FORMAL EDUCATION AMONG THE SIBERIAN YUPIK ESKIMOS
ON SIVUQAQ, ST. LAWRENCE ISLAND, ALASKA;
AN ETHNO-HISTORICAL STUDY

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the University of North Texas in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Pam Powell, B.B.A., M.Ed.

Denton, Texas
December, 1998

The major focus of this study is the effect of formal education on individuals, communities, cultural traditions and values on Siberian Yupik Eskimos of Alaska. The first school on St. Lawrence Island (Sivuqaq), Alaska was founded in 1899 under the direction of Sheldon Jackson. The formal school curriculum for the next thirty years was secretariation. Upon the initial operation of formal schooling on the island, various other forms of schools have impacted the islanders of St. Lawrence. Chapter two is an overview of the background of education in Alaska from its beginning as a territory to its present status as the 49th state in the United States. Chapter three presents the history of formal schooling on St. Lawrence Island. Chapters two and three contain descriptions of various other forms of schooling within the state (i.e. Bureau of Indian Affairs, mission, state-owned) and when and how these forms either existed on the island or had an impact upon its villagers. Chapter four discusses the methodology utilized in conducting the research and fieldwork for this study. Research findings are discussed in chapter five and include verbatim transcriptions of interviews with villagers. These interviews are unedited in order for readers to draw their own conclusions regarding the study. The interviews included in this written finding are representative of interviews taken. Chapter six discusses conclusions gleaned over the course of this study and recommends further areas of study.
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to the village of Savoonga and to the village of Gambell for allowing me access to the island in order to conduct this research.

Igaamsiqayugvikamsi. Anipa.
Because of airport delays, my arrival in Nome was quite late. Shirley, the owner of the bed and breakfast at which I have stayed numerous times over the years, met me at the door. We exchanged greetings and caught up on all the news since I quit teaching on St. Lawrence island in 1994. Although I had nervously anticipated my fieldwork experience while completing class work in Texas, once I landed at the Nome airport, I began to feel at ease.

Breakfast was ready bright and early. Coffee, rolls, bread, and jam were on the table at 5:00 a.m. I helped myself and sat down to talk with two Eskimos who were on their second cup of coffee. We spoke briefly about the weather and the possibility of being weathered in due to a coming storm. I stood up from the table and made my way upstairs to gather my belongings before my taxicab came to pick me up for the five minute shuttle to the airport. While I realized time was closing in on me, I never picked up my pace more quickly than a quarter beat on a four beat scale. To do otherwise would immediately label me a lallumarka (white person in Siberian Yupik Eskimo) and would be contrary to various customs I had learned in my three years as a school teacher in Savoonga.

I carried my bags from the upstairs entrance to the snow-covered driveway below so that I would be able to load it upon the taxicab’s arrival. I loaded my luggage, climbed into the van, and pulled the door shut. I hadn’t shut the door very well, and it flew open as we backed out. I yelled, “Whoa!” Someone in the van said, “Ms. Powell?” It was
Elsie, a former student of mine. Upon arrival at the airport, several of my friends and acquaintances from Savoonga were in the lounge area waiting to board our plane to the island.

Much to my surprise, the morning had not brought anxiety or relief, simply a feeling of familiarity and comfort. I was so relaxed on the morning flight from Nome to Savoonga that I napped for about thirty minutes of the fifty minute flight. My arrival at the Savoonga International Airport (a gravel airstrip) was completely upbeat. I exited through the door. The air was cold and crisp with very little wind. Sunrise was just beginning to light the sky, which looked like a large black bowl illuminated with the light of one low-wattage solar yard lamp. I knew practically everyone at the airstrip. Greetings were sincere; only those who knew me well spoke to me. The others nodded acknowledgment and loaded gear and family on four-wheelers for the ride to the village. One of my former student’s fathers gave me a ride on his four-wheeler to the home where I would spend the next three months. I was greeted by Luke Penayah, whose wife Emily had gone to the post office to check on the mail. I was filled with joy at seeing old friends again. The day continued with chance meetings of friends on the boardwalks of the village throughout the afternoon. Several students from the school (in fifth grade the year I left, but now in the seventh grade) gathered around me and began to sing.

This is the song that never ends. Yes, it goes on and on my friends. Some people started singing it not knowing what it was, and they continued singing it forever just because . . . . This is the song that never ends [continues endlessly].
I threw my hands over my ears and contorted my face pleading with the group to quit singing the song. The children giggled and sang more loudly. I pretended to become overwhelmed by the singing and fell into the fresh snow. Now the children broke into laughter and helped me to my feet; we all hugged. It was as if time stopped. I was back in the village among friends. Each villager and I acted as if we were in a play which had continued to run over the years. Elders would smile and bow their heads in greetings. Children ran up to pester me knowing full well that I would completely engage in the play; former students sauntered over to welcome me. I was at home.

Arrival - Gambell

January, 1997

Bering Air makes two round trips from Nome to the island each day. Like any schedule in Alaska this is subject to change daily. Often the change is due to weather conditions. Many times the change is due to mail loads. Other times passengers precipitate the change due to poor health or a host of other reasons. My trip from Savoonga to Gambell was an afternoon flight. Because I had said good-bye to the villagers of Savoonga many times [each with great pain], I asked the Bering Air representative to pick me up for the ride to the airstrip without giving particulars of my departure to anyone. Of course, they knew I would leave sometime, but like me, each felt a kinship with the other which led to the foregone conclusion that I would again return one day.

The flight from Savoonga to Gambell is approximately twenty minutes and usually turbulent due to a mountain range. In contrast to my flight to Savoonga, I knew
no one on the flight to Gambell. Anxiety coursed through my veins as we began our approach to the airstrip. With winds gusting at gale force, we landed on the airstrip with little trouble. Bush pilots either have the right stuff and fly for many years within the state, or they are culled by deadly air crashes. Bering Air’s record is remarkably good. While nervous, I knew we would land safely. The plane touched down, braked, and the aft was pulled to the right as the wind caught it.

Because I did not know the family with whom I was staying, I disembarked from the plane last hoping that my ride would discover me immediately. As I walked down the steps from the plane, a gust of wind blew me over the rubber handrail so that I was caught by my middle and was swaying, along with gear, over the edge like a puppet. Each time I attempted to raise up, another gust blew me into the same position. Noticing my failed attempts to right myself, the pilot came over and braced my upper body so that I could stand upright. I found this neither amusing nor embarrassing. It was simply an experience which happened. While there were several Eskimos standing at the airstrip, no one laughed or giggled in amusement at my predicament, nor did they offer help. Their placid faces watched as I struggled. It is the custom of Eskimos not to proffer help to others except when asked by the person in need. In this manner, all save face.

Once on firm ground, I looked about filling with panic as I saw no one approach me. Then through the blowing snow, a young, tall Eskimo stepped forward and asked if I was Pam. Relief flooded me as we loaded my gear onto his four-wheeler and made our way over the tundra, through the village, and to the home in which I would stay for the next three months. The family warmly welcomed me and I was shown to my own
room. This came as a complete surprise. The patriarch of the family had passed away the previous Christmas and I was given his room.

A blizzard moved onto the island on the evening of my arrival, and I was homebound for one week. I learned the daily housekeeping tasks and joined in by helping each morning. I completely lost my bearings in Gambell. Even my host's home did not seem to be anchored to any particular spot. As one looked out of the window, portions of homes only ten yards away came in and out of sight. I was reminded of the furling of a flag. It was as if the gust of wind obstructed the view from the window and then vaguely showed only a small portion of the house across the way. I had never experienced wind in this manner. I wondered what other differences, and similarities, I would find between the two villages.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Very few situations in America parallel that of the cross of cultures occurring on St. Lawrence Island over the past ninety years. St. Lawrence Island is one hundred twenty miles from Nome on the Alaskan coast and forty miles from the Chukotski Peninsula on the coast of Siberia. Two villages are located on the island, Savoonga and Gambell. Each village has a population of about 600 Siberian Yupik Eskimos. Like the rotation of a wheel, the circle of life on the island revolves slowly from the outside (i.e. cultural traditions and values) and quickly from within (i.e. many of the Anglo-imposed structures such as education and health services). The Anglo’s constraints tumble upon each other causing disruption and confusion; often various components are modified in an attempt to bring order, albeit within the Anglo context of order. Meanwhile, Siberian Yupik Eskimo cultural traditions and values move at the perimeters at a constant rate which Siberian Yupik Eskimos have maintained for over two thousand years—slowly and methodically. This study will explore formal education and its impact on the Siberian Yupik Eskimos of St. Lawrence Island.

Significance of the Study

While research has been conducted in many areas regarding St. Lawrence Island, no research has been systematically conducted regarding formal education. Education on the island has taken many forms. Each of these structures has impacted the villagers of
Gambell and Savoonga in a variety of ways. The importance of formal education cannot be ignored. Not only have individuals been affected, communities, cultural traditions, and values have also. While oral storytelling is a vital method of passing on historical events from one generation to the next, a compilation of the villagers' formal schooling experiences will be invaluable to the people of the island. The research material for this study will later be housed at the Polar Research Center at the University of Alaska - Fairbanks. Audio tapes of the interviews will be housed in the oral history section of the archives and will be available to villagers through the distance delivery education service provided by the University of Alaska - Fairbanks Distance Learning Center. Tapes produced during this study will allow the villagers of St. Lawrence Island to remember and/or study their heritage from their ancestors' perspective. Transcription copies will be available for study regarding various fields including English as a second language, bilingual/bicultural programs, historical research, family mementos, anthropology, sociology, and education. This study will also add to the body of knowledge regarding the history of formal education in Alaska.

Siberian Yupik Eskimos live on St. Lawrence Island (population about 1,200) and on the Russian peninsula of Chukotski. Siberian Yupik Eskimos who reside on the island and who attended formal school were interviewed and provided a firsthand account of school experiences. Siberian Yupik Eskimos who now reside in Nome, but who grew up on the island and attended school in a formal setting were also interviewed. These interviews along with archival research material provide the basic foundation of this study. Fieldnotes provide a third perspective and focus on the impact of formal schooling
on the villages of Savoonga and Gambell.

Chapter two is an overview of the background of education in Alaska from its beginning as a territory to its present status as the 49th state in the United States. Chapter three presents the history of formal schooling on St. Lawrence Island. Chapters two and three contain descriptions of various other forms of schooling within the state (i.e. Bureau of Indian Affairs, mission, state-owned) and when and how these forms either existed on the island or had an impact upon its villagers. Chapter four discusses the methodology utilized in conducting the research and fieldwork for this study. Research findings are discussed in chapter five and include verbatim transcriptions of interviews with villagers. These interviews are unedited in order for readers to draw their own conclusions regarding the study. The interviews included in this written finding are representative of interviews taken. Chapter six discusses conclusions gleaned over the course of this study and recommends further areas of study.

Linguistic Notes

As stated earlier, the interviews appear verbatim in order to allow the reader to draw conclusions which may or may not be similar to mine. More importantly, I did not edit the interviews in any manner in order to represent the interviewees as accurately as possible. The most pointed example of earlier misrepresentations came to my attention during an interview with Ruth Miklahook, who is seventy-six.

[R] Some of that rules were like, I used to read, they used to wash the shaman’s face with uluk. That’s not true. I was very much hurt when I read those things. [P] You read what? They used to do what? [R] [Siberian Yupik to Wilma.] [P] Oh, wash their face with urine. [R] Yeah. That not true [emphatically]. [P] That’s not true? They didn’t wash their face with urine? [R] That’s not true, never.
The reader should be aware that Siberian Yupik Eskimo does not differentiate gender in pronouns (Jacobson 1984). Several of the interviews make reference to “he” and “she” in the same paragraph. The reader should use one gender consistently when referring to this excerpt. Word order may present another problem when an unfamiliar pattern is encountered by the reader. The simplest method to determine the meaning of the sentence is to read the sentence out loud. “Let” is used as a causative in Siberian Yupik Eskimo. Its meaning translates to standard English “make” and “have.” According to Jacobson, this translation works when one understands that Siberian Yupik Eskimo culture does not use the idea of force. The individual determines his or her own decisions and actions.

Research Questions

1. What subjects were offered in the schools? Which subjects had the most impact on each individual? Which subjects had the most impact on the community? Which subjects had the least impact on the individual? Which subjects had the least impact on the community?

2. Which cultural traditions and values were maintained or retained during schooling? Which traditions or values were disregarded or distinguished during schooling?

3. Are the lives of students enhanced by the ability to remain in the community for education? Is the community enhanced by the ability of the students to remain in the community for education?
4. Has the quality of education increased or decreased as a result of the Tobeluk v. Lind case?

Definition of Terms

Alaskan Native - A citizen of the United States who is a person of one-fourth degree or more Alaska Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut blood, or combination thereof (Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971).

State Operated School System - The state agency which was responsible for education within unorganized boroughs prior to the enactment of Senate Bill 35 (1 July 1971 - 30 June 1975). A nine person school board appointed by the Governor was charged with operation of the system.

Formal education - Any form of public education.

Local advisory school boards (LAC) - Locally-elected committee members who are elected at municipal elections for staggered terms of three years. Areas with less than 251 students have three members on the local advisory board. Areas with more than 251 students have a five-member board.

Native - See Alaska Native above.

Regional Educational Attendance Areas - Organized under Senate Bill 35, REAAs are educational service areas in an organized borough which manage and control public services located within the area. The State of Alaska owns and operates the land and buildings in REAA schools. Each REAA operates under an elected school board.
The evolution of Alaskan schools began in 1867 when the United States purchased the territory from Russia. At the time of the purchase, over fifty Russian-supported schools were functioning within the territory. As a foreshadowing of educational methods over the decades, the Russians utilized clergy as teachers, believing that the best way to save souls was through education (Naske and Slotnick 1987). The first schoolhouse built by the Russians was located on Sitkalidak Island at Three Saints Bay in 1785 (Lazell 1960). While it is not extraordinary that a schoolhouse was built in this settlement, the first permanent Russian settlement in the territory, it is somewhat extraordinary that the school was completed one year prior to the building of the first church. Mission work continued throughout Alaska culminating with the translation of the Scriptures from Russian into Aleutian in 1824 by Ivan Veniaminoff (Underwood 1918).

In 1840 there were five schools operating in Sitka: two were for children of Russian naval officers and Russian Fur Company officers (considered upper-class schools) and two were for the offspring of the working class and orphans (considered lower-class schools) (Jackson 1894-95). The fifth school was a theological school. Officers of the Russian Fur Company were primarily interested in educating indigenous Alaskans in order to have a steady supply of employees for the organization. The drive to
provide employees coupled with the missionaries' zeal to save the souls of the people of Alaska dictated the curriculum. The curriculum for boys included Russian, religion, arithmetic, astronomy, and navigation. The girls' curriculum was primarily devoted to domestic skills. After the purchase of the territory, most of the Russian schools were closed (Getches 1977).

Alaska became a territory of the United States in 1867 when the United States Senate voted thirty-seven to two in favor of ratification of the treaty to purchase the land from Russia (Welch 1958). While the Senate favored acquisition of the territory, they balked at the appropriation of funds for law enforcement and public education. Two factors contributed to the lack of concern for the newly acquired land: the territory was not contiguous to the rest of the United States, and the federal government was stretched to its limit by reparations for the Civil War. As was often the case in newly-acquired lands, the education of the indigenous peoples in Alaska was taken up by various church denominations.

Dr. Sheldon Jackson, a man with an impressive background as the Rocky Mountain Superintendent for the Presbyterian Church (albeit a title which he bestowed upon himself) and a member of the Presbyterian's Domestic Missions, viewed the opportunity in Alaska as a challenge for which he felt particularly suited (Hinckley 1984). After graduating from Princeton with a postgraduate degree in theological studies in 1858, Jackson accepted the position of a teacher of the Choctaw Indians then moved to a position with the Presbyterian Home Mission Board. As a member of this board, Jackson
worked diligently soliciting support for the development of schools and a civil
government within the Alaskan territory.

One could categorize Jackson as a politician for education in Alaska. Between
1877 and 1884 he lectured at church gatherings, educational associations (including the
National Education Association and various state teachers' associations), and committees
for the Forty-sixth, Forty-seventh, and Forty-eighth Congresses. In eight years Jackson
gave over 900 addresses to groups from the Atlantic to the Pacific (United States Bureau
of Education 1894-95). He single-handedly raised money for the establishment of
schools in Wrangell and Sitka and other villages throughout the southeastern section of
the territory (Lazell 1960). Letters from teacher/missionaries in the region relating
triumph over the adversities of life in the untamed territory often appeared in the
Presbyterian *Home Mission Monthly* newsletter.

Education was one important influence Jackson had on the natives. There was,
however, an equally vital event which changed native life forever—the introduction of
reindeer herding. In an effort to slow the exhaustion of food sources, Dr. Jackson
introduced reindeer to Alaska in 1891 (Postell 1990). Although the commissioner of
education saw merit in bringing domestic reindeer to Alaska, it would be three years
before governmental funding would be available for transfer of the reindeer from Siberia
to the territory. This waiting period did not suit Jackson, who saw the value of hiring
educated students from the various mission schools as reindeer apprentices. Because the
missionary/teachers would be familiar with the work ethic of young men in each village,
Jackson determined that the missionary/teacher would choose the apprentices locally.
Originally Siberian reindeer herdsman were hired to train the apprentices; however, soon it was evident that the Siberians were jeopardizing the herds in an attempt to end trade competition. Laplanders proved to be quite successful in training the natives, and soon many of the herds were flourishing.

In 1877 Amanda McFarland, a Presbyterian missionary, began a school for the Tlingit Indians near Wrangell (Mitchell 1997). Once Miss McFarland settled into the daily regime of educating the young Tlingits in the area, she became aware of a practice which she found most disturbing. In some instances, Tlingit families with several girls would trade one of the young teenagers to white traders for commodities such as blankets or money in order to buy much needed supplies. Despite lack of funds or accommodations for tenants, Miss McFarland began to take in young girls and the first boarding school in the territory was established. Miss McFarland found that parents who were likely to trade their oldest girl for goods were often as likely to allow them to attend the boarding school. While the parents did not receive compensation, Miss McFarland was able to convince them that they were making the best choice available while also relieving their family of one mouth to feed.

A second boarding school was begun in Sitka (United States Bureau of Education 1885-95). Despite industrious work by various missionaries between the years 1876 and 1878 to maintain the school, it was operated only sporadically. One after another of the missionaries assigned to the area became sick and had to return to the contiguous states or, once assigned to the territory, worked assiduously to be reassigned to a mission within the contiguous states. Sheldon Jackson, who had previously traveled to the southeast
region of the territory several times, became aware of the lack of educational facilities and persuaded the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions to employ Miss Olinda Austin, an educator from New York City, to reestablish educational services in Sitka. A former guardhouse served as the school building to 130 pupils. During the first year of operation, seven native boys approached Miss Austin and requested permission to live at the school. According to the boys, distractions at home, including drinking and various crowded conditions, precluded the students from studying there. Despite lack of space and adequate accommodations for the students, Miss Austin recognized the need for facilities to accommodate students who had the desire to learn but did not have a suitable home atmosphere. In November of 1880 the seven boys moved into the school building and the boarding home was founded.

While the written word was effective in soliciting funding for churches and schools within the territory, Dr. Jackson's moving testimonials given across the continental states generated money which was the foundation of mission funding. Jackson was able to balance the ecumenical with the secular in a complimentary manner thereby garnering support across a variety of interest groups. His oratorical style changed focus according to the group with whom he spoke. When addressing a religious group, Dr. Jackson would focus on conversion of the barbaric, uncivilized native. On the occasions when he spoke before Congress, he stressed the economic advantages of a literate society. The elite were called upon to use their resources as philanthropic welfare.
On 17 May 1884, the Harrison Bill was passed which extended the laws of Oregon to the Territory (United States Bureau of Education 1894-95). This bill, called the Organic Act in Alaska, provided for the education of Alaska's children. The secretary of the interior was given the responsibility of making "needful and proper provision for the education of the children of school age in the Territory of Alaska, without reference to race, until such time a permanent provision shall be made for the same" (Getches 1977, 3). John Eaton, commissioner of education, was given the responsibility of supervising the educational program in Alaska (United States Bureau of Education 1896). Like the early Russian educators, education of native Alaskans would serve two primary purposes: to convert the natives to Christianity, and to civilize these future American citizens (United States Bureau of Education 1885-95). Recognizing the difficulty of managing an effective program from a distance of some 6,000 miles, Eaton recommended that Dr. Sheldon Jackson be named general agent of education in Alaska (United States of Bureau 1896). Because of Dr. Jackson's early work establishing schools in the territory, he was the logical choice.

While the Organic Act articulated the education of Alaska's youth, it more importantly allowed the federal government to appropriate funds for the same. According to Sheldon Jackson's Report on Education in Alaska (United States Bureau of Education 1896), $25,000 was appropriated in 1884 upon enactment of the Organic Act for the establishment of schools. Education was seen as the foremost method for civilizing natives and assimilating each group into American culture. The amount appropriated for
funding the schools did not meet expenditures for the operation of schools within the territory and various churches shared the responsibility of educating natives.

In an effort to continue education of natives with little support from the federal government, Dr. Jackson led a meeting of various congregational churches currently operating mission schools within the territory. A 1880 meeting created a coalition of denominations which worked with the government in providing education for natives through contract schools. The territory was divided among Baptists, Episcopalians, Methodists, Moravians, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians. Churches found contracting with the government beneficial; in 1886 the government provided $11.25 for each native student (Getches 1977). Further, the government provided transportation aboard naval cutter ships for missionary teachers. When Dr. Jackson filed his Report on Education for the year 1895, he stated that 1,030 students were enrolled in seventeen governmental day schools (United States Bureau of Education 1894-95). Although the combination of funds (i.e. governmental and denominational funding) was far from adequate for a land the size of the territory, each group providing funds felt that they were both catalysts and operatives in transforming natives from their barbaric state to civilized American citizens, albeit without the rights and privileges of citizenship.

The curriculum at many of the mission schools consisted of English instruction, penmanship, reading, arithmetic, music, geography, hygiene, composition, and drawing (United States Bureau of Education 1894-95). The ultimate goal of education was assimilation of natives into the white culture. According to President Grant's Peace Policy of 1873, education would show natives "a better way of life than they have
hereofore pursued" in order to "understand and appreciate the comforts and benefits of a Christian civilization, and thus be prepared ultimately to assume the duties and privileges of citizenship" (as cited in Mitchell 1997, 69).

In 1896 Congress determined that it would phase out the contracting of schools with churches in areas where sectarian schools could be provided (Marsh 1967). Because of the enormous population growth in many Alaskan towns, Congress enacted legislation in 1900 which permitted towns with populations of 300 or more to tax citizens and establish schools. The legislation was important because it allowed election of a local school board which would assume control of the school. The effect of the 1900 act perpetuated the dual school system within the state since the demographics of the larger towns was mainly white (Getches 1977). Many of the towns provided schools for white students through high school while native schools in the town provided education only through the eighth grade.

Prior to 1932 native students wishing to attend secondary school were usually sent to the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania (National Archives-Alaska Region n.d.). In 1932 the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) established a boarding school in Wrangell, Alaska, for native students who were not afforded educational opportunities in the primary grades in their villages. Wrangell Institute also admitted students whose village schools were overcrowded, students who were underachievers, and students for whom a structured environment was preferable to disruptive or abusive family situations as determined by a social service agency (Summary Report Superintendent's Meeting 1968). For all intents and purposes, schooling for natives ended with the eighth grade.
In 1905 Congress passed the Nelson Act which required that incorporated towns and organized boroughs establish and maintain schools. This act gave them local control allowing taxation which benefited those schools whose student population was white. Under Section 7 of the Act, natives were excluded from the act when it provided:

That the schools specified and provided for this act shall be devoted to the education of white children and children of mixed blood who lead a civilized life. The education of the Eskimos and Indians in the district of Alaska shall remain under the direction and control of the Secretary of the Interior. (Getches 1977, 4)

The sole responsibility for the education of native children was held by the federal government and remained specifically with the secretary of the interior. Wording of the Nelson Act sanctioned and bolstered the dual school system which had been developing over the years. In towns with substantial white and native populations, two separate schools would exist. The passage of the Johnson O'Malley Act (JOM Act) of 1934 brought an inducement for territorial assumption of BIA day schools through monetary support provided by the BIA. The transfer of control to territories was the first step toward local input for native education.

Due to lack of funding, not all BIA day schools within the state gained territorial control. Schools which were initiated by missionaries and which were primarily native remained under the control of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Darnell 1979). On 5 February 1956, the Alaska Territorial Legislature agreed to a constitution for the State of Alaska which stated, "The legislature shall by general law establish and maintain a system of public schools open to all children of the State" (Getches 1977, 7). Despite the language drawn up in the constitution, full assumption by the state of the
federally-supported BIA day schools was impossible. Transfer of control would continue at a slow pace due to insufficient resources. On 3 January 1959, President Eisenhower formally admitted Alaska as the 49th state in the United States and the state constitution was adopted.

In 1971 the Alaska legislature transferred responsibility for operations of rural schools to the newly created Alaska State-Operated School System (SOS). While the SOS was governed by a nine-member board appointed by the governor, local advisory school boards were instituted in communities served by a SOS school (McBeath et al. 1983). BIA day schools continued to fall under federal jurisdiction (Darnell 1979).

Along with local governing came the push for culturally-relevant curriculum, including bilingual education (Darnell 1979). In 1968 Congress passed the Bilingual Education Act which provided supplemental funding so that school districts could develop or implement programs which would address the educational needs of low-income, limited-English proficiency students (Alexander 1992). This Act gave many natives in Alaska the first public acknowledgment of the significance of the varied cultural history and traditions which are held by each indigenous group. The significance of this law, however, indicates a nod of acknowledgment rather than full approval in that it provided compensatory education for limited-English speakers.

The passage of the Bilingual Education Act, the move toward decentralization of public schools, and the move toward a more locally-based curriculum all were indicative of the historical time. During the mid-60s American society began to enact civil rights legislation and institute programs which would lead to President Johnson's Great Society.
The culmination of such activity in Alaska was the formation of the Alaska Federation of Natives which garnered great political strength.

In June 1975 Senate Bill 35 was passed by the Alaska Legislature which ended the centralized Alaska State Operated School System and divided the unorganized state borough into twenty-one regional educational attendance areas (REAAs) (Getches 1976). These REAAs gave communities more control over the education of their children by requiring that each REAA be governed by a locally-elected school board. Although the creation of REAAs gave local control to many rural areas, the federal government continued to maintain forty-five BIA day schools in small villages throughout the state (Darnell 1979).

Prior to 1947 native students in Alaska were given the opportunity to attend a BIA high school at Carlisle Indian School, but few chose to do so. This changed after World War II when a naval base outside of Sitka was given to the Alaska Native Service. Upon conversion of the naval base into a boarding school, Mt. Edgecumbe became the only public high school for students outside of their communities and had a dramatic impact on many villages. Often the students elected not to return to their rural communities (McBeath et al. 1983).

A 1962 memorandum of general agreement precipitated the transfer of control of native education from the BIA to the state (Getches 1976). Because the state did not have adequate resources, the agreement contained language which permitted continuance
of control with the BIA until funding was appropriated for transfer. This agreement recognized the inherent problem in maintaining two separate school systems.

It is agreed that the State of Alaska should formulate an overall plan with local participation for (a) expansion of present high school educational facilities, and (b) transfer of Bureau-operated schools to State management and operation. This planning, of necessity, will include Federal financial participation. (as cited in Marsh 1967, 138)

Initially, there were three BIA boarding high schools for the majority of students in rural Alaska: Mt. Edgecumbe Boarding School in Alaska; a school in Chilocco, Oklahoma; and one in Chemawa, Oregon. In 1966 Mt. Edgecumbe had 700 boarding students, Chemawa had over 700 Native Alaska boarding students, and Chilocco had 200 Native Alaskan boarding students (Marsh 1967). The William E. Beltz School regional boarding school at Nome was built in 1966.

Students who wished to attend boarding high schools upon graduation from eighth grade applied to the Juneau Area Office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and listed their three choices. School administrators of BIA schools received a memorandum from Juneau, 15 December 1967, in which Warren J. Tiffany, Assistant Area Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs and Cliff R. Hartman, Commissioner of Education, State of Alaska, outlined application procedures and filing deadlines. In order to assist students in choosing a boarding school which meet their needs, the memorandum outlines each school.

Chemawa School...Chemawa takes mostly older students - 16 and 17 years old, although some may be 14 or 15. Some of the older students do not feel that they will have time to finish school before they will want to marry or take a job, but they still want some more education, including pre-vocational work, before they quit school
Chemawa also has a high school. [emphasis in original] It offers grades 9, 10, 11, and 12....

Chilocco School—Chilocco offers a full four-year high school program. All incoming 9th graders are enrolled in the regular classroom program of required basic academic subjects. Those who appear to need more individualized, intensive instruction to succeed in a subject may enter one of the small classes taught by a special staff of assigned teachers. As a student progresses in the subject, with the help of accelerated classes, he will return to the regular classes or if sufficiently advanced he may move to a higher level of instruction in that subject. Some vocational courses may be available as early as the 9th grade level, but language study, social science, and mathematics are still required.

Mt. Edgecumbe school—Because Mt. Edgecumbe is the only senior high school the BIA operates in Alaska, most of the students are in grades 10, 11, and 12. Many of these students have completed the 9th grade in some other school. However, Mt. Edgecumbe will enroll a comparatively small class of 9th graders....

The William E. Beltz Regional High School—The program is comprehensive in that it is possible for those who are interested to obtain the 16 units of General Education Credit necessary for obtaining a high school diploma and preparing for college. The vocational program includes the areas of office occupations, tailoring and dressmaking, vocational cooking, motor mechanics, drafting, carpentry, and cabinet making, maintenance mechanics, and metal working classes....(Tiffany 1967, 3-4)

Application packets included an application for admission to a boarding school, a medical report, applicant's cumulative data including achievement test scores, and a teacher's recommendation. Students who did not meet the requirements for their first choice of a school were considered for their next preference.

The criteria for boarding school selection were outlined in a memorandum distributed to school administrators from Robert E. Portlock dated 19 April 1966.

Chemawa Boarding School (Priorities)

1. Will enroll students whose achievement level is at least 6th grade at time of entrance.
2. A fall test score of 5.5 or a spring test score of 6.0 will be considered as indicating a 6th grade level of achievement.

3. No student will be enrolled whose age is less than 13 or more than 17. Special exceptions will be made for students who are 18 or older and are achieving at the 9th level.

Mt. Edgecumbe Boarding School (Priorities)

1. Will enroll students from 9th grade thru 12th. (A projection of achievement level at the time of entrance of 8.0 will be considered minimally qualifying). If enrollment needs cannot be met, exceptions will be made and students with lower achievement levels will be accepted.

2. As a general rule, students will not be enrolled whose ages are less than 14 or more than 18 at the ninth grade level.

William E. Beltz Boarding School (Priorities)

1. All 8th grade through 11th grade graduates from rural schools north of the Yukon, except for students with special needs, with age span of 12 thru 18 as entering freshmen.

2. Wrangell 9th grade graduates from the Nome Area who choose to attend William E. Beltz school.

4. Currently enrolled boarding school students from north of the Yukon area shall be given consideration, if they desire to attend William E. Beltz School.

5. Enrollment should be approximately 50% male and 50% female. (Portlock 1966, 2-3)

A summary report for superintendent’s meeting held 26-28 February 1968 outlined criteria for Chilocco Indian School:

a. Eighth grade graduates
b. Minimum age 14
c. No freshman over 19 years of age (Tiffany (?), n.p.)
The number of students who were accepted into any boarding school fluctuated from year to year according to the number of applicants.

On 8 March 1966 Owen E. Morken, Juneau area director for the BIA, wrote Governor William A. Egan, "It was necessary for the Bureau in school year 1964-65 to advise approximately 300 students who voluntarily applied for boarding schools that no space was available. In school year 1965-66, however, a smaller number was advised that no space was available" (Morken 1966). Morken's failure to state the total number of applications and rejections leaves one to speculate whether fewer students applied in the 1965-66 school year as a result of earlier classmates disillusionment after being rejected for a school.

Students attending boarding schools were supplied with a suggested clothing list and were required to provide their own clothing. The BIA would provide $50.00 per student whose parents did not have the resources to fund clothing.

In 1966 the state adopted a new policy sending students to one of two programs: attendance at a boarding home program in which students boarded with private families in various larger communities across the state, or attendance at a regional boarding high school.

Based upon a recommendation by the Training Corporation of America, a Virginia consulting firm, regional boarding high schools were to be constructed in order:

to accelerate the breakdown of old village patterns, patterns which may retard the development of rural folk into a disciplined and reliable workforce. (State of Alaska Regional 1967 as cited in Cotton 1984, 33)
Regional high schools provided students with a wide choice of subjects taught by teachers in specialized fields. Additionally, these schools were equipped with vocational training facilities. Theoretically, regional high schools would provide village students with an effective educational learning environment. Realistically, the psychological cost of removing students from their home environment often outweighed many of the benefits. Kleinfeld (1973) argues that regional boarding schools failed to provide students with the opportunity to form a strong identity due to a contradiction of western and native values. Additionally, village students attending these schools lacked sufficient personal guidance from significant others which was normally provided by their families.

In 1972 a group of Alaska Natives from several rural villages sued the State of Alaska for failing to provide a high school in their village. The case is known throughout the state as the "Molly Hootch" case for the Eskimo girl whose name was the first to appear on the petition (Cotton 1984). The case is formally known as Tobeluk v. Lind. Upon the 1976 settlement of Tobeluk v. Lind, the state board of education now requires that a school must be provided by the governing body of the school district where there are:

one or more children available to attend a secondary school; and there is an elementary school in the community operated by either the district or the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Alaska. Dept. of Administration, 1977: Code 05.040) (Darnell 1979, 440)

The Tobeluk v. Lind case has had a dramatic impact upon schools in rural Alaska. Construction of high schools throughout rural Alaska began upon the settlement of the case. Cotton (1984) states that because of high construction costs ($132.5 million by
1984), this case is the largest settlement in the history of education litigation. On Little Diomede, an island in the Bering Sea, a high school was built for twenty students at a cost of $4.2 million.

Rural Alaskan students currently have the option of attending their local rural high school or a boarding school at Mt. Edgecumbe. During the 1992-1993 year, eighty-two percent of rural students chose to attend school locally (McDowell 1994 as cited in Kleinfeld 1994, n.p.).
BACKGROUND OF EDUCATION ON
ST. LAWRENCE ISLAND

According to Hughes (1960), the first Russian to sight the island was probably Dezhnev, a Cossack explorer who sailed from the Kolyma River to the Anadyr River in 1648. On 21 August 1728, Vitas Bering, a Danish explorer, named the island St. Lawrence Island. In 1775 the island was sighted by Captain Cook, who mistook it for a previously unnamed island, and named the island Clark Island (Jackson 1891). The first inhabitants of the western coast of St. Lawrence Island were located at Mayaughwaq, a village at the base of the mountain at the east end of Gambell. The villagers who resided at Mayaughwaaq lived in underground dwellings (Apassingok, Walunga, Oozevaseuk, and Tennant 1987). Jackson (1891) reports that he discovered several of the structures in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Each dwelling consisted of walrus skulls which were stacked "like a New England stone wall" with partially caved in roofs made of moss and ground. Although the homes were basically structurally sound, their disrepair left much to be desired. Village homes evolved from underground dwellings to free standing structures (Apassingok, Walunga, Oozevaseuk, and Tennant 1987).

In 1830 the Chicagof under the command of Captain Etoin set anchor and visited the island. On 10 July 1875, Kotzebuej's expedition aboard the Rurik discovered five villages on the island (Jackson 1891). A later visit by a United States revenue cutter in
1880 found a practically uninhabited island. According to reports, the people in four of the five villages died in 1878 because of famine and disease. Only one village, Chib-u-chak, was spared complete annihilation. Various opinions have been expressed over the years regarding the cause of the famine. Muir (1917) maintains that liquor initially brought on the natives' demise when many hunters drank during periods which favored hunting. As the year wore on, the weather did not allow hunting, and a famine ensued. Mitchell (1997) concurs with the conclusions drawn by Muir while adding that Vene Gambell's own diary relates stories of the effects of alcohol on the village some twenty years later. The lone dissenting opinion regarding the amount of blame which may be laid on alcohol comes from Bockstoce. "Even if an extraordinarily large amount of alcohol had been traded to the Natives, it is difficult to believe that the quantity would have been sufficient for them to remain cripple from the effects of drink all winter" (Bockstoce 1986, 139 as cited in Mitchell 1997, 136). One would be remiss in failing to recognize the possibility of disease as a contributing factor (Fortuine 1989).

On 30 June 1888, the United States revenue steamer Bear visited St. Lawrence Island on its annual inspection of the territory. Jackson states that Captain Healy hired a Siberian Yupik Eskimo translator, Tommy Tough, at Indian Point (Cape Tehapalin), Siberia. Jackson, the translator, Dr. Holmes, and Lieutenant Dimock went ashore and found a population of 270 villagers living in twenty-one houses. In his education report, Jackson stated that St. Lawrence Island would be a good place for a school as there were seventy boys and fifty-five girls counted during his visit.
Although Jackson reported a favorable climate in which to open a mission school on the island in 1888, appropriations for lumber were not immediately procured. Further, the United States Revenue Cutter Bear was the only ship available which could transport the material to the arctic region (Hunter 1986). This ship which freighted the lumber left San Francisco in 1891 (Stephens 1900a). Carpenters aboard the same schooner built the schoolhouse at a cost of one thousand dollars. The building was forty feet in length by twenty feet in width. Approximately sixty percent of the space available was to be used for a schoolroom; the rest would serve as a home for the missionary/teachers. It was another three years before Jackson found a suitable missionary couple for the isolated island. Lazell (1960) maintains that one of Jackson's strongest leadership qualities was the ability to choose missionaries who exhibited the tenacity, the fortitude, and the drive to work tirelessly in a harsh environment.

Professor Vene C. Gambell was born on 8 March 1863, in Winfield, Iowa (Gambell n.d.). He began teaching at the early age of eighteen. After several years, Gambell attended and graduated from Ames Agricultural College in Iowa. Upon graduation, Gambell was employed as a principal at two different schools in Iowa until 1894, when he received notification from Sheldon Jackson that he had been accepted for a missionary/teacher position on St. Lawrence Island. At the time of his appointment to the Presbyterian mission schools, he was married to Nellie F. Webster, a native Iowan born on 12 April 1874. The Gambells set out from Seattle, Washington, for St. Lawrence Island aboard the Meyer (Home Mission Monthly 1894).
Because the villagers of the island had heard that Jackson had appointed a teacher for the village, when the *Meyer* approached land, the natives sent two boats to greet the newcomers (Stephens 1900a). The captain of the *Meyer* determined that a landing on St. Lawrence Island was too risky due to a strong surf. The *Meyer* set sail for Port Clarence, a reindeer station, and unloaded the Gambells' luggage and one year's worth of supplies. On 15 September 1894, Captain Healy of the United States revenue steamer *Bear* landed on the island where the Gambells were warmly received by the villagers. Because whaling ships often traded with the villagers, they had seen a white man prior to the Gambells' arrival. Nellie Gambell was the first white woman to set foot on the island (Dimmitt n.d.)

The Gambells spent the first two months learning Siberian Yupik Eskimo words and preparing for the first operation of a school on the island (Stephens 1900a). When the doors opened at 9:00 a.m. (Stephens 1900b) on the first Monday in November 1894, the Gambells were surprised to find almost the entire village in attendance (Stephens 1900a). The number of students decreased as the school's novelty began to wear off. The decrease in attendance was not proportional according to gender; the boys were more likely to attend than the girls, who soon stopped attending school entirely. An investigation of the matter found that the girls were afraid of being so closely situated to the boys, men, and Mr. Gambell. Mrs. Gambell began a girls' and women's class which was attended by seventeen females each afternoon beginning at 3:00 p.m. By December, adults quit attending school and soon the boys' and girls' classes felt comfortable enough for the two to be consolidated into one classroom (Stephens 1900b). Attendance at these
daily sessions averaged fifty-five Siberian Yupik Eskimos ranging in age from five to twenty years old.

Vene Gambell related to Stephens (1900a, 1900b, 1900c, and 1900d) the curriculum included: vocabulary development, reading, recitation, arithmetic, art, music, and outdoor recreation activities. While these branches of education addressed the Siberian Yupik Eskimos' cognitive and motor skill development, spiritual salvation from shamanism was a separate goal of the missionaries (Stephens 1900c). All too often in Alaska, the results the missionaries hoped to attain were tempered by diseases unconsciously brought to an indigenous group who had no immune system for foreign bacteria. While many students attended classes sporadically due to subsistence activities and illnesses, the Gambells usually could count on a small core of students to attend without fail.

At the height of an outbreak of influenza, the Gambells decided to forego school and instead to dispense medicine throughout the village (Stephens 1900c). Although many parents were reluctant to turn their backs on centuries of medicinal practice by shamans, the white man's quinine alleviated the symptoms in most of the children. One child whose parents insisted that they follow the advise of the shaman left their child out one entire night to cleanse his physical and spiritual body. Unfortunately, the child died from the cure.

In a letter to Sheldon Jackson from Vene Gambell dated March of 1985, Mr. Gambell writes:
The boys are getting along well. They like number work, adding correctly and rapidly columns of five figures, some of them never making a mistake. Many of them know the multiplication table to the "elevens." I let them do so much of this because they like it, and I think they have more confidence in themselves and use the English they know. They read well in the First Reader. I have used the phonetic method of teaching reading (Jackson 1896, 1426-1427).

What began in 1894 as a tenuous relationship between the Gambells' and the villagers of St. Lawrence Island developed into mutual respect. In April of 1897, a daughter, Margaret Gambell, was born (Home Mission Monthly 1898). Tragically, the Gambells drowned when the Jane Gray sank while returning the missionaries and their daughter to St. Lawrence Island in May of 1898 (Dimmitt n.d.).

On 14 August 1898, the schooner Del Norte arrived at St. Lawrence Island with Dr. Sheldon Jackson, William F. Doty, and Dr. Frank Gambell (Doty 1898). Doty's diary entry records the naming the village by Dr. Jackson.

The sign board marked 'Gambell' was placed on the front face of the house, in order to give to the village the name of the noble missionaries, Mr. V. C. Gambell, and wife, who labored so faithfully to promote the welfare of the people in this community. (Doty, 14 August 1898)

The wording in the diary depicts a scenario which will be repeated over the years. The white man, in a provincial view of the world, bestows his values on an "uncivilized" society. Prior to the formal naming of the village as "Gambell," the natives of the island referred to the village as "Sivuqaq," meaning "wung dry." The act of giving a white name to an already named village is benevolent, at best.

According to various issues of the Home Mission Monthly (1898 and 1899), Dr. Frank Gambell, the younger brother of Vene Gambell, determined that he would resign his position in Unalaklik [now Unalakleet] as a government physician to continue the
missionary work of his deceased brother. Dr. Frank Gambell would relieve Mr. Doty, a seminary student who was called as a temporary missionary, thereby allowing him to return to the lower 48 to continue his studies (Home Mission Monthly January 1899). In a letter to his mother, Frank Gambell wrote:

I hope the news that I am to take his place next year, will not be painful to you. I feel that I should go there and help them. Some one should be there, for they not only want them to come, but they need someone to live right in their midst. Dr. Jackson seemed to be pleased when I told him that I would go next year. (Home Mission Monthly January, 1899, 55).

The Presbyterian Church granted the appointment of Frank Gambell to replace William Doty (Home Mission Monthly July, 1898), but despite Gambell's sincere intentions to fulfill his brother's vacancy, he did not return to the island in an official position.

William Doty found the students to be a credit to Professor Vene and Nellie Gambells' teaching. He started the school year 1 September 1898 with twenty-five boys and no girls in attendance (Doty, 1 September 1898). Although many of the students were motivated and accustomed to appropriate classroom behavior, some students were so disruptive that it was necessary to send a student home the first day. While Vene Gambell had indicated that he and his wife had good student attendance, Doty found attendance sporadic. On 6 October 1898 Doty wrote:

I notice that the attendance is very irregular; in fact has been all along. The boys have to hunt and to work for their parents quite a good deal. Many of the scholars attend the session before recess and then do not return for the balance of the period, while others attend only after recess. It is difficult to obtain satisfactory results under these conditions. Many scholars attend school only one or two days during the week. I do not like to offer any premium to the children for regular attendance, nor am I apt
as yet to understand whether the parents are exacting too much work from their children. (Doty 1898, 19-20)

Poor attendance is also reflected in the 12 December 1898 diary entry.

The slow attendance at school of late caused me grave anxiety. I sent a message to Assome and Shoolook, informing them that the children were absenting themselves from school, and requesting them to confer with the parents and urge upon them the duty of sending their children to school. Later in a talk with Assome, who is the chief, I told him that in other sections of the United States generally the expense connected with the building and maintenance of a school were borne by the people themselves, while here no such burden had been thrust upon the Messinga men; and surely the people ought to feel grateful to the Government for building this school house and sustaining a Teacher among the people. I assured him that I made all allowance for a [sic] the necessary absence of boys of an age when the responsibilities of hunting were assumed, but that there were a number of boys who preferred skating to attendance at school. Then, too, there ought to be a larger attendance of girls. I urged him to admonish the people that they were allowing their children to miss a privilege which would later put them in command of greater resources. . . . The irregular attendance has been a great obstacle in the progress of a most difficult role, that of a tutor defeated constantly, and I have been compelled to assume a most difficult role, that of a tutor to every one present (or nearly as bad as that) trying to coach individuals, instead of instructing divisions the pupils who were naturally in the same class. (Doty 1898, 58-59)

After much fretting and threatening, Doty established a schedule similar to that of his predecessor, V. C. Gambell. While school was held daily from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m., Doty would occasionally dismiss school early or give recess time in excess of two hours per day. In-class time would be recouped on other days when the session would last until later into the afternoon.

Because of the scarcity of paper, school subjects were taught with a blackboard and slates. The curriculum consisted of reading, arithmetic, grammar, spelling, health, music, and art. Interestingly, students were encouraged to draw scenes from picture books [magazines] which often depicted scenes completely foreign to them. Doty praised
the students' work when copying these pictures as well as their drawings of typical arctic life.

After several months Doty was accepted into the community as a teacher, health aide, and missionary, and invited into native homes as a guest. True to his Christian beliefs, he found the visits illustrative of many of the low morals unacceptable in the white world. On 8 November 1898 he writes:

It appears that all the Messinga people who were admitted into the rooms of the house, of Imaq so despicable the fur-curtained partitions, were, according to the Messinga etiquette obliged to show their respect or possibly peaceable intentions toward the new arrivals by removing all of their clothing save the smallest possible covering to effect that concealment which modesty even among their "free and easy" people, most assuredly enjoined. Some food was spread before the guests, after which refreshments, they began to dress themselves in festive garments, for the later ceremonies. The did not [?] the nude condition obligatory upon the receptions party, but were clothed in costumes, which while in part of the women abbreviated somewhat in comparison with the ordinary "out o doors" for him (meaning all males), still were a vast improvement over the scamp garments of the home party. I may say way of parenthesis that the Messinga people were not guilty on this occasion of any greater exposure of their persons than usual in their home circle. Having been frequently called in to see sick folks in the rooms of their houses, I have been surprised to see the whole household nearly destitute of clothing. I unable to express any opinion what effect such "loose" methods of dress have upon the morals of the community—one naturally concludes that a more fitting reserve been the sexes would tend to elevate the ethical sense of the properties and of strict chastity. The people keep their home apartments insufferably warm, and seem to care for no clothing consequently. They ought to be encouraged to dress in a light "house costume", and then advised to keep their rooms at a more temperate heat. As it is they live in the tropics in their houses and in the arctic when they go abroad. (Doty 1898, 41-42).

Doty believed that he, as a servant of God, would lead the errant Eskimos toward a more civilized life through his work at the school and in his sermons. In early January of 1899, he wrote:

In fact God commanded that His word should be taught to the peoples in the uttermost parts of the world. Obedient to that call, Dr. Jackson and others desired to
send the revelation to the Eskimos, and hence I wanted to tell the people about God's Word, while at the same time I taught the children useful information on secular matters in the school. It was my hope that the Messinga people would give heed to the instruction. They were really as little children, and had many things yet to learn which would be to their advantage. (Doty 1899).

William Doty left the island in July of 1899 and was replaced by P. H. J. Lerrigo, M.D., who arrived on the island 1 September 1899. Wasting no time, church was held on 10 September 1899 utilizing an interpreter, Alunga, who also acted as a classroom aide. Classes began on 11 September with an attendance of twenty-eight boys and no girls. Adults and children spent the first week of school evaluating the school and its teachers. Attendance ranged from only boys at the beginning of the week to adults by midweek and a few girls by the end of the week. As each group's curiosity was satisfied, attendance slowed steadily, and by November Dr. Lerrigo was imploring adults to send their children to school.

While Dr. Lerrigo related that students wrote well, several of his entries describe deficiencies in reading comprehension. In an attempt to increase motivation for learning English in general and the Bible in particular, Lerrigo began a young men's Bible study class on Tuesday evenings. The diary entry for Tuesday, 21 November 1899 is representative of several earlier entries regarding school work.

Temp. abt. 28 degrees. No. Wind. School--Larger attendance than usual. Held bible class in evening for the older boys or rather young men. They read the words fairly well, but don't seem to gather any meaning from them. (Lerrigo 1899, 48)

An even more telling entry from Dr. Lerrigo was written on the second day of school, 12 September 1899.
Temp. abt. 40 degrees misty & rain. School—Used the new books which they do not like as it takes more mental effort than they care to manifest to grasp the unfamiliar lessons. Student "Messinga-talk" with Alunga. There appears to be some system about it. (Lerrigo 1899, n.p.)

While Dr. Lerrigo was undoubtedly trained in both the medical and seminary professions, his remarks indicate little pedagogical knowledge. Even more incredulously, one wonders how familiar Dr. Lerrigo was with other cultures. "There appears to be some system about it." The sentence taken at face value reveals a condescending attitude as if the Eskimos were a mute society with little or no cognitive ability.

School was dismissed 27 April 1900. William Doty, Dr. Lerrigo's predecessor, arrived on the island on 23 June 1900 in his new position for the reindeer service. Doty and Lerrigo spent the summer repairing the schoolhouse and monitoring reindeer herding on the island. In late June a measles epidemic which began in Indian Point spread to the island resulting in fourteen deaths by 30 June 1900. Influenza, pneumonia, and bronchitis took more lives after bouts with measles left many of the villagers with comprised immune systems. On 13 July 1900 Dr. Lerrigo recorded twenty-six deaths since the beginning of the epidemic. On 23 July 1900 a fourth of July celebration was held in the evening in an attempt to bring a sense of normalcy to the village. Believing that Christianity was beginning to take hold within the community, the entry goes on to state:

... Seppilla says that the old woman who died in Ifkowans house on the 21st asked to be killed according to the old custom. But her friends had refused, saying it was not good that she should die in this way. She however refused food and died of exhaustion. It is good to see the power of the heathen custom is weakening. Notwithstanding the extreme morality attending the epidemics, none of have been helped to death as far as we have been able to ascertain. (Lerrigo 1900, 231)

Lerrigo's hope was shattered on 10 August 1900.
This morning we saw a dead person being carried to the mountain. We had heard of no one who was so sick as to be in danger of a fatal termination and so inquired of many persons as to the occurrence. They all assured us that they knew nothing of the matter, or, that no one had died, until we asked little Enuk who after some pressing told us that Seevahuks wife had been hung on account of sickness. Enuk mentioned Nyookhuk as having performed the hanging. We shall investigate further. (Lerrigo 1900, 237)

A latter entry relates that Lerrigo warned Nyookhuk about continuing in heathen behavior. Failure to "walk carefully in the future" would result in Lerrigo requesting Captain Tuttle, captain of the United States Revenue Cutter Bear to remove him and his family and return them to Indian Point, where Nyookhuk was born (Lerrigo 11 August 1900, 238). Because the territory was operating under Oregon law at the time, dispute settlements were made by the captain of the United States Revenue Cutter and were binding upon all who resided within the territory. The Bear arrived on Sunday, 10 September 1900 and "Captain Tuttle has consented to my request that he take Nyookhuk & his family to Indian Point." Dr. Lerrigo was judge and jury in this instance when he condemned traditional Siberian Yupik customs and had Nyookhuk and his family banished from the island.

Doty and Lerrigo shared in teaching duties during the early part of September 1900 until Doty left the island in later September. Upon Doty's departure from the island, Lerrigo became the reindeer service representative in charge of dispensing medicine and rations monthly to the herders. Additionally, Lerrigo worked closely with the Laplanders who had been brought to the island to instruct the Eskimos on herding techniques.
The island was the site of two shipwrecks during Lerrigo's duty. The lone survivor of the second shipwreck, Mr. William A. Eagan, was discovered in an underground hut belonging to one of the Savoonga villagers on 24 January 1901. The seventeen day journey from the shipwreck to the underground hut left its toll on Eagan. He was delirious, weak from hunger, and suffered from severe frostbite on his hands and feet. Dr. Lerrigo amputated the first and second toes of one of Eagan's feet on 30 January 1901. Having no way to return to the mainland, Eagan's plans were to stay with Lerrigo until the first United States Revenue cutter arrived after spring breakup.

The first mail of the year was delivered by Captain McKenna of the Fearless on 31 May 1901. The letters for Lerrigo contained news that his mother was gravely ill and that he should return home. On 18 June 1901 Lerrigo set sail aboard the Belena with assurances from Eagan that he would stay on the island until relieved. In a manner typical of survival in harsh, sparsely populated areas, Eagan undertook the duties of Lerrigo. The second entry of Eagan's journal, 24 June 1901 indicates a spirit of willingness to accept challenges for which he was not prepared.

Mon. 24. 54 degrees Foggy. S.E. the [day] started with 4 calls for medical aid. All treated to the best of the ability of one who does not know Rhuo Tox from Iodine. We are expecting 9 men from the crew of the Belena to winter here. if they do life will be a lo Picnic but I am afraid of the influence they may have over the natives. It seems fitting here to make excuses for bad Penmanship and worse Grammer but considering that I have not be blest with an Education, also that this is Volunteer work for the sake of keeping the General Happenings on record in the absence of one more capable also for other reasons partly on Page 41[,] 1/26 [Lerrigo's journal entry of 26 January 1901 recorded on page 41 which described Eagan's shipwreck] and others not recorded on this Earth, I think a little allowance can be made for you whose life will be spent here or on some other similar Field. (Eagan 1901, 66-67)
Eagan wasted no time in beginning his work as a teacher as reflected in his 27 June 1901 entry.

Thurs 27. 55 degrees. clear. all doing well. will arrange some sort of 4th July exercises to instruct the native in regard to their country and its independence. 7 Years of missionary work and they don't know anything of the national Holiday. it was told me that they were well advanced. some of the Boys as far in arithmetic as Fractions. I asked one of the most advanced today if I should sell him 4# of Peas at .01-1/4 per lb how much they wuld cost him. he did not know. I gave him the arithmetic he has been studying and he did 2 very hard Fractions. Why? Because he knew what figures to put down. he could not analyse his work the same with every thing. they sing 3 Parts in church. (chorus only) and they cant sing any thing else. Why? drilled it with the aid of the Ruler of all things one must overcome this. ... (Eagan 27 June 1901, 67-68).

Eagan's duties were varied. He attended to medical problems on the island, divided rations for the reindeer herders, attended sick deer, taught school, helped erect buildings, and sorted and distributed mail and other supplies. Like his white predecessors, Eagen believed that the ways of the white man were superior to native ways and never wasted an opportunity to give a lesson in order to enlighten the villagers.

Sun. 21 [July 1901] 68 degrees. clear. had dinner with Capt. Thomas. lectured natives on progressiveness and intellectual superiority of white man over Indian. Result. Indian gives Food to God and has other crude worship. white man not latter must know best. (Eagan 1901, 73)

On 3 August 1901 the Bear arrived with supplies and Dr. Jackson, who was on his yearly inspection of the territory. Dr. Jackson was pleased to find that Eagan was willing to stay on at the island in the capacity of an assistant for the teachers who were to arrive later in the month and contracted with Eagan to stay another year. In the two years which Eagan spent on the island [1901 and 1901], he complains only twice in his journal.

July 2, Tues. [1901] ... A brand new Baby last night I wish they would manage in the daytime and not wake me up in the night (Eagan 1901, 70)
Oct 5, Tues. [1901] 38 degrees S.W. N.E. clear. The Doctor [Campbell] took occasion to come this morning at 8:30 and request me to get a moove on [emphasis in original]; it is the 2nd time he has seen fit to reprimand me for not go to suite him. it may be I am sadly out of place here but but [sic] trusting ever I shall do my best and with help will try to do my duty to the Government provide it dont conflict with my stronger motive for staying here. When it is taken into consideration the Trouble I have cleaning up after natives and cooking for some continually (for that is the only way to start them out of this present low stae) and for myself, having a Frozen Limb or 2, and being about ½ mile from school House, after thinking all day about it I must conclude to continue in behalf of the work, the Drs Ideas or not. Also I have dogs to Break to the sled for the winter and the Dr considers it sport, but if he dont change his mind before he has lived here 2 yrs he will be an exception. will go to R.D. [reindeer] camp to morrow. provided [emphasis in original] (Eagan 1901, 90-91)

Eagan's 9 March 1902 diary entry records the arrival of Dr. and Mrs. Campbell on St. Lawrence Island. With the exception of Vene and Louis Gambell's placement on St. Lawrence Island, each missionary/teacher arrived on the island under extraordinary circumstances. The Campbell's story is one filled with tenacity to serve God. One should not assume that this tenacity was directed to missionary work in the arctic. In a letter dated 10 April 1900 Campbell pleads that he be sent to Laos or Korea where he felt "medical missionary work; their great opportunities and prejudice dissolvers, as door openers; and their work itself, in healing the body, making way for the time work about the soul" (Campbell 1900, 2v). The Board of Foreign Missions refused Dr. Campbell's request.

On 27 April 1901 Dr. Campbell wrote Dr. Halsey of the Board of Foreign Missions and reluctantly announced that he had accepted an assignment for medical missionary work on St. Lawrence Island.

... I have prepared for work in the Orient; but know nothing about the arctic regions. Having to teach school 5 days in the week, and only 300 people to practice medicine
among, I will soon forget medicine, and -- well, I am sadly perplexed. (Campbell 1901, 3r)

The Board of Foreign Missions assigned Dr. Campbell to St. Lawrence Island. Because Dr. Campbell's primary interests were medical and missionary work, most of his diary entries (1902-1911) dealt with issues along these lines. It is apparent from the very early diaries, 1902 and 1903, that teaching was simply a peripheral duty. School began on 8 September 1902.

Lou has We yu helping wash. 4 snow shirts washed. Opened school 34 present -- 15 away camping. Lou & Oningu hunted up those asleep or slow in getting around. Went after this and rough shod. . . . (Campbell 1902, 138)

By 1906 school and instruction became a primary consideration to Dr. Campbell and his wife. As Sheldon Jackson (1906) points out in his annual education report, student motivation to learn during the year was more than likely a result of Dr. Campbell's extended period on the island and the concomitant trust of the villagers.

During the school year, Dr. Campbell wrote Jackson concerning his students.

Yesterday two little girls came to me after school, hanging their heads and giggling for a long time, afraid to venture to speak English until, after some urging, one of them said, "Omomingo like slate take home." I asked her if she wanted one, too, and she quickly replied, "Yes." Pictures cut from magazines have been used successfully as rewards for good work in classes. They are very fond of turning their backs while the teacher writes some exercise on the board, and, at a signal, turning and trying who can give the correct answer first. In arithmetic they are given some exercise that requires only answers for completion. At the signal the entire class begins to tremble with excitement. Spelling has become a favorite study and a head mark is a coveted prize. I believe many of them would give their white friends a good sharp contest in spelling from the first and second readers. (250)

It was several years after the passage of the Nelson Act in 1905 before appropriations were made for the BIA school in Gambell. Conrad Oozeva relates that the
first governmental school (BIA) was built sometime in the 1930s (Appassingok et al.
1987). A Kleet-Trac tractor was sent aboard a ship delivering materials in order to facilitate construction of the building.

Savoonga began as a reindeer camp in 1914. According to Theodore Kingeekuk, the material for the first school building was brought aboard a steamer named Ruby. Jimmie Toolie states that once the material arrived in Savoonga, reindeer herders from Ayvgteq (a reindeer camp) came to Savoonga to determine the exact location for the schoolhouse. After careful consideration, the herders decided that although the land around Savoonga was boggy, it would be a good place to build a school because ice along the shore would open often, thereby allowing good hunting conditions. The first schoolhouse was built in 1917 and was later replaced by a second schoolhouse built in the early 1930s; the second schoolhouse burned to the ground in the late 1940s. The BIA built another schoolhouse in Savoonga in the 1950s (Appassingok et al. 1987).

While students were able to attend BIA schools in Gambell and Savoonga in grades one through eight, there were few opportunities for students to continue their education after that point. In an effort to remedy the situation, the BIA began to send Alaska Native students to BIA boarding schools in 1966 (Zuelow 1977). Students applied to the school or schools which they wanted to attend, the schools then accepted or denied entrance in their program. Mt. Edgecumbe, Chemawa, Chilocco, and Haskell Institute were the primary boarding schools attended by Gambell and Savoonga students.

Several of the students who left the island were expelled from Chemawa due to alcohol abuse. The superintendent of Chemawa Indian School sent fourteen letters to
parents regarding substance abuse over the course of a four month period (January through April) in 1966. Several of the letters dealt with alcohol abuse, while other letters specified shaving lotion, lemon extract, and mouthwash. Each of the letters informed parents that another instance of abuse would result in expulsion for their child.

As you know from our previous letters, [student] has been drinking on other occasions. We do not approve of drinking among students. [Student] must not do any drinking in the future, or [he or she] may lose [the] privilege of getting an education at Chemawa School.

[Student] has been helped by [a] teacher-advisor, the guidance department head, and many other staff people. They will continue to work with [student] in an attempt to help [him or her], but [student] must make a serious effort to help [himself or herself]. (Guidance Form Letter 1966).

The letters also asked that parents write their children and encourage them to stay in school.

In an unpublished paper discussing Native Alaskan learning styles and cultural traits, Salisbury (n.d.) discusses colleges students attending the University of Alaska at Fairbanks. According to Salisbury, native students rarely mix socially with non-natives on the college campus. The student chooses isolation due to two factors: peer pressure and habit. Further, native students feel that they are the victims of racial discrimination. All too often native students who attend the university have had no contact with middle-class white students. Many times, they have not traveled out of their village.

Parker (1962) found in research that parents of high school dropouts seldom knew that their child had plans to drop out from school until after the fact. "The parent felt that it was none of their business" (3).
Upon completion of the William E. Beltz School (Beltz) in Nome in 1966, students from Savoonga, Gambell, and other nearby rural villages had the option of attending this school which was closer to their village (Alaska State Commission for Human Rights 1969). The school, named for an Eskimo who served as the first President of the Alaska State Senate, was the first regional boarding school in the State of Alaska with funds from the City of Nome, the State, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and was a state-operated school. The facilities of the school included an administration building, an academic building, a dining hall, a faculty apartment building, dormitory for seventy-six boys and seventy-six girls, and a service building. The school was originally conceived as a vocation school. In a meeting held by the Department of Education in Juneau on 20 and 21 October 1965, the following text was adopted:

While this Committee recognizes that regional high schools are not within the purview of its advisory capacity, it feels strongly that the need for such high schools is critical and supports all efforts of the State Board of Education to immediately implement such. However, confining itself to vocational education, it recommends that:

1. Since the W. E. Beltz State Vocation School at Nome and the one to be built in Kodiak were voted by the people of Alaska as vocational schools, they should be so implemented. To do otherwise would in the opinion of the Committee be a breach of faith and direct violation of the intent of the enabling legislation.

2. As State Vocational Schools, these institutions should exist solely as vocational schools and restrict their curricula to vocational education programs as defined by Section 8 in P.L. 88-210. . . . (Vocational Education Advisory Committee 1965, 3)

The intent of the Committee was myopic. Because Beltz was located 3.5 miles out of Nome, a facility which offered only vocational courses would need to find other
accommodations to educate students in basic skills. The only option available would be for students at Beltz to attend vocational classes one-half a day and then be bused to Nome High School for academic course work. The schedule would work in the opposite for the students of Nome High School (State Direction in Providing Boarding Schools n.d.). After consideration, the Beltz curricula included both academic and vocational classes.

According to a teacher's schedule dated December 1966, academic courses offered consisted of English, literature, general mathematics, Algebra I, Algebra II, general science, earth science, biology, chemistry, world history, U.S. history, Alaska history, American Government, and health (Teacher's Schedule 1966). A 1969 study conducted by the Alaska State Commission for Human Rights listed courses by discipline: English, mathematics, history, government, and science (which were listed as biology and chemistry). Economics and art were added to the curriculum. Teachers who were consulted for this study maintained many students entering Beltz for the ninth grade were actually working in the fifth to seventh grade range. The study recommended a full year of remedial work for all students entering the ninth grade. The year would be devoted to developing and increasing academic and communication skills in an attempt to bring students to ninth grade level work prior to matriculation.

The vocational curriculum numerated on the December 1966 Teacher's Schedule was diverse including classes in auto mechanics, power mechanics, mechanical drawing, wood shop, tailoring, dressmaking, general business, typing, home economics, vocational cooking, waitressing, and library science. By 1969 the Alaska Commission for Human
Rights had trimmed the classes down to metalworking, auto mechanics, carpentry, cabinetmaking, dressmaking, tailoring, typing, shorthand, and library science.

In 1970 the Department of Education conducted a needs assessment to aid in planning the consolidation of the William E. Beltz School and the Nome High School (Nome-Beltz Needs Assessment 1970). The region included Nome, St. Lawrence Island, Little Diomede Island, and twenty-three villages. Kotzebue, a village the size of Nome which is also located on the Seward Peninsula, was excluded from the survey. The study included an analysis of student characteristics resulting from data provided by school administrators and the Juneau Area Schools Office, Bureau of Indian Affairs, a survey conducted in the 1968-69 academic year, and solicited responses from native leaders and educational specialists. Because empirical data for the 1967-68 school year is representative of the data presented for three academic years (1966-67, 1967-68, and 1968-69), these figures are discussed. Beltz freshman class averages compared to national standard score percentiles in 1968 on the Metropolitan Achievement Test were extremely low in language, reading and math (10, 13, and 7 respectively) (Nome-Beltz Needs Assessment 1970, 19). The 1967-68 school year recorded more dropouts than graduates. Figures were not given stating the percent of graduates or dropouts of the average daily membership for the year.

Four surveys were given to determine the desired educational outcomes expected by various stakeholders within the region. The sampling frame included students, parents, teachers, and employers. In an attempt to gain insight into which occupations students saw as employment potentials, the survey queried students as to the types of
work which they thought would be open when they completed school. High school girls, regardless of grade, who answered the survey (native and white) believed that professions normally entered into by females (e.g. secretary-clerical, nurse, medical-dental assistant, and teacher) would be available. Answers given by males diverged across grades culminating in twelfth grade. Native students believed they could be employed in unskilled or semiskilled labor while white students choose professions as being more open. The researchers also report that the study found a majority of students preferred an occupation which did not require a college degree. The study recommended a large variety of vocational training courses should be offered at the proposed school. Because roughly one-fourth (twenty-three percent) of the student responses chose an occupation which required a college degree, the researchers noted that a college preparatory tract was essential for the consolidated school. When asked whether each student planned to stay in Alaska or leave upon graduation, the majority of native students planned to remain in Alaska. For this reason, the researchers recommended a curriculum which is strong in basic skills equipping students for life in the native and white world.

Survey results of parents, teachers, and employers reiterated the need for a strong vocational curriculum and a college preparatory tract. Responses from each of the foregoing groups of stakeholders indicate that basic skills in English, reading, writing, and arithmetic are essential for survival in village and town settings. When asked, "What are the major gaps or deficiencies which you see in Alaska's secondary educational system?" the number one response given by employers was lack of responsibility (46).
Parents, when asked the same question, either did not respond to the question or indicated that they did not know.

Researchers made twenty-nine recommendations based upon the data gathered in the study. The majority of recommendations reflected the need to address student deficiencies in basic skills and curriculum development to bring students to a national normative level. The researchers also recommended that a college preparatory tract and a varied vocational curriculum were needed when the schools consolidated. Finally, the authors strongly urged administrators, teachers, and employers to utilize various methods to develop student responsibility. Specific areas to be targeted regarding this recommendation included an extensive on-the-job training program using various employers in the area, development of a curriculum which "help[s] students to understand and internalize acceptable social patterns associated with work in the white man's world" (53), and the development of special dormitory programs which emphasize responsibility as well as values respected in both native and white cultures.

Beltz Boarding School and the Nome public school were consolidated in 1972-73 in order to provide village students an opportunity to benefit from an integrated learning atmosphere and to provide Nome students with a modern facility (Kleinfeld 1973). The consolidation worked in favor of the Nome students who flourished in the modern school. The Beltz students, however, suffered both academically and emotionally after the consolidation. Prior to the consolidation, Beltz students who visited town in order to shop, go to the movies, or see relatives, were frequently taunted by their Nome peers. The Beltz school was a haven for the village students. Although student rivalries
occurred at Beltz, the confrontations were between village students and took place on a level playing field. After the two schools were consolidated, rivalries developed between town students and village students.

While the student body consisted primarily of Eskimo students (316 pupils), the majority of these Eskimo students (198) were from Nome High School. The remaining students were white (fifty-one). A relatively low percentage of disciplinary problems were reported in the 1971-72 school year. According to Kleinfeld:

Only 33 percent (12 out of 36) of the village freshmen developed school-related social and emotional problems, and most were mild difficulties. Only 8 percent of these students had drinking problems, which was about the same percentage that teachers reported had drinking problems in the village. No one was reported to use drugs, and only one of the freshmen got in trouble with the law. Over the 7-month testing period, the village freshmen gained considerably over 7 months in reading achievement. The drop-out rate at Beltz was minuscule 3 percent, and the school had a long waiting list of students eager to get in. (1973, 33)

Kleinfeld attributes many of the problems on a down-sized dormitory staff when funding was cut in 1972-73. An astute comparison arises out of the number of professionals living within the dormitories at upper class private schools and the complete lack of on-site professionals at Nome-Beltz. Character development in upper class boarding dormitories is developed through intramural sports and clubs. While two dormitory aides (one male and one female) lived in the dormitory in the 1971-72 school year, each aide was stretched to his or her maximum capabilities while supervising eighty students. The aides had no time for personal involvement with the students and very little time to develop out-of-school activities. Consequently, the students developed values based
entirely on peer socialization. By the 1972-73 school year, peer group norms included drinking, violence, and strong anti-white feelings.

Because of *Tobeluk v. Lind*, the students of Savoonga and Gambell may now receive their high school education in a school located in their village. According to Cotton (1984), village leaders of tomorrow will now be educated in traditional villages, not in boarding programs. Further, the communities now have a say in the educational process of their children, as provided by the locally elected advisory education committee (AEC). Bering Strait School District, the school district for the Bering Strait REAA, was created by the state Department of Community and Regional Affairs and the state Department of Education in 1975 (McBeath et al. 1983). Gambell and Savoonga lie within the Bering Strait REAA.

Although the schools in Gambell and Savoonga are working for most students, there are students who would benefit from the opportunity to attend a school which is vocationally or technically oriented. A few students in each village would benefit from attending a regional boarding school which provides a strong academic background. Kleinfeld (1973) notes that the paradox of regional boarding schools is that villages will be weakened by fewer students returning.

The fundamental issue is not the size of the school but the culture it creates. Some small high schools use their size to advantage, developing intensive academic programs and activities of great benefit to the students and the community. The key is the energy and imagination of the school faculty and the relationships they develop with local communities.
When boarding schools are the only option and must accept all who apply, the schools have great difficulty. Those boarding schools that succeed—such as the religious schools of previous decades or the present Mt. Edgecumbe—select students who support the school's purposes. According to Kleinfeld, the irony in this situation is that the creation of strong boarding schools requires the existence of local high schools.

The settlement of the *Tobeluk v. Lind* case clearly has benefited many students in Savoonga and Gambell. However, more options for educating rural Alaska youth are needed to help them realize their potential.
CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

The major focus of this study is the effect of formal education on individuals, communities, cultural traditions, and values on Siberian Yupik Eskimos of Alaska. The study is based on traditional historical and ethnographic research methods. The uniqueness of formal education in Alaska dictates thorough research of its genesis and various transformations. Data on early schools was collected through an inspection of the Sheldon Jackson Scrapbook Collection housed at the Presbyterain Historical Society located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Archival artifacts housed in the Presbyterian Historical Society include original diaries and bilingual textbooks using translated Bible verses as part of reading and recitation classes. Education reports for the territory are also housed there as well as various original letters written to Dr. Jackson and originals or copies of Jackson’s responses. Data was also collected from archives of the Arctic and Polar Regions Department of Rasmuson Library, at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Complete research notes and various artifacts from archeological and anthropological work were housed in this Fairbanks’ facility. Many of these studies included transcriptions of in-depth interviews conducted in the field in the late 1930’s and early 1940’s. Often the material in these interviews discussed school events or school related matters. Diaries kept by villagers during those studies added to the body of knowledge regarding lifestyles and events. Data relating to schools under the Bureau of Education
and later Bureau of Indian Affairs are housed at the National Archives—Alaska Region in Anchorage, Alaska. Various newspapers and periodicals at the Rasmuson Library, Fairbanks, Alaska, at the Nome Public Library, at the Bethel Public Library, and at the Anchorage Public Library were also studied.

Rather than begin with a theory or hypothesis, I utilize an interpretivist approach to theory. According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), in an interpretivist approach, material is considered from a social approach based on "direct 'lived experience' instead of abstract generalizations" (19). An ethno-historical study provides such data. The ethnographic research I gathered required a six month stay on the island in order to interview subjects and to record daily life. Gaining access to the villages of Savoonga and Gambell is not dissimilar to gaining access to any privately-owned community and its inhabitants. The villagers of St. Lawrence Island elected not to participate in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 which allocated 40 million acres of land to twelve Alaska Native Corporations and $962.5 million dollars to be distributed to native and regional corporations over a 20-year period (U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs 1976). As a result, the island belongs solely to the Siberian Yupik Eskimos.

In order to gain the approval of the various committees and councils for my study, I wrote a letter of introduction in which I explained my dissertation proposal. The letter was addressed to three parties in each village: the president of the native corporation, the President of the Indian Reorganization Act council (IRA council), and the mayor. The letter contained my general methods of data gathered, a list of the topics which my research would address, and the benefits which would result from the study. The letter
stressed the importance of disclosure of facts gathered during my research. Each village received copies of all historical documents gathered during my research of historical records.

I spent three months in each village gathering data as a participant observer. The first village in which I conducted research was Savoonga. During the three years I taught school there, I became close friends with several families in the village. I approached one of these households requesting room and board for the time I would spend in Savoonga. The letter which I wrote outlined my study, listed the various community members whom I had written requesting initial permission to conduct the study in Savoonga, and proposed a monetary amount for floor space ($10.00 per night). Further, I informed the elder in the household that I was a vegetarian and would purchase and prepare my own food. Finally, I gave a suggested list of various responsibilities for which I would be held accountable as a member of the household. While I was informed that this household did not need any help, the elder in the family and I talked on the telephone and discussed alternative families with whom I might stay.

The letter to my second household was warmly received and I was welcomed into the home as a family member. Immediately upon confirmation of a place to stay, I placed a bush grocery order. Five family members lived in the home in which I stayed in Savoonga: the father, the mother, two daughters, age twelve and seventeen, and the father's mother, age eighty-five. My daily responsibilities included hauling water, washing and drying dishes, some cooking, care giving responsibilities for the elder (who suffered from Alzheimer's disease), and hauling laundry to the washateria weekly to wash
and dry family clothes. Within a very few days my chores became a much anticipated daily event. I attribute my enjoyment of these daily tasks to the fact that they were my only familiar routines.

Finding a family with whom to live in Gambell was more problematic. Because I had not taught in the village, I knew few of the villagers. Most of my acquaintances from Gambell were people I met briefly when I was teaching in Savoonga or on school-sponsored events throughout the school district. I approached families in Savoonga whom I knew had relatives in Gambell and related my room and board negotiations. About three weeks prior to my departure for Gambell I was confirmed with a family.

The family with whom I stayed in Gambell consisted of a mother and father, two biological sons ages twenty-nine and thirty-two, and two of their grandchildren whom they adopted. The youngest, a daughter age five, was the first born of one of the biological daughters of the adoptive parents. The son, age nine, was the first born of another of the biological daughters of the adoptive parents. While my daily duties in Gambell were similar to those which I undertook in Savoonga, there were some major differences. The family in Gambell had running water which eliminated hauling water and hauling laundry to the washateria. The similar duties included washing and drying dishes, sweeping and mopping the floors, helping with laundry, babysitting, and occasionally helping to clean the house. As in Savoonga, these morning rituals were anticipated with a great deal of joy. My job was clear. Working as an ethnographer in the field, conversely, required making constant decisions and total absorption in detail.
I find it imperative to state that the assumptions of these duties were strictly self-dictated. Although each family agreed to my letter by allowing me to stay in their home, I was seldom asked to perform any of the above duties. Jobs which needed to be performed were obvious after one or two days of observation. It was an understood agreement that in order to participate in family life neither party would call attention to my chores, i.e. I did not call attention to any work I performed and the woman of the house did not mention my actions.

As a participant observer I kept two journals: a descriptive journal in which I recorded daily events and an analytical journal in which I examined the events in an attempt to find and explore themes and patterns. Notes were taken primarily in English; any material which I felt was sensitive was inscribed in Gregg shorthand or German. Journal entries often contained sketches of landscape, home settings, or tattoo configurations on elder women. My journal writing was usually accomplished in private homes, e.g. during an interview or at the home in which I was staying. The public places in which I took notes were the washateria, the school gym, the health clinic, and the city hall building in each village. The post office and the grocery store buildings were never used to record information. Because the villagers in both Savoonga and Gambell knew that I was a researcher, there was only a fair amount of curiosity regarding my field journals. When queried about the journal's contents, I would pass the journal (usually the descriptive journal) to the party and I would let him or her read a page or two. This ordinarily satisfied any curiosity about my work.
Siberian Yupik Eskimo is the mother tongue of the islanders; English is taught formally in kindergarten. Elders and small children (i.e. ages one to four) living in both villages spoke very little English. A television is now the center of activity in many homes leading to what some fear will be a loss of the language. My presence in many of the homes led to a predominant use of English when I visited. Conversations between me and the interviewees contained substantial use of code switching, the use of both English and Siberian Yupik Eskimo within one sentence, on the part of the villagers. While I understand some Siberian Yupik Eskimo, I can only produce a few simple sentences.

The subjects for this research project included Siberian Yupik Eskimos of St. Lawrence Island who had attended formal schooling in any of following situations: mission schools, Bureau of Indian Affairs schools (both locally and in Mt. Edgecumbe, Alaska; Chemawa, Oregon; or Chilocco, Oregon), state operated boarding schools, and Rural Educational Attendance Area schools. While most of the subjects interviewed were located on St. Lawrence Island, I also interviewed Siberian Yupik Eskimos who currently reside in Nome, Alaska, but who received formal schooling in one of the foregoing systems. The population of each village, Gambell and Savoonga, is approximately 600 Siberian Yupik Eskimos. The subjects for this research were approximately twenty-two to ninety-one years of age. I conducted fifty-two semi-structured interviews which are public record. These interviews were conducted in casual settings such as the home of the interviewee or at the home of my hosts. A few of the villagers spent extended periods of time with me in conversation which they said
could be used “loosely” in research findings (i.e. without reference to the interviewee). I found these conversations quite interesting and gleaned light on the experiences faced by three generations of Eskimos.

Locating individuals who would agree to an interview was challenging. Because the villagers in Savoonga knew me from my previous teaching years, I found many interviewees would agree to an interview with a simple request. Since few homes in Savoonga have telephones, I spent an enormous amount of time walking in the village trying to locate individuals, gaining access into their home to explain my study, and scheduling an appointment for an interview. Often I would arrive at a scheduled interview only to find that an important matter had arisen, and we would have to reschedule the interview. The occurrences which predicated these reschedulings were never due to casual reasons but were due to survival, e.g. weather conditions, hunting, illness, refueling propane heaters, lack of sleep after staying up all night to continue citizen band radio contact with boats, repair of broken snow machines or four-wheelers, and repair of homes after blizzards.

After my arrival in Gambell, I was homebound for one week due to blizzard conditions. Once the whiteouts cleared, I began to acquaint myself with the villagers by strolling through the village for extended periods of time. In a village the size of Gambell, any new parka is immediately recognized and while only a few would stop me to inquire as to my reason for being in the village, word spread quickly about my intentions. Locating interviewees in Gambell was much more difficult than Savoonga because the people in the village did not know me. To further complicate matters,
Gambell has been the subject of a few studies, and the people feel that they were taken advantage of because of their uniqueness. On more than one occasion, the person whom I approached for an interview declined because the village had been misrepresented in previous studies. Since Gambell had been the site of previous research investigations, the villagers expected cash payment for their time during the interview process. Many, if not all, of the earlier researchers in Gambell were working under a grant which afforded them funds for solicitation of information. As a private researcher, and more importantly, as an earlier citizen and friend of many on the island for three years, I determined prior to my fieldwork that I would barter services rather than pay cash outright for interviews. I was informed by several villagers that current yearly interviews conducted by federal agents of the Fish and Wildlife Service paid interviewees $35 dollars per hour. I missed the opportunity to interview several villagers because I held fast to my belief.

I posted notices at the native store and at the post office explaining my research and asking interested persons to contact me. This brought few inquiries. I then reassessed the situation and went about formulating new plans to find subjects. I began what I call the "cold call" interview, where I would just show up at someone's house, explain my project, and ask if they would be willing to be interviewed. This method met with quite a bit of success. I attribute this to the fact that most of the villagers were dumbfounded to find a white woman dressed in a Eskimo snow shirt at their door. My second strategy was to post signs at the native store explaining that I would babysit in return for a "fascinating" interview regarding villagers' school experiences. This method brought several interviews. The third strategy I utilized was to post a notice at the native
store that I would wash, dry, and fold three loads of laundry (at my expense) at the
washateria for an interview. My only request was that the family drop off the clothes at
the washateria as I had no four-wheeler to pickup and deliver the laundry. Once again, I
interviewed several subjects utilizing this method. Finally, I spread the word that I would
help families out with necessities in return for an interview. This method usually resulted
in my buying disposable diapers for the child of the interviewee.

All subjects were required to sign a consent form. Because the literacy rate is low
for many elders in both the Siberian Yupik Eskimo language and in the English language,
a translator was used to communicate information in the consent letter prior to obtaining
the subject’s signature. Eskimos who were illiterate signed the consent form in the
presence of the translator and one other villager. The consent form clearly articulates to
subjects that information given during the interview will become part of the public
historical record and that each subject’s name may be printed in the study. The consent
form further states that, as public record, the material contained in the final research
document will be available for study by students and scholars. Subjects for whom
confidentiality was a concern were notified that they should not sign the consent form and
were not interviewed. A total of 30 women and 22 men signed consent forms and were
interviewed for the study. Various villagers in Savoonga and Gambell spoke with me on
the condition of anonymity, stating that I could use their ideas freely in the written report.

In-depth interviews were one of the primary data gathering techniques utilized in
this research. Interviews were conducted with persons who attended formal schooling in
the various institutional forms represented on the island since the first schoolhouse was
built in Gambell. The interviews were conducted in an informal manner within a predetermined cognitive framework allowing adaptations of questions during interactions. While most interviews were conducted in the interviewee's residence, some took place at the interviewee's place of business or other public gathering areas (e.g. community meeting place). Each interview was recorded using an audio recorder and later transcribed utilizing a transcription machine. Fieldnotes taken after each interview provide another dimension to descriptions of the interviewees. If interviews were scheduled too closely together, I would record descriptive material and observer comments on the audio recorder following the interview while walking to my next appointment. Each of the foregoing techniques provide thick description to the data (Geertz 1983). Information received in the interviews was triangulated through an examination of public archival records, private archival records, and direct response data (Borg and Gall 1989).

The interviews for this study were transcribed and analyzed for emerging themes. I utilized Glaser and Strauss's (as cited in Glesne and Peshkin 1992) grounded theory approach when analyzing the data. Constant comparative techniques were employed in the analysis of data to discover patterns and concepts. Once transcribed, data was transferred into The Ethnograph v4.0 qualitative data analysis program. Interviews were printed as separate files and were coded into categorizations. Data files were analyzed according to theme. Multiple data files were then analyzed according to themes and speaker identification. Cohort groups were developed from an analysis of face and identifier sheets which listed demographic data for each subject. The members of each
group were determined by the educational level they completed. For purposes of this study, the cohort groups for Savoonga and Gambell were compiled as one set. These groups were then analyzed for emerging themes and patterns.

Historical documents, including personal notes, diaries, newspaper accounts, and state and federal documents were catalogued. Once categorized, each category was organized chronologically. Data from each document and artifact was analyzed for content, entered into The Ethnograph v4.0 qualitative analysis program, categorized and coded. Themes and patterns found in this data bank were then analyzed in order to establish a historical foundation of formal schooling on the island and to triangulate data.

The findings of this study are written in narrative form. In order to achieve textual vocality, I utilize a combination of field journal entries, interviews with villagers of Gambell and Savoonga, and documentation obtained through historical research (Jolles 1994).

While the methodology applied was entered into with a suspension of judgment and no preconceived ideas, it must be recognized that I am analyzing a different culture from my own. As a white, single female I bring to this study the accumulation of my middle-class, western, Anglo culture. Siberian Yupik Eskimo culture is more closely aligned to eastern systems of thought. Surprisingly, many of the mannerisms I have learned as a southern woman are congruent with respectful mannerisms on the island. Respect for one's privacy is a given. One simply does not ask questions which are personal until given some agreed upon signal, e.g. the sharing of a relatively important secret or fact to which others are not privy. Furthermore, once told the secret, it is taken
for granted that one will not broach the subject matter with others. If, however, a third party brings up the subject, it is most respectful to acknowledge an awareness of the situation but not to discuss the matter. A second shared mannerism is the avoidance of answering a request in the negative. While a simple “no” is certainly the easiest response, it is feared that this will hurt the feelings of the questioner. In order to circumvent this problem, one will answer in a noncommittal manner, often leading the questioner to believe that the person is actually answering in the affirmative, but he or she may not have all of the relevant information at the time to do so explicitly. Finally, as in most situations, knowledge is power. Shared knowledge is many times seen as a relinquishment of that power. Each of these characteristics played an important part in my role as researcher. Because I spent three years (1991-1994) teaching sixth through twelfth grades in Savoonga, I was aware of these similarities and was quite comfortable with them.

In contrast, many of my values were in direct opposition to those of the islanders. Time is dictated in my western world by a clock. As such, I can compartmentalize it, rearrange it, and manage it. The islanders view time as a continuum; ones does not manipulate time but simply exists within it. As a westerner, I view work in a Calvistinic manner. The islanders see work as a matter of survival. Play is more subtle to the Siberian Yupik Eskimo and shown more often than in the western world.

I relate these similarities and differences in this chapter because much of my fieldwork was affected by each characteristic—sometimes individually and sometimes in concert with each other. I endeavored to look at the Siberian Yupik Eskimo world from
this perspective. To suspend judgment in the field is ideal, but I often wondered if my white values were so inculcated into my very being that they would somehow filter my experience. I certainly had some knowledge of native perception, but my previous knowledge was strictly theoretical. My six months in the field began a transformation in which I began to view life from the native perception.
CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION OF INTERVIEWS

One of the main purposes of this study is to learn how formal education affected Siberian Yupik Eskimos in the late 1800's. Prior to the arrival of the missionaries on the island, the Eskimos were visited by whaling ships who would stop to trade tobacco and pilot bread for walrus. Upon Mr. and Mrs. Vene C. Gambell's arrival, neither the white couple nor the Eskimos were literate in each other's languages.

Their few English words, picked up from whaling ships, were mostly terrible oaths, and still more revolting expressions. As they crowded forward, laughing, they did not in the least comprehend what it signified to us and later we learned that all this was only their way of making us welcome. But you can imagine how shocked we were, and with what haste I conducted my wife to the school building. (Gambell 1898).

The reception received by the Gambells was warm but proved decidedly that they had much work to do in order to convert the heathen savages. The Gambells practiced their Siberian Yupik Eskimo so they could hold classes. As well-educated, white, Presbyterian teachers/missionaries, the Gambells brought with them an idea of how the villagers should look and act. Accordingly, the curriculum was set by the white man long ago.

As it has for thousands of years, the day becomes an average of six minutes shorter beginning on 1 November. By 21 December, the solstice, villagers must complete many activities within a four hour day. Until the arrival of the white man, the shorter day posed no problem to the Eskimos who were able to hunt during daylight hours and sleep
at other times. The concept of time brought by the white man and its many dictates has changed the traditional methods of hunting. Because school was held during prime hunting hours, parents were forced to choose between their children cutting class to hunt in the traditional manner or to follow the missionaries' pleas for learning to read which would lead to salvation.

Perhaps the most respected man in Savoonga is Jimmie Toolie, age ninety-four. Although I received directions to his home from my hosts, Emily and Luke, I wandered throughout the village looking for it. It was a beautiful day. The only sound was the crunching noise my boots made as I walked on the boardwalk. After no more than twenty minutes I found the Toolie home. Because Jimmie is the eldest in the community, he and his wife received one of the most recently built houses in Savoonga.

The house was immaculate. I was unable to tell whether Jimmie and Mabel, Jimmie's wife, lived there alone or whether other relatives lived with them. Mabel motioned me to the table for the ubiquitous coffee. She spoke very little English, but smiled and welcomed me into her home with gentle body movements directing me to a seat. Within a matter of minutes I was attempting to explain to them about my research and how it would add to the recorded knowledge of the community and Siberian Yupik Eskimos as a whole.

Soon it was apparent that we were having great difficulty communicating; Mabel got up from the table and made two telephone calls. After having taught in Savoonga for three years and living with an Eskimo family for three months, I was greatly surprised at the response to the calls. I have never seen calls for help responded to so quickly; two
women arrived within a matter of minutes. Jimmie Toolie was born in Gambell on 16 August 1903. Mabel Toolie was born at Southside Camp, a fishing camp, on 1 September, 1909. Being an elder has its privileges.

At the age of thirteen Jimmie Toolie began formal schooling in Gambell with Mr. and Mrs. Cambell as his teachers and was promoted at the end of the spring term. After second grade, Jimmie quit school to become a reindeer herder and apprenticed with Lukan Annogiyuk at Southside Camp. The herders moved in 1914 and established Savoonga in order to hunt walrus.

During my interview with Jimmie and Mabel Toolie on 15 December 1996, Jimmie related that school was devoted to academic subjects. School began each day at 9:00 a.m. The missionary/teachers would ring a bell at 8:45 a.m. announcing the school day.


Upon the opening of school in Savoonga, Jimmie attended Men’s Class.

While formal schooling consumed a large part of the day, children learned most traditional methods of Eskimo life by watching the older people in the village. A few survival techniques were taught explicitly by elders. Jimmie worries that although young people want to learn traditional ways, they are not pursuing that objective.

[J] You got testing in school up on the ice. [P] Should they teach that at school? [J] Up on the ice, when they [unintelligible] through, we don’t walk, because it will break. [P] Are the people, are the younger people, uh, forgetting traditional ways? [J] Yeah. I’m starting to teaching how to hunting. Yeah. How to shift the ice. [P] Uh, huh. [J] Yeah. [P] They have to know that. [J] Now I let ‘em because uh, if she’s not learned, if she go out, go out hunting, it will break some in the water.

Traditional ways, including both subsistence and recreational activities, were learned by watching the elders. Jimmie learned Eskimo dancing, exercising, and hunting. Like the elders before him, Jimmie teaches Siberian Yupik Eskimo to the youth in Savoonga. The halls of the school reverberate with the sound of his drumming and singing at Hogarth Kingeekuk Sr. Memorial School.

Mabel began first grade in Savoonga at fifteen and stayed in school for two years. Her favorite classes were taught after regular school hours when the missionaries held cooking and sewing classes for young women. The school day would end with the teacher singing:


Another elder who was born at Southside Camp is Elsie Kava. Her house is one of the largest in Savoonga. It stands beside the boardwalk leading from the school to the post office, so I passed it almost daily for three years. The front door faces the Bering Sea rather than the boardwalk. I knocked on the door 11 December 1996, and a little girl answered. She was four years old and spoke no English. When she saw that I was a white woman, the child held the door open more widely so that her great grandmother could see me. Elsie recognized me immediately and invited me into her home.

As two very young girls (ages three and four) played around us, we began the interview. Elsie, who is eighty-four years of age, was born 17 November 1912. Elsie’s first formal schooling experience took place at Eevwak, a fawning camp.


[P] How many kids were in school out there? About. [E] I don’t know. From my family and my, the man that lives with us, he got two girls and three boys, and me and my brother. From Seppilus, three. Annogiyuk, my husband, Bobby Kava, Jeanette, Laura, Nathan, Francis, Dwight. I’m thinking of sixteen.

As Elsie began listing the people who lived at Eevwak, she leaned forward in her chair. Although she was concentrating on the people, she never worked her hands indicating that she was keeping count by her fingers. She simply came up with the total; there was no pause between the final listing and the total. As she gave the total, I’m sure that she
saw the wonder in my eyes at the quick calculation. Elsie sat back and I continued the interview.


During this past part of the interview, a little boy, probably four years of age, came into the room, sat down and began to beat two sticks together as a drumbeat. "Ya, yo, yo, yo; yo, ya, ug, ug; yo, ah ya ya; ya, ah, ah, oh, oh." The boy's singing was very sincere and it was obvious that he intended to express his feelings in the song. Elsie was proud of him and turned to me and said, "He sings everyday."

Although the curriculum has retained its stress on academic course work over the years, early schools were more secular in their curriculum. In 1910 the Women's Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church published a Siberian Yupik textbook which
included pronunciation of letters, word recognition lists, and selected Bible verses (Campbell 1910). John 3:16, a prominent verse of western religion, was a popular recitation lesson. While none of the interviewees specifically stated that they studied the Bible in school, when queried particularly, many of the interviewees discussed reading the Bible in school or singing spiritual songs. Elsie Kava tells how class would begin each day with a spiritual song.


Lucille Wongitillin, Jimmie Toolie’s youngest sister, was born 14 December 1914. Lucille kept the birth records for Savoonga since the midwife, Bernice Penayah, could not write. Like Elsie Kava, Lucille went to school in Eevwak, a reindeer camp on the North Cape. I met with Lucille in Nome on a weekend visit. As I sat with her husband and her, I noted that Lucille kept an immaculate house. We drank tea as she began talking.

[L] That time those two man and wife, when they go, they go out from their tent and use frying pan and they ring. [P] They’d ring a frying pan to get you to come to school? [L] Yeah, sure. That, that’s the way. I put my on a parka as you. [Lucille laughs.] [P] And that’s how you knew to go to school. [L] [unintelligible] from that antique girl. Eevwak’s kids, they go there outside. [P] Outside? [L] Not inside. So we’ll learn from that a-b-c and 1-2-3. We learn it. That kind. [P] Would, would, they would teach the school outside or inside the tent? Or the cabin? [L] No,
Outside. [P] Outside. [L] They go out ray, ray sunshine. [P] Uh, huh. [L] So if the weather is good, we never, so that, so that, so it’s that way. Not one year, only maybe one month or something. [P] They’d stay for maybe a month? [L] Yeah. [P] And then go back? [L] I don’t know where . . . . [P] In the summer, they’d come? [L] Yeah. Yep. [P] Not in the winter but in the summer? [L] No, we were

Later in her youth, Lucille attended school in Savoonga where she learned to speak, read, and write in English. Indicative of her work as a midwife in Savoonga, Lucille said that the classes which helped her most in her life were “geography and hygiene.”

Art was studied in Savoonga with the subjects of the artistic endeavor being described as both traditional and western.


Nelson Alowa, born on 13 August 1913, began school when the reindeer herders moved their camp to Savoonga. Nelson began school in the first grade and was quickly promoted to the Mrs. Thompson’s fourth grade class. When he was young, Nelson attended school whenever the doors were open and he was not needed for hunting. Day classes, which were held from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m., were dedicated to academic subjects. Night classes, which included reading writing, and arithmetic, were taught by the teacher for the older men. Often after the teacher left, elders in the community would instruct those assembled in traditional hunting and survival methods.

[N] In night class, the older person is school in (speaks Siberian Yupik)... in 8:00 o’clock up to 10:00 o’clock. We have a little, learn a little about the harpoon. How to make the harpoon from the elders. [P] Oh, the elders. Would they teach that
at school? [N] Yeah. When after, before, eh, after school until 10:00 o’clock. Once in a while they invite us, school teacher for when the older person schooled in the, they go 10:00 o’clock. [P] That was at night? [N] Um. [P] So you went to English school from 9:00 in the morning until 3:00? [N] Yeah. [P] And then you went home and did chores, and then you went back to night school from 8:00 to 10:00? [N] Oh, maybe two times a week. [P] Two times a week, night school? [N] Um.

[P] What subjects did you take during the day? [N] Math, reading, speak English. We never speak our dialect while we were in school. They’re pretty mean that our school teacher, that lady. [P] She was pretty mean about it? [N] Yeah. [P] What would she say if you tried to speak Siberian Yupik in school? [N] Not speak our dialect in school. When we go inside the school, the schoolhouse, we never speak our dialect. We try to speak English. [P] And you learned it at school? [N] Yeah. We learned in school. There are pretty restrict for our dialect in school. The first teacher. Just try to speak English.

[P] Did you take carving? [N] No. [P] No carving? They didn’t teach any traditional . . . ? [N] No. Maybe three years after we started school, the girls tried to use the sewing machine for our snow shirt for the boys. We work hauling store [materials] from the beach to trade our calico for snow shirts. We put the gravel from the schoolhouse. They were real pretty muddy. [P] Right, right. So you put gravel down. Hm. Did you do any skin sewing in school? [N] No. Just only the girls are learning when she learn the sewing machine to make snow shirts and you know, blue denim for the pants for the boys. [P] Uh, huh. So, now the boys didn’t learn any kind of . . . what did the boys do then when the girls were in sewing class? [N] We have nothing for the boys.

After the opening of a school in each village, parents encouraged their children to attend class. Education was valued as one of the ways to move into the cash economy introduced by the whites. This encouragement continued into the next generation when, upon eighth grade graduation, students were sent off to a BIA boarding school for higher education.

[P] Now that they have schools in the village, like high school, do you think that the kids are getting the good education? [N] Yeah. Real better. [P] Better? [N] Um. [P] Hm. Do you think it helps the community that the students don’t have to go out? [N] Sure, if they exercise their study about we can help the community. [P] Right. It does help the community then. They can become an IRA president or something. Do you think that there are more jobs in Savoonga now that there’s a
Ora Gologergen, a resident of Savoonga, was born 17 February 1917 in Gambell and attended school in Gambell from beginners, at ten years of age, to sixth grade. Ora recalls the teacher’s name as “Nicholson.” A summary of missions in Alaska states that Mr. and Mrs. R. S. Nickerson were employed at Gambell as missionary/teachers during the school year 1925-1926 (Dimmitt n.d.).


Because the homes in Gambell are more spread out than in Savoonga, the first bell announcing school rang at 8:30 a.m. and the second bell rang at 9:00 a.m. Recess for the whole school was held twice daily: 10:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Ora says there were no organized games played at recess.

Otto Geist, an archaeologist who conducted excavations at Kukulek from 1927 until 1934, wrote daily notes which included activities going on in Savoonga and Gambell as well as his opinions of daily encounters. On 21 March 1932 an entry from Geist’s notes reads:

Sometimes, while going over the village (most any school day), it seems to me that there is continual recess for the children. It seems that about every half an hour or so the children play outdoors. Not that it is my business. As far as I am concerned they may have all recess instead of classes. Most children like these intervals even in cold weather. I did too and there was never too much recess for me when I was a little boy. But neither can we learn by playing alone. I do not know what the missions did. I hope Mr. Nickerson, the last one, whom I knew, was not a representative of what formerly held sway here. He would made a mighty poor example. (22)

As the years passed by, the reading of the Bible continued in school. Kathy Noongwook, whose birthday is 17 December 1927, relates similar events in the classrooms in Savoonga.

Ralph Apatiki, Sr. was my first interview in Gambell on 14 January 1997. It was 11:15 a.m. with just the beginning of sunrise, which occurred at 11:35; I was mopping the floor when he came to the door. Because of a week-long whiteout, I had not left the house. Ralph came inside and spoke Siberian Yupik to Josephine Ungwiluk. She turned to me and asked if I wanted to talk to Ralph. Ralph, Sr. and I sat at the Ungwiluks’ kitchen table and had a cup of coffee while I explained my research. He was quite excited about my plans and was eager to be interviewed—right then. I quickly gathered my audio tape recorder and my notes and returned to the table flush with excitement of interviewing someone from Gambell. While all of my interviews had been interesting and enlightening, Ralph, Sr. was one of the most articulate interviewees in his description of the curriculum when he was at school. Further, his explanation of the materials and teaching methods used exemplify the slow move from a traditional way of life to a western way of life.

[P] Did you take like reading and writing? [R] Yes, reading would be the first. [P] Uh, huh. Reading. Uh, huh. [R] Trying to learn about reading first. [P] Right. [R] Uh, huh. [P] Did you take reading and just English or did you take it in uh, Siberian Yupik? [R] Oh, uh, probably both. Sometimes there’s a class leader. Not often, but certain times. [P] Uh, huh. Would that be a classroom aide? [R] Yes, but we learned what the teacher teaches us. That’s a teacher from uh, from the states. [P] Uh, huh. Right. Do you remember your teachers’ names? [R] My first teacher were Mr. uh, and Mrs. uh, Smith. [P] Smith. [R] William. They were here for several years. [P] Uh, huh. Hm. [R] And uh, they teach what we saw in a book. Reader. And we saw trees and cars and airplanes, which we do not know. [P] Right. [R] So that’s the way it starts. So we learn first about those. Not, not, not uh, like we have here. Like uh, walrus or seal or whale. [P] None of that? [R] None of that. [P] It was the cars and . . . . [R] Yes, cars and all that. That’s the way it starts.

[P] Hm. So it starts with the white man’s culture and not yours. At all. [R] Uh, huh. Oh, it’s all. That includes the coloring books, scissors, painting. . . . [P] Everything? [R] Everything. [P] Your art was done on art on the lower 48? You
would draw things like uh, a tree or something or a car? [R] Yes. Yes. We tried that, but later on, we can draw what we saw like uh, hunters. [P] Right. [R] Boat sailing, hunting walruses, and so on. [P] So you took uh, reading and writing. Did you take math? [R] Reading, and writing and later on there's math. [P] Uh, huh. Would you, would you write on a chalkboard or would you write on a piece of paper and pencil? [R] There's materials like uh, papers that we use and a blackboard. [P] Uh, huh. Could take all your homework home? Did you have homework? [R] Yes. Yes. We have homework. [P] You have homework. [R] Homework. Later. Not the first, not the first few months and then later home course starts. [P] Right. Right. Would you take home books? [Telephone rings in background.] [R] Yes. [P] Uh, huh. And do homework. [R] Yes, and then besides that, there's library. We can take home something to read which we learned. [P] Right. Right. [R] Yeah.

[P] Okay. So we've got math and reading and writing and uh, art. [R] Yes, that's the first years of our schooling. In other words, it's called beginners in school. [P] Uh, huh. Right. Math, reading, writing, and art. [R] And uh, most of that is from other countries which we saw. Like trees. What I said. Trees, airplanes, and cars. [P] Right. Not what was here. [R] Not something which we saw here on the island. [P] Didn't that make it harder for you because everything was new? [R] One thing that they want us to use English other than our Yupik language. So it was. [P] Well, could you speak you, could you speak Siberian Yupik, or would you get in trouble? Would they slap your hand if you spoke Siberian Yupik? [R] Later. Later. When we grew up more. Those didn't happen yet. [P] Okay. They didn't get upset about it? [R] Those are my beginner years. [P] Right. They didn't get upset about it at the beginning? [R] Yeah, but also in our beginning years, that they said, "Try to learn those things like brush your teeth, and comb your hair, and wash and take a bath," and that's wrong.


Dwight Noongwook, a sixty-seven year old Alaska Village Electric Coop (AVEC) operator for Savoonga, attributes his success today to an encouraging teacher, Mr. Williams, who taught at Savoonga from 1946 until 1948 (Annual School Report 1946, 1947, and 1948). Noticing Dwight's potential for working with technical materials, the teacher developed a project utilizing electricity.
[D] And uh, one of my, uh teacher uh, teach me how to build a village. I use a lot of flashlight bulbs to put the little wires around it, wires around it. I use uh, dry steel to connect the wire. When I connect it, all the light, spotlight comes on. I use a lot of light bulbs. I tied 'em uh, 'bout up there. Make a bowl like that, and make a house that that, and I make a lot of light bulbs. I was the only in the village who made this. [P] If, when you’re looking back on it now, thinking back on your life, which uh, subject has helped you the most in your life? Which class has helped you the most? Was it math? Was it reading? Was it writing? What do you use the most today? [D] I don’t do these now. I kept using my eyes and ears. I listen to my kids here all the time.

During the interview, Dwight stated that he learned most of his skills through trial and error. When a villager calls Dwight due to trouble with wiring, he must assess the situation and find a remedy. His father, Nathan Noongwook, was the captain of the crew which landed Savoonga’s first whale on 31 April 1972. [Nelson Alowa’s interview confirms this date.] According to a plaque hanging on Dwight’s wall, Chester Noongwook was the striker, Raymond Tolle and Clyde Rookok were float men. The crew was rounded out by Darrell Kava, Henry Noongwook, Meryl Annogiyuk and Edwin Noongwook. Olga Noongwook and Steve Walsh were the spotters.

The subjects taught while Dwight was in school were reading, writing, mathematics, recess, and art. Since the students learned many of the white man’s games, he played football and baseball during recess. Carving was taught as a separate class by an elder.

[D] Yeah, we do a lot of carving class. We do a lots of carving, all right. Our old man, Albert Kulowiyi, he’s a teaching that carving class. We always make a little part, little parts like a owl, out of walrus teeth. He had lots of walrus teeth. Every one of us carve our own. Sometime we carve little bird. We go down to store, native store, we give it to our store and we buy white food stuff.
When Dwight began school in 1944 or '45, the schoolhouse was heated by coal and the homes were heated by seal or walrus blubber.

[P] Hm. How would they heat the building? Did they use coal or...? [D] They using lamp. Some kind of uh, the one that they call it [Siberian Yupik]. [P] Coal? [D] Coal. [P] They'd bring that on the North Star when they'd come with the North Star. [D] North Star. Sometimes we using our wood. Chopped wood. [P] Uh, huh. Who would get the driftwood from the beach? [D] We gather up the driftwood from the beach. [P] Would the students do that or would the teachers do it? [D] Uh, most of the teacher do it. For the next few days. They get ready pile of wood. [P] Right. So the schoolteachers might go out and gather the driftwood? Would they go by walk? [D] They go by walk. Sometimes they go by dog team or uh, on a sled. [P] Uh, huh. [D] That time we had no fire or [unintelligible]. [P] You use walrus and seal oil, right? [D] Yeah, walrus and seal oils and uh, driftwood. [P] Right. Right. Would walrus oil, would that heat the house? Walrus or seal oil? [D] Yeah. My old man do that. I learned by watching it. He pile up a piece of wood in the stove and then uh, he cut a little piece of walrus blubber or seal blubber and just right on the top of wood, and then he light it, and it start burning real good. [P] Hm. [D] All night and all morning. He always let us get warm all night and all morning.

When he turned sixteen years of age, Dwight left school to become a hunter. He continually added to his knowledge on the traditional subsistence way of life.

[P] So, when you left in fourth grade, then you became a hunter? [D] Uh, huh. I like to be a hunter like my father. [P] Right. [D] He told me that if you are not going hunting you're not going to get any eating stuff. [P] Right. That's right. [D] Cause when you go out there, you gotta get out there, and try to get boats, and try to gather up boats, and bring it on up there. They told me like that. If I don't do anything, I never get anything. [P] Uh, huh. [D] He told me, work a lot. So... [P] Do you think the kids work as hard today as they used to? [D] Uh, huh. [P] They do? [D] We always like to work when we hunt. When we hunt anything. White, white, white man's uh, stuff around here. We have not white man's stuff. We like to work our own. [P] Right. [D] Yeah. Even uh, our parents tell us to out there and try to take piece of, a block of snow, so we have to make uh, water out of it. When frozen, our river's frozen, or the lake's frozen. We always cut piece of blocks of snow. We bring a lot of snow and bring it in here to our home and we melt it out and make water. My mom's always making water out of snow. Today, right now, we had, a [unintelligible], it's contaminated area around. Too many years from now. We got lots of burning uh, stuff around here. Like uh, gasoline, stove oil. [P] So it's contaminated. [D] Yeah. Snow machine always drive around now.
Carol Gologergen, born 25 December 1943, currently works as a homemaker in Savoonga for the State of Alaska. Prior to this job, Carol has worked as a health aide in both Savoonga and Gambell for many years. On 3 December 1996, Carol and I sat down to a cup of tea at the Penayah’s house. She is Bernice Penayah’s homemaker, which is similar to a nurses’ aide for the elderly. Carol sat at the coffee table on an overturned bucket, while I sat on the couch with Bernice. Carol is a slight woman who is always in motion. She was quick to smile during our conversations and was very open with me during her daily visits for Bernice. While I wanted the interview to continue into the afternoon, Carol said that she had to get home because she was rearing four of her female grandchildren. Two more grandchildren, boys, were being reared by their other grandparents. Carol discussed the church and school in Savoonga. As with other interviewees, she states that she did not study the Bible at school, but that the teachers talked about it during the day.


When asked which classes in school helped her the most in her work and in her life, Carol was unable to name one. They were all important to her.

The Tobeluk v. Lind case provides local high schools in each community. Each interviewee I spoke with from Gambell and Savoonga was asked which group they think is receiving a better education: the students who attend[ed] school away from the island or the students who remain[ed] on the island for high school. The answers were evenly split between the boarding schools and the village’s local high school. However, every interviewee stated that it was best for the student to have a choice.

Job Koonooka spent one year at the Bristol Bay Mission School in Alakanuk. He remembers that he spent either sixth or seventh grade away from the island and at the end of the school year decided that one year was sufficient. Like many of the students, he had trouble paying his return fare.

[J] Yeah, and uh, my dad couldn’t pay my way back. I think he had only enough to pay my two sisters. There was three of us in our family that went. My two older sisters. But he had a friend in Anchorage, a fur buyer, David Green, and uh, he kind of arranged things so that I could work for him for my own fare coming back. He paid my way from Dillingham to Anchorage and then I worked at his fur store. David Green Fur. Uh, and then one day I had enough hours. I was so homesick. I told him, “I’ve had enough, I want to go home.” So he took me shopping, paid my way, and I made it home okay.

Since Job’s father placed a large emphasis on school work for his children, he chose academic work over subsistence activities for his children. Job attended Mt. Edgecumbe and graduated with the class of 1966.

As one of the many students who left the island to receive an education, Job feels that he received a better education than today’s students. While this is disturbing, one can imagine the discouragement of successfully completing high school when there are no jobs or positions within the community for employment. As was the case thousands of years ago, subsistence skills are more highly valued than academic skills. When queried, most the interviewees stated that having a school on the island did not expand one’s opportunity for employment; there are few full-time jobs. The largest employer of villagers is the school. While positions do occasionally become available (e.g. bilingual aide, cook), the jobs are scarce and usually only temporary, i.e. substitute teaching.

[P] Do you think the kids today are getting as good of an education as you had? [J] No. No, I don’t think so. No. I don’t know why I say that but uh, a lot of uh, students that graduate from high school, right off the bat I can see that their English is low. Their comprehension is a little low, you know. [P] Uh, huh. [J] So. . . . Personally uh, I don’t know what, I think it’s, I guess it has something to do with the structure of the school and personnel. You know, people that are running and then people that teach. [P] Uh, huh. Right. Hm. Do you think since there’s a school in the village that, that there are more job opportunities here? Or has it made that much difference to have . . . more job opportunities for people? Natives? Since there’s a high school here. Do you think it’s made more job opportunities like for classroom aides or has it helped? People have more jobs or not? [J] Uh, not necessarily. I don’t think. Although they’re at this time, they’re trying to be that way too. But uh, once they graduate there’d be jobs waiting for them. [P] Right. [J] But the size of the, it’s the size of the village. You know, we can’t guarantee every student who graduates a job. [P] Right. Right. [J] But the thing of it is, a lot of job opportunities over there at the school, they require uh, high school education. [P] Uh, huh. [J] A diploma. High school diploma, and they do get those. They, they, they award those there at the school so that opens up, you know, a little bit of something for them.

Rodney Ungwiluk, Jr., at whose home I was staying in Gambell, attended formal schooling on the island through eighth grade. He graduated from Mt. Edgecumbe.
Rodney was one of the few interviewees who stated that there were more jobs in Gambell as a result of the local high school.

[R] Oh, yeah. I think there are more opportunities here in the village now than when I came back. Uh, cause there was a store where you could work and a post office. [P] Uh, huh. [R] And that was about all, I think. Well, at the city. [P] Right. [R] Now, besides those three, there’s a high school, there’s a corporation, the IRA, and uh, outside of what do you call them, seasonal jobs now. Yeah, there’s more opportunity for jobs than when I came back.

While many of the students who left the island for school felt that their children and grandchildren were not getting as good of an education as they did, a few spoke passionately about the way education has improved over the years. This improvement is related to various reasons including implementation of the bilingual/bicultural program, the availability of computers, and the opportunity to receive an education within the village.

Rodney was emphatic in his belief that education has improved.

[P] Do you think, this is strictly your personal opinion, do you think that your children and your grandchildren got as good an education as you did? [R] Oh, I envy them. [P] Okay. [R] Cause they are getting better schooling than I did. [P] Do you think they’re learning more? [R] Oh, yeah, sure. They’re learning more. The reason I said I envy them is because they’re, right now the school system has what you call a bilingual/bicultural program. [P] Right. [R] And what I have forgotten, they’re learning. You know. Old time, you know, word, or like parts of a, a sod house or a den. [P] Right. [R] I don’t remember them. They, they’re learning about those, you know. [P] Hm. [R] In other words, uh, they know more, to me, they know more about our camp than I do.

Because I had not taught in Gambell, I wanted the people of the village to get to know me slowly and unintrusively. Due to a let up in a whiteout at Gambell, I announced to the Ungwiluk family one morning that I was going to walk to the store to get a few supplies. I pulled my snow pants over my layer of long underwear and jeans, pulled my
parka over my head, grabbed my gloves and then put my boots on in the shed. Josephine had been quite clear when directing me toward the store. It was my first adventure out, but I thought, “How hard can this be? The village isn’t that large and I can surely follow directions.” I was completely surprised at the shock of wind that I met when I stepped out of the house. While the wind seldom blows in Savoonga, it seldom stops in Gambell. I pulled my goggles over my eyes and took off in the general direction of the store. I made several false starts and was heading off toward the dump when someone on a four-wheeler stopped and helped me get my bearings. Again, I set out very determinedly. After a twenty-five minute walk, I finally found the native store, pulled off my gloves and goggles and walked into the store. The villagers smiled at me as I entered and watched me shop. I bought a bag of Doritos and some toilet paper. A lady approached me just as I was about to exit the store and questioned my intentions on staying in the village. I explained my research to her and let my eyes fall on several people who had gathered to listen. I knew that my allowing people within the village to look me over would take me a lot further than trying to press on with interviews immediately. When I walked out of the store, the wind had increased markedly and snow was blowing. I was completely disoriented and began walking in the direction of the Ungwiluk house. Soon I saw a young child on the road ahead and began to head in the direction of the child, who appeared to be moving back and forth in some type of game. The child’s parka was a bright yellow and his or her cap was fire-engine red. It wasn’t until I got to within twenty feet of the young one, when I realized it was not a child but a fire hydrant. I laughed at my mistake but the laugh was hollow as I realized that I did not know where the
Ungwiluks lived or where I was. I kept on walking at a steady pace fully aware of the impression I was making on villagers as I walked about plaintively. A fog lowered on the village and my depth perception was completely obliterated as I stepped into a snowdrift and lost my footing. I began to go into a slow panic which was not alleviated until I could make out the outline of a large building which reassured me that I had not wandered away from the village. I walked into the IRA building and asked for directions to the Ungwiluks’ house. I walked to the house and prayed that when I opened the door, it would the right home; it was. After a cup of tea, I became more lively and certain that I could learn the village given enough time. The silver lining in this very frightening experience was the map which Joni Ungwiluk sketched showing me the location of every home in Gambell and listing its occupants. This map allowed me to determine who lived at each home before I attempted to visit, and prompted me to stop by Anders Apassingok Sr.’s house.

Anders, the bilingual/bicultural teacher in Gambell, echoes the sentiments held by others. Our interview came about through my cold call technique.

[P] Do you think the kids in your own personal opinion, your grand kids and kids, are they getting as good of a education as you got? Is their school as good as your school was, do you think? Do you think school is has good now as it was in the old days? [A] It is [emphasis in spoken word]. Yeah. But something if like one staff meeting over there, I asked the staff, I said this to the staff, “What are we [emphasis in spoken word] not doing to our students in our schools that motivates them enough to on to higher education?” or, “What are we doing [emphasis in spoken word]?” You understand what I mean? [P] Right. Right. What can the teacher do? [A] They have a lot [emphasis in spoken word] more than when I have in high school.

H. Vernon Slooko, Sr., whose birthday is 13 March 1949, attended school in Gambell, Wrangell, and Chemawa. On 21 January 1997 I interviewed him at his house.
while his grandchild played with pots and pans in the kitchen. Every five minutes or so the interview is punctuated by the sound of falling aluminum pots and pans. Slooko's response to the quality of education now as opposed to when he was in school is representative of responses given by interviewees.

[P] Now that there’s a high school here in town, . . . [S] Yes and no. [P] Do you think that the students are given a better opportunity for education? [S] Yes and no. [P] Okay. And what makes you say yes? [S] Uh, there’s an opportunity for them to attend school every day close to home. [P] Right. [S] That they can walk there. [P] And no because why? [S] No because they don’t offer any uh, uh, other basic uh, trades or uh, schooling that you can get in boarding school. [P] In a boarding school. [S] Right. And in a boarding school, you’re well disciplined as opposed to here that you get sent home without any punishment mostly.

[unintelligible] [P] Uh, huh. [S] In the boarding school, when you do something wrong, you either have to mop the hallway for hours, or there’s waxing, or [unintelligible] and you hate doing that on weekends where you could have been out playing with your friends. [P] Right. [Pans of various sizes and weights fall and hit the kitchen linoleum floor.] [S] Here you can get sent home and you can go back to school and do the same thing again without knowing the consequences. [P] Yeah, that’s, I can see that. That’s true. Do you think that uh, do you think it’s better for students to have a choice about leaving Gambell to go to high school? Like to Mt. Edgecumbe? To have that choice or would you rather, would you, how would feel if the high school closed down out here? [S] I would that uh, the students have very uh, class and choice in what they study. [P] If they went out. [S] You’re right. If they went out because there would be more qualified teachers with uh, equipment or what-have-you that goes with that certain class. [P] What if they had regional boarding schools and Mt. Edgecumbe? Would that be a good idea? [S] Yes, I would think so. That would give you a choice. [P] Right.

Denny Akeya, his wife Rosemary, and I had tea and talked about their formal schooling. Because we had been friends when I taught in Savoonga, we were completely at ease with each other. Denny’s birthday is 2 July 1951 and Rosemary’s birthday is 17 March 1955. Rosemary was baking bread throughout the interview; Denny, the Bering Air agent, was in and out of the house meeting planes. Their youngest son sat on the couch and watched cartoon videos on the television. During the interview a dog with
shaggy black hair came up to me for attention. “The dog needs to have a hair cut,”
Rosemary said. I looked the dog over and volunteered to cut the fur around his eyes.
Obviously listening intently to our conversation, the young boy appeared out of nowhere
with a pair of scissors. He and I went into the bathroom and worked for some ten
minutes grooming the dog’s face. The child and I emerged proud of our work. Once
released, the dog ran for cover and I did not see him again throughout my visit.
Rosemary is originally from Gambell and Denny from Savoonga; both attended
Chemawa Indian School in Oregon.

[P] Do you think your kids are getting as good of an education as you got? [D] I
don’t think so. [P] They’re not studying as hard? [D] No. [P] The teachers, or do
you think, the teachers are as demanding as your teachers were? [D] They’re
demanding, but it’s the kids that are not really any effort at all in learning. Cause, you
know, at home, I try, the two young ones, I’ll get ‘em out of bed. The other older
ones, you know they want to sleep all day. And, you know, I, when they complain, I
said, “Hey, it’s up to you at least to get up and do something.” I tell ‘em that business
hours are during the day, not during the night. [P] So the kids, you give the kids the
choice of whether or not to go to school? [D] Well, I, we work on it, but it’s just up
to the kids. [P] Right. Everybody’s telling me that. Everybody’s telling me that
same thing. [D] You know, when we were in high school down in Oregon, the
people at work in the dormitory went from room to room getting kids out of bed.
Every morning, six o’clock, seven o’clock, and then, you know, take shower, get
ready for breakfast, go have your breakfast. Half an hour breakfast. There like a
thousand students and they would feed them breakfast in half an hour. Lunch in half
an hour. Supper in half an hour.

[P] Do you think that school’s better now that the kids can go to high school
here? Do you that that’s, it’s better for the kids to go to high school here? [R] Some.
[P] Do you think there should be a choice? [R] Uh, huh. [P] If you had a choice,
what kind. . . . would you have vocational classes here and college courses maybe at
Mt. Edgecumbe? Or how would you do it? [R] I’d send my kids to Edgecumbe. [P]
To Edgecumbe? [Rosemary raises her eyebrows in affirmation. ] [P] What if they
got homesick? [R] No, I don’t know. Probably send for them. [P] Yeah. [R] No, I
would tell them it’s just only for nine months. [P] Uh, huh. Do you think your kids
are getting a better education now than you got? In high school? [R] To me, it still

I interviewed Ina Seppilu on 17 December 1996. Because I was unsure where she lived in the village, I waited until after sunrise (12:00 p.m.) to find her home. As I was removing my winter gear, Ina and I began to talk about the school where I had taught from 1991 until 1994. We went into her kitchen and sat at a table which was situated between a wood burning stove and a window. During our discussion, I learned that Ina loved to clean house, but that she disliked cooking. We found that we were very similar and talked well into the afternoon comparing birth dates, likes and dislikes. Ina first went to school at Wrangell Boarding School for remedial work; afterwards, she attended Chemawa.

[P] When did you go to Wrangell school? [I] 1965. [P] What grade was that? [I] It was supposed to be my ninth grade, but I was really homesick. Jeez, I didn’t even like the trees there. [P] You didn’t even like the trees? [I] Huh, uh. At first I was really excited cause I hadn’t been out of the island for, since I was small. And I was really excited. I couldn’t wait. And then uh, we got on a coastal Ellis airplane, where they land on water. [P] Oh, I’ve never done that. [I] Um. Anyway, they were too cold and too loud. There were some kids from Kotzebue, Nome, you know. And so we landed. I was okay, but jeez, all of the sudden I started getting homesick. [P] It’s hard when you are that age. [I] That is a problem, yeah. [P] How old were you? [I] Fifteen. [P] Fifteen? That’s hard. [I] Or fourteen. [P] That’s very hard. [I] Uh, huh. [P] Did you stay in Wrangell? [I] I had to. I had no way of getting out. No money for my family to pay my airfare.

When queried about which subjects helped her the most, Ina stated that writing was the most helpful subject she took throughout her years in formal schooling. Home economics was another favorite class.

[P] What would you sew in home ec? [I] Oh, I didn’t. . . . I was really good at that. I would uh, I made a dress and my home ec teacher, Carolyn, she found out I was good at it. For as, I could fix my other clothes. Like pants. All those. And

Echoing answers I heard often, Ina is happy that there is now a high school in the village for students, but she states that the quality of education is directly related to the quality of teachers which come to the island.

Games, both playing cards and board games, are very popular pastimes in Gambell and Savoonga. Many a long, dark winter night and day are wiled away in some type of game or another. I learned a dozen new games during my fieldwork. Ila James and I bartered an interview for three loads of laundry. I completed the laundry over a weekend and went to her home on the evening of 6 February 1997. My journal entry describes the evening.

I went to Ila James's house this evening to interview her. She owed me an interview from laundry I did for her earlier. When I arrived at her home, she was sitting at the kitchen table (located next to a wall) drinking a cup of coffee. Two small children were running around the family room in various stages of undress. The little boy (about age two and one-half) had on a shirt but nothing else. The little girl (who appeared just a little older than the boy but could have been as old as four) was stark naked. The family room had a couch with the back to the kitchen area. It faced the wall opposite the kitchen table. The wall had a T.V. and stereo inside a home entertainment center.

The little girl provided endless peripheral entertainment for me throughout the interview. One of her favorite pastimes was to stand at the end of the couch and turn a somersault to the other end of the couch. From my vantage point (directly behind her at the kitchen table) I would see the top half of a naked girl bending forward to roll, then her bottom would appear, and finally her little feet and toes.

When the girl became bored with this activity, she would climb the entertainment center with the agility of a monkey. Her naked figure was all over the piece of furniture with no apparent anxiety showing on her mother’s (or grandmother’s) face. The child fell twice from the center and began to cry. Her mother spoke to her in Siberian Yupik and the girl calmed down almost immediately. Neither fall
discouraged her, nor apparently did her mother, because she got right up and began her ascent again.

The interview went very well. As soon as I turned off the recorder, Ila asked me if I could play Scrabble. I said, “Yes,” because I figured I could fake it from the commercials I had seen on T.V. Because she felt comfortable enough to ask me to play, I felt a negative answer would be a slap in the face. I didn’t want her to think that I only viewed my work or concerns as important and hers as being inconsequential or trivial.

I began the game by saying, “It’s been so long since I’ve played, I’m sure you will have to review most of the rules with me.” Ila said, “Oh, don’t worry. It will come back to you as we play the game.” We played one game which took about one hour. Ila’s score was 339 and my score was 120. I’m sure she wondered how I got as far in my education as I have. As Ila was putting away the game, she said, “You really should exercise your brain some.” (Fieldnotes 1997)

Jessee Gologergen and I sat and talked on 24 November 1996. Jessee worked as a health aide in 1991 and 1992 when I was teaching in Savoonga; now his position at the health clinic is clinic travel clerk. Jessee loves to read. Whenever we see each other we discuss books. When I saw him I was reminded of the Christmas eve in 1994 when he pulled his snow machine up to my house, ran to the door, handed me a Christmas gift, and was on the snow machine and gone as quickly as one might say, “Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night.” The present was Michael Chrichton’s *Jurassic Park*, a book which I loved. As we sat on the floor of his house, Jessee and I again talked about reading.

[P] When you left eighth grade and went to Mt. Edgecumbe in ninth grade, was it hard for you to catch up with the work? [J] Yeah. Mostly in areas like math. I found out that a lot of the students were a little bit more ahead of me, and I had to struggle to catch up and keep up. [P] But you did? [J] Yeah. But in other areas like reading, I was at the same level or above the level of my classmates. The ninth grade, the tenth graders. [P] Right. What about right now? Do you read only books in English or do you read books in Siberian Yupik Eskimo? [J] Both. Like the *Lore of St. Lawrence Island*. I can read both, and it’s in both languages, you know. It’s just reading the
traditional words is just a matter of sounding them out, and then saying them syllable
by syllable. And if you can do that, you can read.

During the interview Jessee said that he believed that students who had attended Mt.

Edgecumbe Boarding School had received a better education than those who remained on

the island and attended school locally.

[P] Why do you think it’s better if they leave the island? [J] Like when I left, they had more classes to offer, they had more different things. They had music. They had arts and crafts. They have arts and crafts here, but there they had like painting and drawing, while here they have carving, bead working. Traditional stuff. [P] Traditional things? [J] I like that. I like what they’re teaching, but if they go somewhere they’ll have a broader perspective. They’ll get to see more of the world. The way it is and not just here. It seems like the way most kids pick up things now is either through the T.V., through movies, or through student travel, and then they come back and show what they learn, and then all of the other kids will catch up on it. But, I think it’ll be better to go out and experience what other have to offer. Not just here in the village.

Wilma Miklahook, classroom aide Hogarth Kingeekuk Sr. Memorial School in
Savoonga attended school at Unalakleet and Mt. Edgecumbe Boarding School. The year
she spent at Unalakleet was devoted to remedial work prior to attending Mt. Edgecumbe.
Wilma has been working towards her teacher certification for several years. The Eskimo
Teacher Education Program is a partnership between the Cross-Cultural Education
department of University of Alaska at Fairbanks and the Northwest Community College
in Nome (Fosdick 1981). Like Rodney Ungwiluk of Gambell, Wilma feels that the
islanders are very lucky to have a local school.

[P] Hm. Do you think that, that, that now that the high school is here on the
island, do you think that Savoonga is a better place? Or do you think it was better
when the kids would go out? [W] I thinks it’s better now. I always say to kids, to
children, “You’re lucky to have a high school.” [P] Oh, yeah. They don’t realize.
[W] I always tell them that. [P] They don’t realize that unless they’ve been away
from home at that age, they don’t know. [W] When I was fourteen, I was fourteen at
school, I always think and I was very homesick, and sometimes I get sick for homesick. [P] Sure. [W] I always tell them to try to behave and all that. [P] Right. [W] So lucky to have school here. [P] Uh, do you think that the kids are getting as good of an education now as what you got? [W] I think it’s about the same. [P] About the same? [W] Uh, huh. [P] In the high school, is it the same? Do you know? Or do you think got harder classes, were they harder at Mt. Edgecumbe? [W] I guess it was harder over there [meaning at Mt. Edgecumbe]. It wasn’t that. I was always thinking. [P] Uh, huh. Oh, so that could have affected it.

In order to schedule an interview with Bernice Rookok, I walked to her house in the early afternoon to discuss the possibility of talking with her about her school experiences. Bernice is married to a well-respected man in the village, Paul Rookok. They have three children Sheila, Melody, and Paul, Jr. Both Melody and Paul, Jr. were students of mine when I taught in Savoonga. Melody looks exactly like her mother.

The outer shed of the house was dark black once you closed the door to the outside. I found the door and made a mental map of how to get to it once I closed the shed door. The shed smelled of walrus. I knocked and someone knocked back. Finally, someone said, “Come in.” A wood burning stove dominates the room. It is no longer in use because the family uses a stove fueled by oil. Two clothes lines hang in a v-shape across the room. Jeans, shirts, and towels block one’s view of the entire room when standing. Once seated though all eyes met.

As I was gathering my audio material, I glanced about the room. Dishes, both dirty and clean covered the cabinet. The kitchen table, which sat near the corner of the room held an assortment of items: peanut butter, paper, toys, tapes, and pens. General smiles all around created a warm reception; the walls covered with children’s artwork solidified and mirrored the warmth.
Melody sat on the floor in the room with one of the three young children constantly taking turns sitting in her lap. One young son (age six) tells me he has a bird. On top of the refrigerator a small bird cage holds a solid white parakeet. The refrigerator sits at the end of the kitchen wall and is parallel with the hallway. The young boy then climbs up to the top of the refrigerator with surprising agility—one foot on the wall, the next higher on the refrigerator. Once on top, he retrieves the bird cage and jumps to the floor. The boy disappears and then reappears with padded snow gloves, opens the door to the cage and attempts to get the bird onto his finger. After repeated tries, he gives up and allows the bird to fly free. The bird searches frantically for a place to sit. First it hits a pair of jeans hanging from the clothesline. Then it flies smack dab into the forehead of one of the little boys. The small boy’s look of surprise was met by everyone’s laughter which made him laugh too. But you could tell that at first he didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. Finally, the bird landed on the first grader’s finger, which was extended this time without the glove.

Bernice and I began our interview. We sat on buckets facing each other next to the old wood burning stove. Bernice was very friendly and her eyes lit up as she spoke of the past. The three young children ran to and fro in the room. A favorite game of theirs during the interview was to proudly present themselves in various Halloween masks. The older son (in first grade) climbed on top of the wood burning stove and turned various knobs on the Sony CD/tape player. The interview continued while the children played wildly around us.
In 1969 Bernice was included in a group of four or five students who attended school in Chilocco, Oklahoma. School in central Oklahoma held an idea of intrigue which, when coupled with leaving a home environment for the first time, must have been very threatening. Like many of islanders who attended boarding schools away from home, Bernice had to stay away at school over the holidays.


[P] Did you get to home at Christmas? [B] No. We stayed. [P] You stayed all that time? [B] We didn’t have any money when I was, my parents didn’t have any money to get me home for holidays. [P] That’s a long time to be away from home. [B] I came home right after school for the summer and then go right back. [P] Right. [B] When school started.

[P] Well, when you uh, went away at school, did y’all celebrate Yupik holidays? Siberian Yupik holidays? [B] We don’t have those. [P] You don’t have any holidays? [B] We don’t have any holidays. [P] Not until the white man came did you get holidays, right? Would you celebrate Christmas there and Easter and Thanksgiving? [B] Well, I did. I forgot how my Christmases and Easters turned out when I was in school cause I had no family members, you know. Nobody gave me gifts for Christmas. [P] Nobody, so you didn’t have any gifts? [B] Huh, uh. No gifts. [P] Wasn’t that sad or was it . . . ? [B] No, I just didn’t . . . [P] Didn’t think about it? [B] I just didn’t think about it when I was in school. All I thought about was, you know, trying to take my courses and attending my classes when I was in school.

The curriculum at Chilocco was similar to that of other vocational boarding schools (e.g. Chemawa). Bernice took art, English, and mathematics. While life in
Oklahoma was completely different to village life in Alaska, Bernice embraced the new environment while maintaining her cultural roots.

[P] In art class, which kind of pictures, would you draw pictures from Alaska, or would you draw pictures that looked like the lower 48? [B] Uh, our teachers taught us how to woodwork and engrave. [P] Oh, that's beautiful, isn't it? [B] And he taught us how to paint. All of kinds of art work. [P] What kinds of pictures would you paint? Of what? [B] I wasn't thinking about our culture then, you know, when I was going to that school. I wasn't thinking about that. [P] So, you would paint things like horses or what? [B] Fish. Uh, flower and a vase. Like a flower and a vase. [P] Right. Hm. Would the teacher let you speak Siberian Yupik to your friends in class? [B] Yeah, they didn't mind us speaking the Yupik language. You know, they thought it was a good sound to speak in the language cause that was the Indian school.

My interview with Bernice addressed the issue of the quality of school. Bernice's answer is very similar to Denny Akeya's response.

[P] Now that students can stay here in Savoonga and go to high school, do you think that that's helped the village out any or not? [B] Maybe, with some students, but some students uh, having a high school here in the village seems like didn't really teach us uh, getting up early going to bed early. And trying to study, but we need to learn. [P] Right. So it was better, do you think? [B] Our childrens didn't much of their homeworks good, you know. There were too many of us in the homes. Too many kids. [P] Too many kids? Too much distracted noise and stuff going all the time? [B] Uh, huh. [P] Hm. So you think it's better for some to go and some to stay then. [B] Oh, I don't know. It's up to them. [P] Up to them? [B] But I think, well, what we went through going, getting out of the village [unintelligible] for school, it was a lot better than seems like it was with our children. [P] Uh, huh. Do you think you learned more there than they're learning here? [B] Uh, huh. [P] Why do you think that? Because . . . . [B] I don't know. Our kids are kind of spoiled, I guess. Or they know they're home and whenever they want to skip class, they go out and go wherever they want to go so they skip that certain class they had.

After an hour or so I left. Stairs led from the outer shed to the ground. A wooden plank lined with hanging walrus meat was nailed at a diagonal line from the house to the handrail for the stairway. Bernice and Paul Rookok's house is in the last row of houses facing the cemetery, which is about one mile from the village proper. Leaving the house
and looking toward the cemetery gave me a very sad, longing feeling. My mood was surreal. Each gust of wind took me into another time. One gust and it is the present. The next gust, and it is 11 March 1993, the day of Samantha Penayah’s funeral and villagers are heading toward the cemetery to put Samantha in her final resting place. A sled carrying her casket from the Presbyterian Church to the cemetery is being pulled across the tundra with two parallel ropes by men on either side. There are at least fifty men in this procession. The men and high school boys made the casket in the high school shop classroom. Samantha was a student of mine who took her life at fifteen. If I think too hard or too much, I know I will be overwhelmed with emotion. I walk from Bernice Rookok’s house toward Harriet Penayah’s house as the crow flies.

The tundra along the walkway is fairly covered with snow. I have no idea to whom this large area belongs, or rather who is responsible for the ground’s care; it is strewn with large items. A wooden sled, a very large roll of indoor/outdoor carpet, wooden flats seemingly laid in a path to somewhere but stopping abruptly. A snow machine sits forlornly in the middle of the grounds. Obviously, the snow machine belongs to no one and looks as if it was abandoned where it gave way and broke.

The first house I see across the tundra is the Alowa’s. I imagine Tina, who was only fifteen on 9 June 1993, holding a .22 to her head and pulling the trigger. The door was locked leaving her aunt standing at the window pleading for her not to complete this act. The juxtaposition of the warm Rookok house with the cold, hard memories I was now experiencing overwhelmed me with emotion. I question how this hearty group of
people can walk along this path without feeling the weight of the world on their shoulders.
CHAPTER 6

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to systemically conduct historic and ethnographic research on the history of formal schooling on St. Lawrence Island, Alaska. A western, academic curriculum has been taught on the island since the introduction of formal schools in 1894. Sheldon Jackson, as the driving force behind education in the territory, founded mission schools which were established to bring civilization to the natives. In order to achieve this goal, reading, writing, and calculation were the primary subjects taught. Each of these subjects was seen as a precursor to the salvation of the natives.

The enactment of the Organic Act of 1884 provided for the education of all children in Alaska, regardless of color or race. Congress determined in 1896 that it would phase out the contracting of schools with churches. Since funding was not available for the transfer of control from mission schools to the territorial control, schooling remained secular, albeit with an emphasis on academics rather than religion. Native students who wished to attend school after eighth grade were forced to attend the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) school in Pennsylvania.

The territory became a state in 1959, but no provisions were made to transfer control of the mission or BIA schools due to lack of funding. In 1966 students who wished to attend secondary school were sent to one of three schools: Chemawa Indian
School in Chemawa, Oregon; Chilocco Indian School in Chilocco, Oklahoma; and Mt. Edgewcumbe in Sitka, Alaska. The forced separation of children from role models and traditional ways of life had a marked effect on Alaska Natives. Because there were no role models for students at these schools, students saw little value in the education they were receiving or in ways which it could be applied to their everyday life once they returned to the village. Homesickness further exacerbated the problem. Alaskan Natives who wanted to continue their education into high school were forced to give up their identity and culture and assimilate into a white culture.

Some of the islanders who attended school out of the village were expelled from school because of alcohol abuse. The letters sent home with the students implicate the child rather than the system. One would be remiss to question whether this abuse was the problem or rather a symptom of the problem. *Tobeluk v. Lind* decreed that all villages which had at least one secondary student who wanted to attend high school locally must provide a school setting for education. For the first time in the state’s history, rural students did not have to leave their families and communities to receive a secondary education. As a result, more students have attended and graduated from school now than in the past.

Recommendations

1. Provide students with a culturally-relevant curriculum which is taught recognizing different learning styles. It is vital that the schools on the island have materials which address the Siberian Yupik culture. Locally-recognized experts, along with white teachers, must develop lessons that reflect the context, values, and traditions
of the culture. Because first year teachers often do not have a repertoire of teaching strategies upon which they may draw to effectively instruct students of different cultures and learning styles, I recommend that districts hire experienced teachers for rural schools. Ivory carving, mechanics, heating and water conditioning must be made available to the students. These subjects are equally as important to the villagers on the island as are the standard "white man's curriculum" being taught now.

2. Books and resource materials must be written for the native student that relate to their worlds. Using books and materials from the lower 48 are virtually useless to the native students. Too much time is spent explaining white man’s terms such as traffic jams, rush hours, junkies, etc. These concepts should be introduced in geography or literature classes, not in grammar or arithmetic classes where terms relating to their everyday living would be more applicable. Once the concepts are taught, it is appropriate to introduce them in basic classes such as reading, writing, and arithmetic.

3. Savoonga houses its teachers in one area of the village and provides each housing unit with running water. None of the Eskimo homes in the villages has running water. Many of these teacherages have other amenities which are not always found in native housing: ovens, carpet, stand-alone beds, dressers, and couches. The teacherages are not as isolated in Gambell as they are in Savoonga, but there is enough separation between them and native housing that they are segregated.

Such segregation in living quarters does not give non-native teachers the opportunity the learn about the culture of the students whom they are teaching. This separation in living quarters coupled with the western teacher training many of the
non-natives receive in college fosters a continued division between school and everyday life. In order to present concepts and material in a contextually-relevant manner, teachers must be familiar with students, their home situations, their culture, and their values. One way to achieve this integration is for the housing of white teachers to be interspersed among the Native Alaskan housing. Another possibility is for teachers to rent rooms or living space in the homes of the villagers. Everyday living in the villages is tedious and teachers will never be able to relate to the living conditions of the villagers if they do not experience those conditions first hand. Integration between white teachers and the villagers is imperative.

4. Provide students which a choice regarding second schooling, i.e. those who want an education with an academic emphasis may choose to attend Mt. Edgecumbe; other students may be interested in a vocationally-oriented curriculum. It is vital that all students have the opportunity to receive a complete education in their village. All core courses must be taught locally. Basic vocational classes (e.g. mechanics and carpentry) must also be taught in some form on the island. Itinerant teachers specializing in various courses could travel throughout the district staying at each village for a semester or term.
APPENDIX

INTERVIEWEES
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Place of Interview</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jimmie Toolie</td>
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<td>Bernice Penayah</td>
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<td>Nelson Alowa</td>
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<td>Myra Seppilu</td>
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<td>Ora Gologergen</td>
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<td>Alexander Akeya</td>
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<td>Ruth Miklahook</td>
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<td>Dwight Noongwook</td>
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<td>Morris Toolie</td>
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<td>Hortense Okoomealingok</td>
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<td>Lucille Wongittilin</td>
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