alex Ivanoff; others spoke Dena'ina, like the second church reader, Nick Kalifornsky. Children mostly spoke English, learning enough of the other tongues to follow the gossip of their elders.

The town was ready to grow after the war, but the polyglot community already in place couldn't be ignored. The original people had a right to their land – hence the survey in the summer of 1950.

Decades later, Kenai Natives would formally claim four and a half million acres of the Peninsula. But in 1950, the rules were different. The families who lived crowded in old town received their house lots and gardens for a small registration fee. Alex Ivanoff got a quarter-acre.

With that, the country around Kenai could be opened to homesteading, mostly by war veterans. A road to Anchorage was newly completed. An army base at Wildwood on the north side of town opened in 1953. Oil was struck at the Swanson River in 1957. More and more people poured in.



Aerial image of Kenai in the early 1950s. Photo by Ralph Soberg, used courtesy of Hardscratch Press.

With the settlers came new churches. The first Protestant missionaries in Kenai were sent by the Slavic Gospel Association, a Chicago group whose specific goal was to wrest souls from the Orthodox church. Other Protestant denominations followed.

All of which further burdened Alex Ivanoff, now responsible for church services with the retirement of Father Shadura in 1952. It was a duty he would carry for two decades, as no new priest was assigned to the struggling parish.

Old feelings remained so strong that even some converted families continued to have their children baptized at the Orthodox church. But in business and school, as well as in the new churches, Kenai's first people were encouraged to leave their Native and Russian heritage to the past.

A few made the transition successfully. Many did not.

Life was as hard for Ivanoff as it was for others in the parish. He was a man of boundless energy, often compared by his friends to a beaver or an ant. He walked everywhere. Once he bought an old house and moved it out of town on his back, dismantling the walls of fish-trap planks and carrying them one at a time across a deep canyon.

As he grew older those responsibilities bore down on him. After the death of his wife, Lydia, he raised their four youngest children by himself. He quit cutting trees for fish trap poles and found steady work as janitor at the territorial school, coming home at night to haul water and wash clothes on a scrub board. For extra income he rented his steam bath to GIs from the Wildwood base. He tended a potato patch on church land behind the rectory and baked 17 loaves of bread in a wood stove every Sunday after leading two services.

Finally Alex Ivanoff collapsed. He was sick with pneumonia for two years. When he recovered, he moved closer to his one support – the church. He went to Sitka and in 1961 was ordained as a deacon. His responsibilities grew. He was sent to Seldovia in 1964 to supervise reburial of Orthodox graves unearthed in the Good Friday earthquake.

But the respect of the community did not increase accordingly. A few people accused him of putting on airs. The priestless congregation was torn by family schisms as its membership shrank.

This, then, was the "village with a past" that many of Kenai's homestead-era settlers found when they arrived in the 1950s and early 1960s: a Native population in small houses without running water, wracked by tuberculosis and mired in alcohol, their church growing more irrelevant every year.

In 1956, one of Kenai's oldest landmarks disappeared.

The two-story Russian schoolhouse was declared a hazard and torn down. The 19th-century building with four gabled windows had been a parish meeting hall after the Russian school closed in 1921. The square, dovetailed logs, including some from the original 1849 church, were bucked into firewood.

Just as in 1941 with the bulldozing of old Ski'tuk, there was head-shaking in the community, but no protest. The grassy street corner, where the school was torn down, sat empty for years as Kenai experienced an oil boom and apartments replaced the early homes of old town. Then in 1967 the city found a use for the church's corner lot.

Federal money was suddenly available for projects to mark the Centennial of Alaska's purchase by the United States. The vacant lot in old town seemed just right for a Centennial historic museum. The only problem was that the land belonged to the church. And the Alaska purchase hadn't exactly been a cause of celebration for the Russian-Native congregation of Kenai.

But now the Kenai church was in financial trouble. The oil boom had deposited a boxy 53-unit apartment complex on one side, its foundation dug into the site of the original Russian fort. The apartment building brought sewer and water lines to the church's cul-de-sac. The parish, which supported its operations by the sale of candles and prayer books, couldn't begin to pay the \$8,000 sewer line assessment.

The city of Kenai offered the church a deal. In exchange for a free 55-year lease on 1.4 acres of church property, including the rectory and the old Russian school site, the city would pay the assessment.

With the lease for the school property in hand, the city received a \$40,000 grant to construct a two-story Lincoln-log building to represent, though it did not resemble, the short-lived U.S. Army fort erected in Kenai in 1868.

The upstairs became a repository for pioneer cooking pots and photographs, and several early log cabins were saved and moved to a barbed-wire pen behind the building. Downstairs from the historical museum is the Forget-Me-Not, an Alzheimer's day-care center.

The museum never quite lived up to the optimistic note affixed to the city's successful grant application: "It is anticipated that this, together with the Church, will be the central tourist attraction on the entire Peninsula, not only in 1967, but for many years to come." The collections are now to be moved to the new Bicentennial Visitor Center.



Rear view of the 1967 Fort Kenay building and the 1881 church rectory (the peninsula's oldest documented building) as of April 2017. The church cupola is visible in the background. Photo by S. F. Loshbaugh.

Two years after the Alaska Centennial agreement between the church and city, Alex Ivanoff, worn out and suffering from cataracts, died after a fall down a stairway. His funeral at the Holy Assumption Church was a five-hour, two-candle service.

Soon after his death, squatters accidentally burned down the Ivanoff home in old town.

Ivanoff's fellow church reader, Nick Kalifornsky, had died at age 80 in 1965. A priest from Kodiak, Father Macarius Targonsky, came for the funeral. Targonsky would return to Kenai several years after Ivanoff's death to become its eighth resident priest.

After the death of her father, Mary Kalifornsky Nissen returned increasingly to her own Dena'ina memories, finding a way to unite them with her faith in Orthodoxy.

"We had no temples or worshipped no idols, we just had the Great Outdoors," she wrote. The Dena'ina, she recalled before she died in 1979, knew God as the Great Oversoul.

"We were told that 'God' held the world in his hand. And when there was earthquake, he just reminded us he was there. When I see a rainbow I am always glad to see it, because God has not forgotten us."

### **Seven: Invisible No More**

In the summer of 1990, Steve Pelozza, a young logger from Fort Bragg, Calif., moved to Kenai from Valdez, where he had been working on the cleanup of the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill. He rented an apartment at the Bay Arms, the complex next to the Holy Assumption Church.

Gazing out his sliding glass door at the historic St. Nicholas chapel, then at an abandoned log cabin nearby, Pelozza had a vision. He wondered why no one in Kenai had ever realized that the old cabin sat on a tourism gold mine.

Any worries Mary Ann Tweedy had about the old families of Kenai were quickly dispelled when she got to city hall that evening in April, 1991. The hearing on Steve Peloza's old town art gallery had brought descendants of Kenai's early Indian and Russian families out in force. The council chambers in the city hall basement were packed with people ready to speak up.

For 200 years, the old families had grumbled among themselves or gone along quietly when newcomers brought progress and change. In oil-town Kenai, where homesteaders from the 1950s were considered old-timers, the truly old families had become invisible. Until now.

Things were indeed changing in Kenai's Bicentennial year.

The seven council members sat behind tables on a high stage, looking down on the rows of chairs filled with townspeople.

The city had already received a dozen letters opposing the gallery, including one from California written by Mother Victoria Schnurer, an Orthodox nun and church historian who wrote in 1974 the first thorough account of Kenai's early days.

"That small area of old Kenai is a remarkable treasure," Mother Victoria wrote to the city, "all the more so because of the continuous use of the church and the Chapel by Kenai's Russian Orthodox congregation, which constitutes a living link with Kenai's Russian and native antecedents."

Newer residents, however, tended to react to what they could see, not to invisible links and invisible people. One of the first speakers was a young oil-field worker, who had heard about the controversy and showed up to speak his mind.

"I look at that old town as a junkyard. I'm sorry if I offend anybody by being rather blunt," he said. "As a tourist, I wouldn't have no interest in going over there at all."

The city had once considered a plan to prettify old town with plantings and kiosks and boardwalks. But a consultant's 1986 scheme was abandoned when Father Targonsky and others said a cute Victorian design was inappropriate. Instead, the old part of town, bypassed by the highway and malls, continued to slip into decay, an area of aging boom-era apartments and overgrown vacant lots.

Kenaitze tribal chief Clare Swan followed the young oil worker to the microphone. She'd grown up in old Kenai; her mother came from a Kenai Dena'ina family, her father was an immigrant from the Philippines. She remembered the old church neighborhood as a quiet place with wildflowers and picket fences, and children riding toboggans into the gully in winter.

Swan was glad the city hadn't built a faked-up historical village.

"You have all these visions in your head of what the village should look like. The reason it doesn't work is that you don't have to make up the history. It's already there," Swan said. "The way you preserve it is ask the people that live there and know about it. And then listen. Some of it isn't very good. It's not very jazzy. But history is what it is. . . ."

"People come to Alaska and want to see Native history, particularly in Kenai. But people have their own ideas of how Indians are supposed to look. We're not John Wayne types. I'm sorry."

Steve Peloza stepped to the microphone and said he was "at a loss."

Sure he had talked of salmon bakes and horse rides and selling "nice artistically done manger scenes" at Christmas. But all he'd done so far was try to fix up an old cabin. How could anyone complain about his plans for a nice yard? Was it jealousy?

"As for the totem pole, that's my prerogative."

A historical architect from the National Park Service had warned the city that the church's 1970 designation as a National Historic Landmark could be jeopardized by "inappropriate" commercial development nearby. He had cited Pelozza's totem pole as an example, noting that totems are not indigenous to Cook Inlet.

"It's been like cleaning up a dump," Pelozza went on, repeating his claim that he would make "Steven's Alaskan Originals" the plum of the area.

"The plum is the Russian Orthodox church," responded Alexandra Lindgren, whose turn followed. "The plum is the hallowed ground that my ancestors are buried in."

Lindgren said she was glad for the controversy, because although she was baptized in the church she'd never given much thought to her heritage before that week.

"My grandmother used to walk me past that church. You couldn't skip," she said. "And I don't think my grandmother would want me to support an art gallery by her grave."

"We would certainly not hold a salmon bake or sell arts and crafts by the shrine of John F. Kennedy at Arlington," Mary Ellen Israelson had written in a formal appeal to the city. Israelson, whose mother was a chief of the Kenaitze tribe in the 1960s, cited the recent Persian Gulf War when she rose now to speak.

"President Bush ordered his commanders at all costs to avoid the mosques and holy places," she said. "We can't even do the same thing here."

It was all rather unusual testimony for Kenai, where economic development is rarely challenged. None of the city council members were Native or Kenai-born, but they listened attentively as speaker after speaker talked about showing respect.

Pelozza waited angrily for somebody on the council to point out to these people that letting things rot away was not exactly respectful of the past. The man Pelozza really disliked was Kenai's priest, Father Targonsky. The father had been the first to stir up the city against him. Targonsky had complained when Pelozza opened up the view from his gallery with a chain saw. The complaint led to criminal trespass charges because the trees were on church property.

"You call that a priest? Where's the love-thy-neighbor aspect?" Pelozza had asked one day at the gallery. Tourists drove up, took pictures of the chapel, and left without coming to see his jewelry. Pelozza blamed Targonsky.

"He's got a hex on this place."

Sure enough, Targonsky got up now in front of the city council to complain about Pelozza's sign being lit up at night and about the totem pole: "You might as well put a Buddha there."

"This is not an issue of a gallery vs. the church," said Archpriest Nicholas Molodyko-Harris, who came down from Anchorage's St. Innocent Cathedral and took a loftier rhetorical stance than the local priest. "It's much more deeply involved. It has to do with the gradual eradication of the Native way of life. An infringement on sacred burial ground. Disrespect for the oldest Christian church in the Kenai Peninsula. . . ."

"The oldest relative that all of you have in Kenai is the Orthodox Church. And it seems to me very ironic that such a debate is taking place, where the oldest institution of all institutions in Alaska is here being discussed on the same level with a man who has only been in Kenai for about a year."

When it finally came her turn to speak, Mary Ann Tweedy could have begun by invoking her mother's family, the Kalifornskys, who had been in Kenai when the Russians landed. Instead she started with a memory of her Danish father, Louie Nissen, one of Kenai's leading white citizens in the century's middle years.



"My father way back when was one of the people who pushed to incorporate the city of Kenai," she said. "Being here now makes me wonder, wow, what did we do?"

Soon, however, she was on to the Kalifornskys.

"My grandfather was a reader at the church. My family all the way back through history were part of that church. But for some people, it's not important unless we can use it as a tourist attraction.

"As for the young man who said the area is a mess. Yes, it's a terrible mess. But if you want to go back 40 years, the village of Kenai was a nice place. We had gardens, small homes, fences. People respected the land. By God, we don't do that anymore."

A lot had happened in the last few decades to dispel long-held feelings of helplessness among the Kenai Dena'ina and instill a new pride in their Native heritage.

As pressure for a Native land claims settlement in Alaska built, several Kenai leaders formed the Kenaitze Indian tribe in 1962, choosing the Russian name for their people instead of lesser-known Dena'ina names like *Yaghanenht'ana*. Among those who formed the tribe was Mary Ann Tweedy's mother, Mary Kalifornsky Nissen.

Passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971 sent some Kenai residents scrambling to their family trees to see if they had the one-quarter Native blood required for shares in the new Native corporations. Kenai's regional corporation, Cook Inlet Region Inc., would become one of the most successful.

The Kenaitze received federal recognition as a tribe in 1971, and for two decades ran job training and alcohol programs for Dena'ina descendants and summer camps for children. The activities helped raise the tribe's visibility in Kenai, especially among the community's Natives.

"The fact that we're so invisible to each other is the reason we have problems with alcohol and substance abuse and depression," said Clare Swan.

Then, in 1989, the Kenaitze tribe leaped into the public eye when tribal members put a net in the Kenai River for salmon. The Kenaitze had challenged the state's tangled subsistence regulations in federal court and won. Temporary fishing rights subsequently granted by the state were called "educational," a description that cut several ways. The fishery was educational for young tribal members who didn't remember the summer fish camps of midcentury, and also for the community at large, unaccustomed to thinking of an Indian tribe amid the malls and subdivisions of Kenai.

Now in 1991, on the 200th anniversary of the Russian landing, the Kenaitze were once again drawn into prominence.

Some tribal members objected to the very idea of celebrating 1791, a year that brought massacres, torture and smallpox to the Dena'ina. But most agreed that a proper commemoration would call attention to the long history of the Kenai area.

Tribal chief Swan joined the planners, but soon found herself sparring with other members of Kenai's Bicentennial commission. The group was mostly business leaders, its president and vice president oil company executives. Swan walked out of an early planning meeting in the midst of a discussion about creating a colonial village.

"The idea of a theme park offends me," Swan said afterward. "We want to be a part of the celebration, but on our own terms."

Ultimately the Kenaitze accepted a low-key, cooperative role. Together with Cook Inlet Region Inc. they agreed to host a "friendship potlatch" in October.

"The most important thing is to become comfortable in our own community again," Swan said. "Because right now, we're not."

The hearing on the gallery lasted two and a half hours, and when it was over council members said they were impressed by the heartfelt testimony. Invisible no more, the old families went home with a renewed sense of their standing in Kenai.

Two weeks later the council rendered its decision. Pelozza could open his gallery.

The council decided the historic zoning district, created in 1986 to protect old town, gave the city leverage only over new construction. Council members said they would consider revising the code to prevent similar disputes in the future. But for now, they couldn't stop the gallery because it didn't require a building permit.

Delighted with the result, Steve Pelozza forged ahead. He put a Coke machine and a newspaper vending box on the porch of the Dolchok cabin, saying this would convey to tourists it was a commercial operation. He set up a wishing well and advertised a car wash to generate cash flow. He prepared the ground in front of the cabin for AstroTurf, and arranged for horse rides over the Fourth of July.

To the gully behind the cabin, where elders said rotting crosses used to lean, Pelozza brought in truckloads of dirt. Truck after truck rumbled past the church, until 385 loads of fill had been dumped on top of whatever remained of the northwest corner of the original Russian fort.

Pelozza had said he didn't have a lot of financial backing. Some opponents had said he was just a big talker. But he was lucky to find a source of cheap fill dirt: the nearby excavation for the Kenai Bicentennial Visitor and Cultural Center.

## **Epilogue: Funerals**

Two hundred years after the Russians came ashore at the Kenai River, the old Kenai families get together any more only at shareholder meetings and funerals.

For the Ivanoffs, one of oldest Russian creole families, the funerals have marked a tearful and tragic unravelling.

Two months after they found Daniel Ivanoff in the snows of old town and buried him in the Russian cemetery, his brother, Alfred, dropped dead of a heart attack at 53.

Unlike Daniel, who had lived quietly in a small trailer in old town, Alfred had been prominent in modern-day Kenai. He was the city's fire chief, having started firefighting as a volunteer. He was not much involved in the Orthodox church, like the three preceding generations of Ivanoffs, but he seemed to fill a similar need for community and liturgy in the Kenai Moose Lodge, which he helped found in 1978. Alfred had recently taken part in an international Moose ritual competition and achieved a near-perfect score.

Like the other Ivanoffs, Alfred was a reserved man. He did not speak about his Native roots or the Ivanoff family history, even with his wife, Roberta, who was not a Native and wanted to know more. His bottled-up anxiety over his younger brother's four-month disappearance and death contributed to his unexpected heart attack, she said.

The family held a vigil for Alfred Ivanoff at the Orthodox church, but the large service with Father Targonsky was staged at the Moose Lodge. Afterward, uniformed firefighters loaded the casket onto a fire truck for the short ride to the Russian cemetery.

The Ivanoff corner was becoming crowded.

Alex Ivanoff, the church deacon who planted the trees in his old town yard, and his wife, Lydia, are buried there.

Anna, their first-born, drowned in a well in Kodiak, leaving eight children.

Alec, the oldest boy, had a weak heart. He moved to Oregon and died at age 39.

A daughter, Mary, died when she was seven. Her surviving siblings think the cause was leukemia.

Billy Ivanoff died when he was 20 in San Diego. He'd enlisted in the Navy with a buddy from Kasilof. One night, a drunk driver picked them up hitchhiking and slammed into the back of a semi carrying industrial pipe. Billy's friend lay asleep in the back seat and escaped injury, but up front Billy was killed when a pipe crashed through the windshield.

And then there was Danny, who disappeared in a blizzard. Once, in Vietnam, Danny had lost a cross blessed by their father. His brother, Jake, sent Danny his own cross, since Danny was the one flying helicopter rescue missions over the South China Sea. Danny was wearing that cross when they found him in the snow. Jake made sure it was buried with him.

Now Alfred's sudden death left the two youngest Ivanoff siblings, Jake and Polly.

Polly had married Mike Conaway, a white cook from Seattle, and they settled in Kenai after a spell in the Lower Forty-eight. She raised her sister Anna's four youngest children and a daughter of their own.

Softly, slowly, Polly Conaway will recount the struggle of her father to raise his four youngest children alone. She was the baby of the family. After school, Polly used to visit her babushka, who braided her hair and spoke soothing Russian words as the little girl waited for her father, the school janitor, to come home. She never knew her mother – only the perennial flowers she'd planted before she died.

Jake Ivanoff and his wife live in a tiny trailer north of Kenai. The trailer used to be Danny's home, before he died. Jake hauled it out the road to Nikiski this spring after his own house was gutted and blackened by fire.

The fire melted clothes on the hangers and left Jake and Carmen Ivanoff destitute. The Hunger Hut, a nearby bar where they were well known, held a five-dollar-a-plate benefit and solicited sheets and towels. Their Native corporations came through with gift certificates: \$200 from Kenai Natives Association, \$25 from Cook Inlet Region.

The corporations were supposed to provide financial security for the Kenaitze people, Jake says. It is an observation laced with dry humor and bitterness, like his other stories how the IRS gets his permanent fund checks because an accountant screwed up his taxes, how he was denied a limited entry fishing permit because he'd been in the military when he needed to be building up qualification points, how he lost his oil platform job because he smelled of beer returning to work after his brother's funeral.

Jake avoided Kenai's Bicentennial. But on days when he makes the drive to Kenai, he marks history with his own, private pilgrimage.

The drive takes him past the church, which as a boy he swept out after services. He was ordered to scrub the floor as punishment the day the bishop came and found him and another altar boy drunk on sacramental wine.

In the woods just beyond the Kenai church lies the Russian cemetery. It doesn't look like most cemeteries. There are wildflowers on the graves in summer, and meadows of lupine and dwarf dogwood. Along the edge of the clearing where the Ivanoffs are buried, graveyard and forest merge imperceptibly. Many of the three-bar crosses are blank. One of these, set inside a small fence under a spruce tree, marks the grave of Jake's mother.

Occasionally someone official comes along with a proposal to "fix up" the cemetery, to clear brush and mow the grass. Jake likes it the way it is.

There are two more generations of Ivanoffs in Kenai.

Gregg Ivanoff is Alfred's son. A 1983 graduate of Kenai Central High School, Gregg is 25 and works for a state-funded program helping handicapped people find jobs.

He never really thought of himself as part-Russian or Indian when he was growing up. His father never talked about such things.

Now suddenly Gregg wants to know more. He has a seven-year-old son, Christophor, and he wants to be able to tell his son something about his heritage. But he doesn't have anything to tell him.

Gregg can think of a hundred questions he wishes he'd asked before his father died. He remembers his grandfather, who died in 1969, as an old man who made wooden toys. Gregg doesn't know anything about the earlier Ivanoffs. He had noticed that one of the people buried under the St. Nicholas chapel was named Ivanoff. He didn't know it was his relative.

Gregg's mother, Roberta, who grew up in California, was always intrigued by the Ivanoff family history. But not even her persistent questioning had drawn out her husband. She'd found others in Kenai just as close-mouthed and secretive. She has told her son and daughter, Melinda, what little she knows.

A few years ago Roberta thought she'd found a key to their history. Her husband's father, Alex Ivanoff, used to keep a journal about the affairs of Kenai. She found someone who could translate his Russian prose and tried to track down the journal.

Danny was supposed to have it, but Danny said he'd given the book to Jake. Jake didn't know where it was.

The deacon's journal wasn't among Danny's belongings when he died. And if the book was at Jake's house, it went up in smoke when the house burned.

So that was it. Another piece of Kenai's past had disappeared.

When the 500th anniversary of Columbus' voyage to the New World is marked in 1992, organizers of events will tactfully use words like "commemoration" and "meeting of cultures." But such careful rewording of history never fazed the organizers of Kenai's Bicentennial.

As 1991 progressed, however, Kenai's celebration never really caught on.

Tourism in Kenai actually declined in the Bicentennial year; the chamber of commerce attributed the slight drop to the national recession and poor sport fishing on the Kenai River. The decline would have been worse, the chamber said, without the publicity generated by the anniversary.

Organizers tried hard, publicizing everything from a Bicentennial Dance Brazil concert to a Bicentennial Miss Alaska Pageant. But a first-ever "Blessing of the Fleet" attracted more

clergymen than fishermen. A Founders Day celebration and birthday-cake carving at the Kenai Mall in September drew only a handful of exhibitors and puzzled looks from shoppers.

"I guess in some instances I thought people would grab onto it more than they did," said Bicentennial Bureau director Sue Carter. "You know, the significance of the history. But I found a lot of people just don't care."

In December, the Kenai Historical Society donated \$39,000 to the parish for restoration of the Holy Assumption Church. Swede Foss, chairman of the parish work committee, said an additional \$40,000 was still needed to repair the leaking roof and cupola, replace oxidized iron nails, clean icons and finish restoration of the 96-year-old landmark.

Construction of the \$1.6 million Kenai Bicentennial Visitors and Cultural Center fell behind schedule and its dedication had to be postponed until the year after the Bicentennial was over.

As the anniversary year neared its end, Mayor John Williams announced that Kenai would apply for federal designation as an All-American City. [Kenai went on to win the award.]

One of the best-attended Bicentennial events came late in the year: a "friendship potlatch" staged in October by the Kenaitze and Cook Inlet Region. Scores of Kenai residents joined hundreds of CIRI shareholders for an afternoon of Native dancing in the high school gym.

Mayor Williams gave the longest speech, noting that Kenai had been "a village of commerce and culture" long before places like Dallas or Seattle were settled.

Kenaitze chairwoman Clare Swan gave the shortest.

"This is one time of year to get together just to enjoy each other," she said. "So many times it's for some disaster."

In September of the Bicentennial year, Father Macarius Targonsky lost his job after 17 years in Kenai. Despite declining health, the priest had continued to fight Steve Pelozza and the city. But his role in an unrelated matter got him in trouble.

Targonsky was named in a lawsuit as trustee of a land trust set up by Ethel "Eadie" Henderson, a longtime Kenai bar-owner whose Frontier Club had been the scene of several prostitution busts. The priest claimed to be helping a parishioner, but publicity about his close relationship with Kenai's famous alleged madam added to long-standing complaints from the congregation.

When Bishop Gregory Afonsky came to the Holy Assumption Church in September for a service that drew 50 people, he announced that Targonsky would be relieved of his duties in the parish. A new priest based in Anchorage was assigned to Kenai twice a month. It was unclear whether the Kenai parish would enter another extended period without a resident priest.

City officials said they looked forward to a better working relationship with the Church in the future. Pelozza was overjoyed.

Misdemeanor charges against Pelozza, for trespassing with a chain saw on church property, were dropped, after he demanded that the trial be moved to Fairbanks because of

negative publicity. But his arts and crafts gallery never drew the Bicentennial crowds he'd envisioned. Nor could he convince many local artists to display their wares. He blamed the city's indecision and resulting bad publicity, and he threatened to sue.

Vowing to run for city council to improve the business climate in Kenai, Pelozza was told he didn't meet the city's three-year residency requirement for officeholders. When he challenged the law in court and lost, he accused the judge of being part of a conspiracy against him. The case is on appeal.

In October Pelozza closed his gallery and said he would not reopen next year. The Dolchok cabin that had been at the heart of the year-long dispute was once again up for rent, possibly for a new commercial use.

Peter Kalifornsky's crowning work, his collected writings in Dena'ina, was published in November of the Bicentennial year. "Uncle Pete" was honored on his 80th birthday at the CIRI friendship potlatch in October.

But it was a bittersweet autumn for the Kenaitze's most respected elder. In September his village corporation forced him to move from his inexpensive home in the former Wildwood Air Force Base apartments. Kenai Natives Association, which received the base under the land claims act and already leases part of it to the state Department of Corrections, told him the remaining apartments were needed for future projects.

Leaving the apartment where he had expected to spend his remaining years, Kalifornsky sold many of his belongings and moved to a rural trailer court in Nikiski. There he spent the week before his birthday trying to put a skirt on an old mobile home and install storm windows, working hard as ever to keep ahead of the shortening days.

Polly Conaway, the last daughter of Alex Ivanoff, went to church when the bishop came to Kenai, and attended the CIRI potlatch. Otherwise her life was not touched by the Bicentennial.

These days there is little to see of the old town where she grew up. The road down the bluff where kids ran to the beach has sloughed away. The beaver dam where she recalled a happy afternoon with her father is now the site of a video store.

Sometimes she visits the old Ivanoff neighborhood, driving by rusting cars left on the grassy place where her brother Danny died. The trees planted by her father are still there, but the house is gone, and so are her mother's forget-me-nots.

Mary Ann Tweedy's mother was a Kalifornsky, one of the *Yaghanenht'ana*, "the Good Land People." They were descended from the chief of Ski'tuk village in 1791, the year the Russians landed. Mary Ann keeps promising to devote some time to organizing the papers and photographs her mother left. But life keeps her too busy.

Occasionally, though, when she drives to old town to help an ailing tribal member, she takes the long, winding route and watches for any rare house remembered from her childhood. If there's time, she takes the road out to the FAA towers, where the original village once stood. She gets out of the car and stands at the bluff.

Sea gulls slip along the edge, riding air currents up from the river. Down below, waves roll in on the sand where the first Russians stepped ashore.

And upriver, past the sweeping tidal flats, the view is almost primeval – ancient river cliffs and forest, dark hills rolling to the mountains, everything almost as it must have looked 200 years ago, like a country that could have provided for the Good Land People forever.

### Sources

[transcribed from Anchorage Daily News]

Few historians have given Kenai more than passing attention, despite its fascinating mix of characters and cultures. Information for this series had to be pieced together from a wide variety of primary and secondary sources.

Where possible, materials written during the periods described were used.

For the early Russian period, the principal source was *A History of the Russian-American Company* by P. A. Tikhmenev, translated and edited by Richard A. Pierce and Alton S. Donnelly (Vol. 1, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1978; Vol. 2, documents, The Limestone Press, Ontario, 1979).

Journals kept by Russian priests give a rare look at 19<sup>th</sup> century Kenai. Excerpts are available in translation in “Documents Relative to the History of Alaska,” Alaska History Research Project 1936-8, on microfilm at the University of Alaska Fairbanks library. The documents contain other records, including the complaint against Alexander Ryan signed by 23 Kenai residents in 1895.

Letters from U.S. Commissioner Cleveland Magill were made available by the state archives in Juneau. Articles about the Magill-Ryan shootings were published in *The Anchorage Daily Times* in April 1918.

A vital statistics index to Russian Orthodox church records in the Alaska diocese compiled by the Library of Congress helped to pin down birth, marriage and death dates of the Ivanoff and Kalifornsky families. The index is available on microfilm at the University of Alaska Anchorage library.

The Kenaitze people at the turn of the century are described by Father John Bortnovsky in “The Kenai Mission,” in the *Russian Orthodox Messenger* (1898), translated by Anne C. Sudkamp.

A highly personal view of Kenai around 1914 is provided by Alice Brooks and Willietta Kuppler in *The Clenched Fist*, (Dorrance, Philadelphia, 1948). For years the book could not be obtained in the Kenai municipal library because a local resident, offended by the book’s description of his father, stole it off the library shelves whenever it appeared.

An essential book about the original people of Cook Inlet was written by Peter Kalifornsky and published this year as *K’tl’egh’I Sukdu, A Dena’ina Legacy* (Alaska Native Language Center, Fairbanks, 1991).

Alan Boraas, a professor of anthropology at Kenai Peninsula College in Soldotna, was a fundamental source of information and research ideas in lectures, conversations and writings. Among the latter are “The First Years of the Russian Colony at Kenai” (*Alaska History News*, Winter 1991); “The Kenai Bicentennial: What Are We Celebrating?” (a talk before the Cook

Inlet Historical Society, May 1991), numerous columns in the Kenai Peninsula Clarion and his biography of Peter Kalifornsky in *A Dena'ina Legacy*.

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Many Kenai residents shared stories and details. The writer is particularly grateful for assistance given by Paul Shadura and George Miller.

And, finally, these stories would not have been possible without the helpful cooperation of the Ivanoff and Kalifornsky families.

### **About the author**

Tom Kizzia traveled widely in rural Alaska as a reporter for the *Anchorage Daily News*. His work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The Washington Post* and been featured on CNN. Tom is a former Knight Journalism Fellow at Stanford University and a graduate of Hampshire College. His stories about the Pilgrim Family won a President's Award from McClatchy Newspapers. His first book, *The Wake of the Unseen Object*, was named one of the best all-time non-fiction books about Alaska by the state historical society. He lives in Homer, Alaska.