

IRR'INARQELLRIIT / AMAZING THINGS: QUINHAGAK ELDERS REFLECT ON THEIR PAST

Ann Fienup-Riordan

Calista Education and Culture, 9951 Prospect Drive, Anchorage, AK 99507; riordan@alaska.net

with Alice Rearden

Calista Education and Culture, 6040 Beverly Drive, Anchorage, AK 99526; alicerearden@hotmail.com

and Melia Knecht

University of Aberdeen, King's Museum, Old Town House, High Street, Aberdeen AB24 3EN, United Kingdom;
m.knecht@abdn.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

In August 2014, a group of Quinhagak elders met to examine artifacts recently excavated by Rick Knecht and a team of archaeologists at the precontact site Agaligmiut, known locally as Nunalleq (lit. “Old Village”) in Southwest Alaska. The following pages describe not only the specific recollections the artifacts evoked but the years of collaboration between archaeologists, anthropologists, and community members that made this opportunity possible. Yup'ik oral tradition, alive in the minds of Quinhagak community members, is as rich a resource as Nunalleq and the treasures found below ground. Yup'ik history is complex and full of surprises, and it takes both physical and oral form. Bringing the two together has the potential to increase our understanding of Yup'ik history exponentially. With the interest and support of communities like Quinhagak the process will continue into the future.

In the early 1600s, Yup'ik warriors left their wives and children in the village of Agaligmiut, at the mouth of the Agalik River on the south side of Kuskokwim Bay, to carry out a raid on enemies in Canineq (the lower Kuskokwim coastal area), possibly at Pengurpagmiut or Pengurmiut (Fienup-Riordan and Rearden 2016:16–18, 74–76). A battle took place and the Agaligmiut were defeated, survivors fleeing south toward Bristol Bay. The victorious Caninermiut pursued them to their village, where they blocked the entryways of homes and set them alight with punk and wood shavings soaked in seal oil. Parents tried to save their children by sending them out to the enemy to keep as their own. Their enemies refused them and threw their bodies in a nearby lake. Everyone was

killed, old and young alike. After the attack, the village of Agaligmiut was abandoned. The sod and wood homes collapsed, and grasses grew over what remained. The story of the destruction of Agaligmiut, however, remains alive in Yup'ik oral tradition (Figs. 1, 2) (Fienup-Riordan and Rearden 2016:264–291; Pratt 2013; Rearden and Fienup-Riordan 2013:394–397).

In the centuries that followed, the Agalik River changed course, moving three miles south in its rush to enter the Bering Sea. Along its banks a new village of Agaligmiut (Arolik on USGS maps; also referred to as Agalik in conversation) was established where people lived into the early 1900s, when residents of many small villages moved to the new community of Quinhagak.

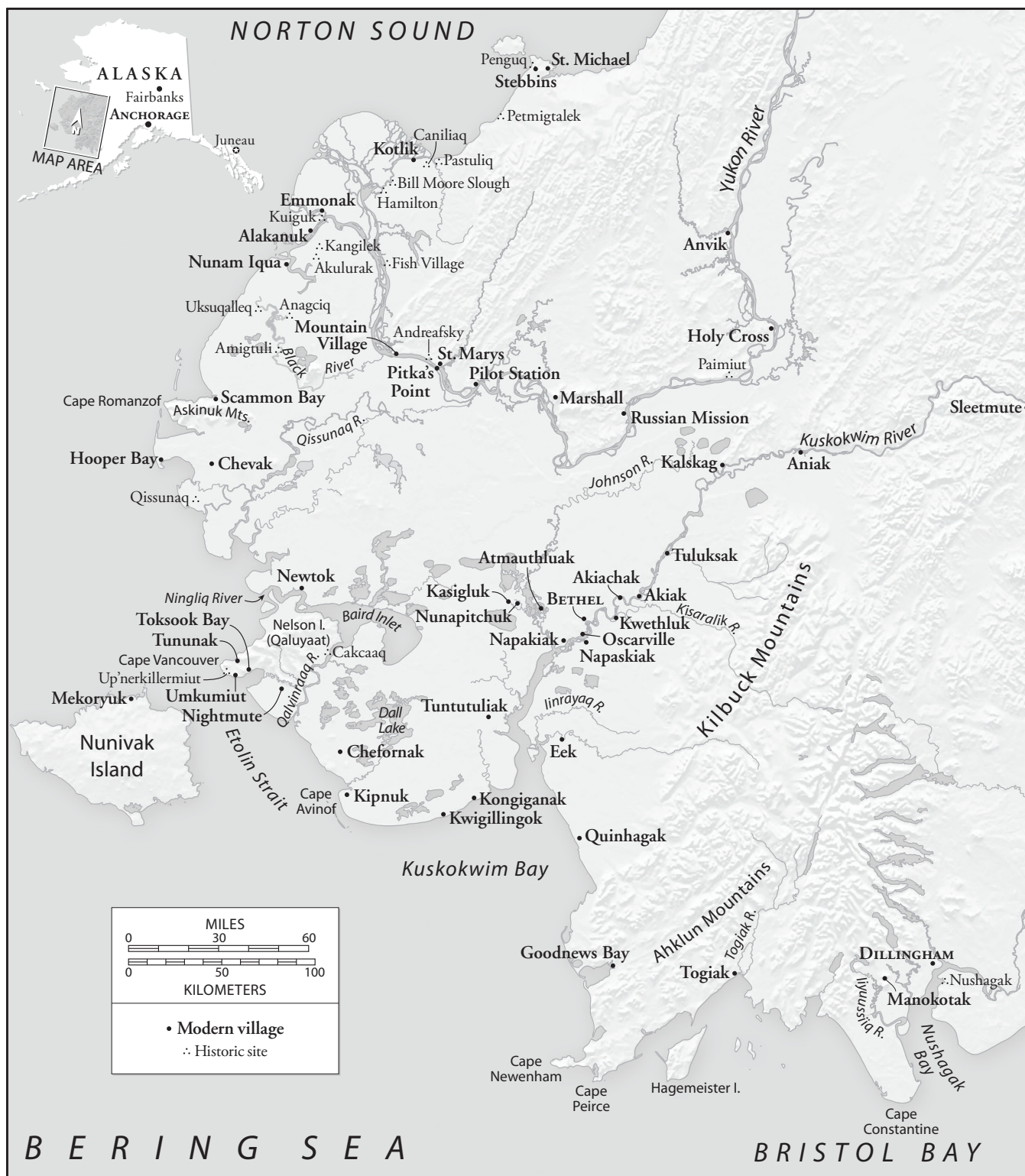


Figure 1. The Yukon-Kuskokwim delta region, 2016. Drafted by Patrick Jankanish.



Figure 2. Qanirtuuq and Agalik river valleys. Drafted by Michael Knapp.

Nunalleg (lit. “Old Village”), as the original Agaligmiut came to be called,¹ was now exposed to the Bering Sea, which came steadily closer over the years, until the people of Quinhagak, just four miles north along the coast, noticed chunks of sod rich in artifacts washing out from the old site. Erosion is the rule, not the exception in Southwest Alaska, but in this case residents recognized that what was washing away was their heritage.

Through Terry Reeve, a non-Native working in local fisheries development, village corporation president Warren Jones made contact with archaeologist Rick Knecht, who was working on nearby Nunivak Island at the time. Rick visited Quinhagak in 2009. Although he did not immediately recognize the site’s importance, he did recognize the danger Nunalleg faced of total annihilation. He and a small team of university students began excavation at Nunalleg, which was on village corporation land, in the summers of 2009 and 2010, largely supported by the Quinhagak village corporation, Qanirtuuq Inc.,

which put more than \$200,000 toward the project. They continued work on a modest scale, pulling a wealth of artifacts out of the tundra, including not only special pieces but equally valuable remnants of everyday life, so often ignored by collectors and rarely found intact in archaeological excavations. Preservation was excellent at Nunalleg, but time was running out. By 2012, the coast had eroded back 30 feet, and all of the 2009–2010 excavation site—totaling 60² m—had washed away (Knecht 2014:45).² By 2013, Rick and his colleagues obtained a \$1.8 million four-year grant from the British Arts and Humanities Research Council to continue work at Nunalleg.³

Even with this large contribution of outside funding, the Nunalleg project continues to be an important example of collaboration that could not continue without community support. When Qanirtuuq Inc. built a new store in 2010, they converted the old store into a dining room, laboratory space, and storage for the archaeologists. A large quonset hut across the street was refurbished with

beds for fifteen student project participants and a shower was installed behind the old store. Two large wall tents were built at the excavation site—one as a lab and one as a break room, out of the wind—as well as an outhouse, stairway up from the beach, even an industrial fan to blow away the bugs. Qanirtuuq Inc. provides four wheelers and an old truck to the archaeology team each summer during their four-week season. They even brought out the propane grill from the corporation store to feed archaeologists, community members, and out-of-town visitors during the dig's annual show-and-tell at the end of the 2014 season (Plate 1).

The energy and commitment that Quinhagak community members have shown toward archaeologists and their work is not an isolated instance of Quinhagak reaching out to reclaim their heritage. In 2009, the same year Rick was invited to visit Quinhagak to evaluate the Nunalleq site, Terry Reeve asked me to attend a Qanirtuuq Inc. board meeting, where I shared the work that Alice Rearden, Mark John, and I had done with the Calista Elders Council (CEC, renamed Calista Education and Culture in 2014) to help document Yup'ik traditional knowledge throughout Southwest Alaska. Board members had seen the bilingual book we had published in 2008 on the Canineq area, *Paitarkiutenka / My Legacy to You* by Kwigillingok elder Frank Andrew, and they wanted CEC staff to come to Quinhagak and help them make a book for their community. Although less than 50 miles as the crow flies from Frank Andrew's hometown, Kwigillingok and Quinhagak have very different histories that only close work with community members could reveal. Alice and I had worked with elders all over the region, but this was the first time a community had come to us with such a request, and we were glad to help. Qanirtuuq Inc. subsequently obtained funds for stipends for elders, plus a plane ticket for me. I flew from Anchorage to Quinhagak in September 2009, where I met with Warren Jones and Annie Cleveland to discuss what kinds of information they wanted elders to share. They wanted to focus on *qanruyutet*, the oral instructions so important in community life. We finished talking around 4 PM, and Warren asked when I'd like to begin. I suggested that we start the next morning. He pointed out that when Rick Knecht had come to Quinhagak, he began work the same day.

The corporation put me up in a small duplex behind the village store, in one of two large, wood-paneled rooms with a bed, couch, table and chairs, stove and refrigerator, and big, south-facing window. It was a comfortable, quiet place, and ideal as a meeting room, as it had only four steps for elders to negotiate when entering. For the next week Annie and I met with a dozen of the community's oldest and most knowledgeable residents, including George Pleasant, Nick and Martha Mark, and Joshua Cleveland. Thanks to a grant from the National Park Service, CEC organized a follow-up gathering in Anchorage where Annie, George, Martha, and Joshua continued to share stories of their past. Alice (who could not travel to Quinhagak because of her small children) was there as well, and subsequently transcribed and translated everything the elders said during both gatherings. Later that year, I worked to edit what elders shared into a bilingual book, which Kathy Cleveland read and edited. Qanirtuuq Inc. also applied for and received funding from Donlin Gold to print their book, which was published by the Alaska Native Language Center in 2013 as *Erinaput Unguvaniartut / So Our Voices Will Live: Quinhagak History and Oral Traditions* (Rearden and Fienup-Riordan 2013). For Christmas 2013, Qanirtuuq Inc. gave a copy of the book to every family in Quinhagak.

In 2014, Warren Jones called with another request. As work continued at the Nunalleq dig, each season thousands of artifacts were excavated, carefully cleaned and packed, then shipped to the University of Aberdeen in Scotland for conservation and analysis. From the beginning, the plan has been to return the entire collection to Alaska, with some of the more beautiful pieces on display in Quinhagak—a plan which community members fully support. Such a move, however, will take time. In the years since our elders' gatherings in Quinhagak and Anchorage, the health of both Martha Mark and George Pleasant had declined. Warren Jones and others knew that the opportunity to work with knowledgeable community elders was disappearing as fast as the tundra coast in front of Nunalleq. Elders needed to look at the artifacts archaeologists were unearthing and share what they knew now or never.

I was happy to return to Quinhagak to help in this work for a number of reasons. First, I was fasci-

nated by the project, as it is the first major professional archaeological excavation along the mainland Bering Sea coast of Southwest Alaska in decades,⁴ and the only excavation of a site so clearly associated with the period of bow-and-arrow wars. Alice Rearden and I had spent the previous year working to complete a regional history of Yup'ik bow-and-arrow warfare—a project I had been thinking about for thirty years (Fienup-Riordan and Rearden 2016). The Agaligmiut massacre is a well-known part of that history, but until the Nunalleq dig it had no date.⁵ Now not only do we know approximately when the massacre occurred but also what was left behind. Archaeologists usually work at sites where they find the remnants of life lost or discarded when people move away. Agaligmiut was abandoned suddenly, with things left where they fell after the massacre, and the upper layer of the site included not only tools of daily life, but roof sods riddled with burned arrow points and triangular slate end-blades, skeletal remains, even dead dogs under a layer of burned timbers and ash (Knecht 2014:46).⁶ As the archaeologists continue to dig down to the earliest layer, estimated to date to AD 1300, just before the onset of an era of climate cooling known as the Little Ice Age, we are learning more about what life was like at that time—the food people ate, the tools they used, the toys their children played with. As preliminary reports make clear, there are important continuities between precontact material culture and more recent ethnographic collections from the same area (Fienup-Riordan 2005b).⁷ There are also significant differences and unique objects rarely found in other Yup'ik ethnographic collections—large labrets, simple wooden dolls, and grass cordage.

My second reason for welcoming this work was the close relationships Alice and I had developed with a number of Quinhagak community members who were now our friends. We knew they had a great deal to share, and we were glad to help them. In the 1990s I had worked with elders in museums in New York, Washington, DC, and Berlin, Germany, examining ethnographic collections from Southwest Alaska, and I knew how rewarding elders found these experiences—often in unexpected ways (Fienup-Riordan 2007). I had never, however, worked with elders in their own village examining archaeological material fresh from the permafrost. I would be learning as well.

I came to Quinhagak, tape recorder in hand, the last week of August 2014, also the last week of the Nunalleq field season. The crew was tired from over a month's work, but they were also proud of all the unique artifacts that they had found in the ground. The afternoon I arrived they showed me photos of some of the pieces. We also talked about where and when to meet with elders. Annie Cleveland suggested meeting as we had five years before in the small, blue duplex behind the store. Jacki Cleveland, an award-winning film maker born and raised in Quinhagak, would be videotaping our sessions, and she agreed that the blue duplex was perfect, with good light and plenty of room. Objects would need to be carried on trays between the lab space in the old store and the duplex, but Melia Knecht (Rick's wife and curatorial assistant at King's Museum in Aberdeen) agreed the move was doable. She and her graduate-student assistants, Jacqui Graham of the University of Aberdeen and Trisha Gillam of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, would prepare trays of objects and move them back and forth as needed.

I arrived on a Sunday. Sad to say, a well-known community elder, Susie Foster, had died in her sleep just days before, and the community was in mourning. A light was kept burning in the church tower until after her funeral and burial. We planned to meet with elders for the first time Tuesday morning, following Susie Foster's funeral, which would be held on Monday. The week would be a busy one, as Qanirtuuq Inc. had planned a community show-and-tell from 4 until 5 PM Wednesday afternoon, during which objects from the summer season would be laid out for everyone in Quinhagak to see. The archaeologists had a similar show-and-tell following the 2013 season, and more than eighty men, women, and children of all ages attended. At the end of the program, students from the Quinhagak school performed Yup'ik dancing for a dozen community elders seated before them. Quinhagak is devoutly Moravian, a denomination that in the past has eschewed dancing of all kinds. Times are changing, however, and some younger community members embrace dancing as part of their heritage. The public performance at the show-and-tell was the first time Yup'ik dancing had been seen in Quinhagak—other than during rehearsals at the school—in more than one hundred years.

Colleen Lazenby, a volunteer working for the newly organized Quinhagak Heritage Inc., had found funding for and organized the work with elders. She and Melia gave me a list of the kinds of artifacts recovered during the month before I arrived, including basketry, jewelry, dolls and human figurines, household goods (pottery, bentwood boxes, bucket handles, spoons, and ladles), tools (knives, root picks, harpoon points, adzes, drills, lancets, and a fire-starter platform), kayak parts and models, arrow points and shafts, fishing equipment, masks and mask attachments, a paint box and paint brush, animal figurines, and toys. All had been cleaned, catalogued, and put in numbered plastic bags. The wooden pieces (making up 80 percent of the artifacts found at Nunalleq) were particularly vulnerable and were stored in coolers to keep them hydrated between the time they were unearthed in Alaska and conserved back at the University

of Aberdeen. When they were laid on a tray for elders to view and touch, Jacqui or Trisha stood by to periodically brush them with water. For every hour we spent in consultation with elders, these women spent triple that time sorting and preparing objects to view, then returning them to storage. For all involved it was a labor of love.

FIRST DAY WORKING TOGETHER

Monday morning I drove with the crew out to the site, where the charred layer of sod from the destruction of Agaligmiut was clearly visible. While I was standing in the mud, a young archaeologist bending down beside me unearthed a dart—an object central to the story of the beginning of warfare in the accidental blinding of a boy by his companion during a game of darts in the *qasgi* (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. Wooden dart excavated at the Nunalleq site, August 2014.

While standing at the site, an ATV came to bring me back to the village. The family had decided to postpone Susie Foster's funeral until Tuesday, and Annie Cleveland thought we should meet with elders that morning, which is what we did. Jacki Cleveland and I hurried over to the duplex, where Jacki set up her new video camera and I brought out my trusty Sony 5000 tape recorder. Annie arrived shortly with our three elder participants: George Pleasant, Joshua Cleveland, and Nick Mark. We were sorry Nick's wife, Martha, couldn't attend, but all felt fortunate that George's health was good and that Joshua and Nick were willing to join him.

Born in Quinhagak in 1938, George was raised by his grandmother and is primarily a Yup'ik speaker. He is among the most respected elders in Quinhagak, both for his knowledge and his willingness to share what he knows. Joshua Cleveland was born in 1937 in the village of Eek and moved to Quinhagak when he married. A fluent Yup'ik speaker, Joshua also speaks in English, reflecting his many years serving in the Alaska National Guard. Close in age, George and Joshua have been friends for decades and like to tease each other, Joshua sometimes offering to chew George's food for him (George has few teeth) and George kidding Joshua about being a warrior in the National Guard.

Born in 1929, Nick Mark was our oldest member and not surprisingly remembered using pieces of Yup'ik technology that the others were too young to recognize. Nick grew up in the mountains and at camps along the Qanirtuuq River, harvesting salmon in summer at Usqaelria and camping upriver at Agtuqaumanerpak in the fall, before moving back downriver with his family to Quinhagak when winter came. Annie Cleveland, born in Quinhagak in 1940, was our youngest group member. Combining excellent Yup'ik- and English-language skills with a strong desire to document and share community history, she led the gathering with energy and interest. Pauline Matthews, a Qanirtuuq Inc. board member, was also a frequent visitor.

After everyone had arrived, Annie explained why we were there—to look at the things that the archaeologists were recovering from Nunalleq. George started to speak, even before the first tray of objects was brought in. He began by retelling the story of the Agaligmiut massacre

by the people of Pengurpagmiut—a story he had told in 2011 during our Anchorage gathering (Rearden and Fienup-Riordan 2013:394–397). Annie asked him if the people of Agaligmiut had homes with a single exit, and George (p. 5)⁸ replied: “Yes, they say although the village of Agaligmiut was large, they dug tunnels underground, but they say they had one tunnel exit way somewhere that led outdoors. They say they would go inside there and go through the tunnel underground and know where their home was, and they would appear somewhere through the middle [of the home] down there.” George's observation was significant, as archaeologists had found an elaborate system of sod-covered hallways connecting rooms within what may have been one large structure.⁹ Although the entire village likely consisted of more than one such structure, these multiroomed homes were not typical of historic Yup'ik settlements, in which the *qasgi* was surrounded by separate dwellings for women and children. Connecting compartments through a series of hallways may have been simultaneously a way to keep heat in—the climate was colder in the 1600s—and enemies out.

George (p. 169) had heard his grandmother describe the old-style *qasgi* with an underground entrance where a person would emerge in the center of the dwelling: “My grandma spoke only about [homes] that had *kalvagyarat* [underground entrances]. They would get inside and walk through halls down there and appear outside. Then when they went inside, they went down from outside and walked underground and appeared in the middle of a home. Those were stories they told about the ones from the early days. But the new [dwellings] had [aboveground] doorways.” Knecht's crew has looked in vain for such underground entrances, perhaps because the ground was too water-saturated for actual subterranean construction.

George (p. 13) said that Agaligmiut was probably a large village, and Joshua added that there are many old villages buried in the region today: “And some of them are in the midst of water, they eroded like Apruka'ar below Eek.”

Annie then began examining the first tray of objects, including spoons, ladles, a bowl, and other household utensils (Plate 2). George (p. 6) remarked in Yup'ik: “Those things they made probably existed in the early days around 1200 or 1300 before Russians came to Alaska.... These things are really part of what Yup'ik

people made before white people came around.” Joshua was surprised that the objects looked so new. Annie (p. 7) noted that the archaeologists had found a great many things, including tools, jewelry, and cooking equipment: “We evidently didn’t know that all those years this stuff was over there.” George (p. 7), a Qanirtuuq Inc. board member who has been part of board discussions of the project, replied: “Since they were in the permafrost underground and not unfrozen, they are in good shape. Charlie Pleasant was our grandfather. He used to tell us that something that is underground doesn’t get bad, even if it’s there for many years.”

George (p. 7) picked up the *luuskaa*q (spoon), noting: “This was their utensil for eating soup since our ancestors made fish-egg soup.” Then the men examined a *mellgar* (man’s carving knife), saying that the ones they had used had metal blades. Annie noted how nicely made things were. She (p. 11) commented on the *urasqa*q (white clay) used to decorate a ladle, adding, “I think those digging got to the kitchen.” Looking at bentwood bowls, I asked her if she had seen men making these when she was young. She answered, “no,” and Joshua added that he had only seen men steaming wood in the *qasgi* to make sleds.

Annie said that some people are superstitious and think that if they take things from a grave they will be haunted. I mentioned that on Nelson Island they say that people can take things from a grave if they leave something in payment, and Annie said that was true in Quinhagak as well. Later in the week, one of the visitors to the archaeologists’ show-and-tell said that he had been told when he was young that these old things should not be touched. Yet he was glad this work was being done today. Attitudes toward artifacts buried at Nunalleq are complicated, differing between individuals as well as between generations.

After these comments, George (p. 5) resumed telling stories about the bow-and-arrow war period. He mentioned the story of how war began with two children playing darts in the *qasgi*, adding that this did not happen at Agaligmiut:

Starting with those two children who were playing, one accidentally popped the other’s eye. Then the father of the one whose eye was popped went down and took that dart and was just about to retaliate on the one who popped his [son’s] eye. The

father of the one who popped the eye evidently said to him to only pop his other eye, that it would be okay if they both had one eye. [The father of the injured boy] evidently popped both his eyes. They say from then on, when a person would get angry, he would go down and start fighting. From then on, war started: They started to fight in war.

George (p. 15) also briefly told the story about an aborted attack on the Kuskokwim River village of Luumarvik across from Napakiak. As enemy warriors approached Luumarvik, they saw kayaks continually arriving:

[One man] would head down Luumarvik River and arrive there at the village. It so happens that one person was just circling, and he would go down Luumarvik River. And from there, he would put on new clothes and using another kayak, he would go downriver once again. They say when [they thought] there were too many people, they were afraid [of them] and didn’t attack. They had gone to decimate and destroy that village like Agaligmiut.”

Joshua (p. 16) added, “That person probably *luumallrulliria* [flew by supernatural means]. Luumarvik became its name.”

George (p. 16) also briefly told the story of an attack on Mamterarmiut (Goodnews Bay) during which two warriors wearing *qasperek* (seal-gut rain garments) got their enemies to waste their arrows by circling a home and quickly reentering. As they ran, they say their *qasperek* made rattling noises as the arrow points hit them. After a time, the warrior Urluverpalek joined them, and the enemy fled. Their enemies returned, however, using wooden shields, but Urluverpalek shot them through their shields, nailing them to the wood: “They say from there, they fled and didn’t appear again. Although they went to them using wooden shields since [Urluverpalek] was going to shoot arrows at them, he would shoot an arrow through the wood.”

George (p. 18) said that there are many tales of warfare, including stories of the famous Kuskokwim warrior Uayaran, who took revenge on a group of warriors who had killed his younger brother. Iluvaktuq was another famous warrior who was surrounded by his enemies as he was butchering a caribou. To torture him, they forced him to eat half the caribou, although in fact he was a man with

a prodigious appetite. Pretending to be in pain and to continually collapse, he slowly moved away from them as they taunted him. Then suddenly he took off without warning. Reaching safety on a mountain top, he turned and boasted of his feat, calling back to his adversaries, "That one up there already on the slope!" Annie (p. 21) mentioned the caribou back fat that Iluvaktuq vomited as he fled: "That's why today our parka has two white pieces [on the shoulder]." George agreed, calling them Iluvaktuq's *miryaruaik* (two vomit designs) (see Fienup-Riordan and Rearden 2016:58, 89, 95).

George (p. 22) continued with the story of the time the famous Kuskokwim warrior Apanuugpak was surrounded by enemy warriors at Iiyuussiq. Although he almost panicked, he saw that his young companion was continually picking up arrow-point covers, saying they were hard to make in his hometown.¹⁰ Observing his unconcern for danger, Apanuugpak regained courage and let out his voice, leading his comrades to safety. Later George (p. 25) added: "That one they call Apanuugpak was the last warrior here in our land in Southwest Alaska. They stopped fighting in war from then on when white people came around." Joshua listened to his friend talk with pleasure, saying that he hadn't heard stories like these when he was young and didn't know them.

Pauline Matthews (p. 27), who was sitting to one side, commented: "I thought you were going to talk about these things, about the things they found. Or are you going to tell stories?" Annie (p. 27) responded: "We looked at these things and cannot tell stories about them. But we are curious about their tools and what they did." Joshua (p. 27) noted that they had talked briefly about some of the objects and how they were nicely made before they had metal: "It's probably visible through these objects that they had animal bones for sharpening and used those kinds of knives. Peter Andrew made skinning tools for beavers out of animal bones by sharpening them since they don't tear [skins]. Those past people probably used those. But the things they made are very nice. I think those great men worked on them for a long time." Annie added, "It makes me curious to know what kind of tools they used. Our ancestors were evidently wise. They apparently had big brains."

We continued looking at a stone-bladed *uluqaq* (woman's semilunar knife), an *ayallaq* (cutting board), and other tools. George (p. 29) said: "Here are their *calissuutet* [working tools], *uluat* [semilunar knives], *canassuutait* [their carving tools], *segcuutait* [tools they used to cut fish]. They probably carved wood using those tools." Looking at an *uluqaq*, shaped like those still used in Quinhagak today but with a stone blade that was still sharp, Joshua (p. 30) exclaimed, "*Irr'inargelliniut* [They are amazing to see]." Both Annie and Joshua commented on an especially handsome *uluqaq*, George joking that it was as sharp as a razor. "Try shaving," retorted Joshua (p. 31). Annie (p. 31) commented that some of these stones were probably used for skinning animals, like seal, mink, and beluga.

Speaking in English, Joshua then queried the young archaeologists in the room, asking how many pieces they had found. Jacqui (p. 32) said 10,000 in all.¹¹ Pauline asked Jacqui if they were digging deeper than last year, and Joshua wanted to know if she was one of the diggers, and she answered yes to both questions. Joshua (pp. 32–33) asked more questions, including where Jacqui was from (Minnesota), where the funding was from (the British government), and where the other diggers were from (around the world).

After a short break, Jacqui and Trisha brought us a second tray of objects, including a paintbrush, whetstones, and various small pieces of jewelry. Examining the *mingugissuun* (paintbrush) with the squirrel's hair bristles still in place, George (p. 34) said it was probably used to paint pottery or wooden masks, using charcoal and *urasqaq* (white clay). George (p. 36) identified a dark-colored whetstone as an *arviq*, a particularly abrasive stone found in the vicinity of Platinum. He noted that metal quickly gets sharp when using it. He said there were two types of *arviit*, some that are brownish and others that are black: "There are many of those near Platinum. That's why the village is called Arviiq." Annie added that stones like these not seen around Quinhagak were probably brought from all over. George (p. 39) added: "Our ancestors apparently traveled far away using their arms and legs."

Now we turned to a tray of ivory and bone jewelry. Everyone bent over the tray and picked up different pieces

to admire. George (p. 45) commented: “They are things they made, toys, models of things they made by hand. Some of them are probably earrings. And this is a small model fish.” Annie identified a tiny circular ivory piece as part of an *uyamik* (necklace), remarking that its line design was a perfect circle, and George added that their tools must have been sharp. A small piece of amber also caught Annie’s (p. 46) eye: “This is an expensive rock.” She then turned to a tiny ivory seal: “There is an *issuriruaq* [spotted seal model] that was also a necklace’s hanging piece.” Joshua (p. 46) exclaimed: “There are many of these amazing things. Things that aren’t seen have evidently appeared [from underground].” I pointed out an *aqlin* (earring) with a large hook, and Pauline (p. 46) responded in English: “Holy cow, they must have had big holes [in their ears].”

Though their experience with these artifacts, made centuries before they were born, was limited, the group was continually impressed by their workmanship. Joshua (p. 51) noted: “Those people were so skilled with their hands.” Annie added: “Gee, they have so much patience.” George (p. 47) remarked: “They were good at making things, even though they didn’t have fast tools. And they only had lamps with spotted seal oil for light.” Joshua (p. 47) replied: “It’s because those who were tireless would [make things]... We don’t know what they are, but they are amazing.”

Joshua (p. 46) was as surprised that archaeologists could find these tiny pieces as by the things themselves: “They apparently find them, even though they are small.” In fact, the archaeologists were using fine-mesh screens during their excavation, enabling them to catch even very small artifacts. These screens had been specially designed by Warren Jones and his crew at Qanirtuuq Inc., who had examined the archaeologists’ sifting screens and decided to improve upon them. Later Annie (p. 57) added: “Wow, I don’t know how they found this one.” Joshua (p. 57) remarked: “They apparently take out a lot of things [from the ground] in a short time.” And Annie concluded: “Yes, they are amazing.”

Looking at a tiny figurine, Annie (p. 50) noted: “This is also a *yut’ayagaq* [small person].” George suggested: “These are *naanguat* [toys]. When [my grandmother] was a teenager, she said they also had *inuguat* [dolls].” I

asked if the figures were *inuguat* or *iinrut* (amulets), but Annie did not know. They looked at two large labrets, one shaped like a seal’s face, but did not know how they were used. Joshua (p. 53) noted: “There is apparently no one to tell stories about these things from long ago.” I picked up a toggle used to attach lines. Joshua said that it was ivory, and George said that it was made from a tooth.¹² (Fig. 4).

Annie wondered how they made holes in the ivory, and George (p. 56) recalled seeing a man using a bow drill: “When I was small, some time ago when [that man] was making a bracelet, since he made it after white people came around, he used something that looked like a small nail and placed it here [at the end of a wooden shaft] and wrapped twine around it and continually [moved it] like this [back and forth] to make a hole.” Melia (p. 58) then showed them an *iguun* (drill) with a nephrite bit: “It’s from the Kobuk River 400 miles to the north. It’s the hardest rock around here. This is a very special piece. We were very excited when Jacqui found this.” Joshua (p. 59) remarked: “They probably made things through resourcefulness. They had ingenuity like white people.” Chuckling, George added: “When they made working tools, our ancestors were apparently more resourceful than MacGyver” (Fig. 5).

Melia (p. 61) then showed the group a lancet: “This is very, very thin, almost like a thin razor blade. And we think this is what they used to make the cuts in their faces for the labrets... It’s nephrite ground very very thin and sharp.” She asked them what they would call it, but Joshua (p. 61) explained: “From 700 years ago, none of



Figure 4. Ivory toggle found at the Nunalleq site, August 2014. Courtesy Rick Knecht.

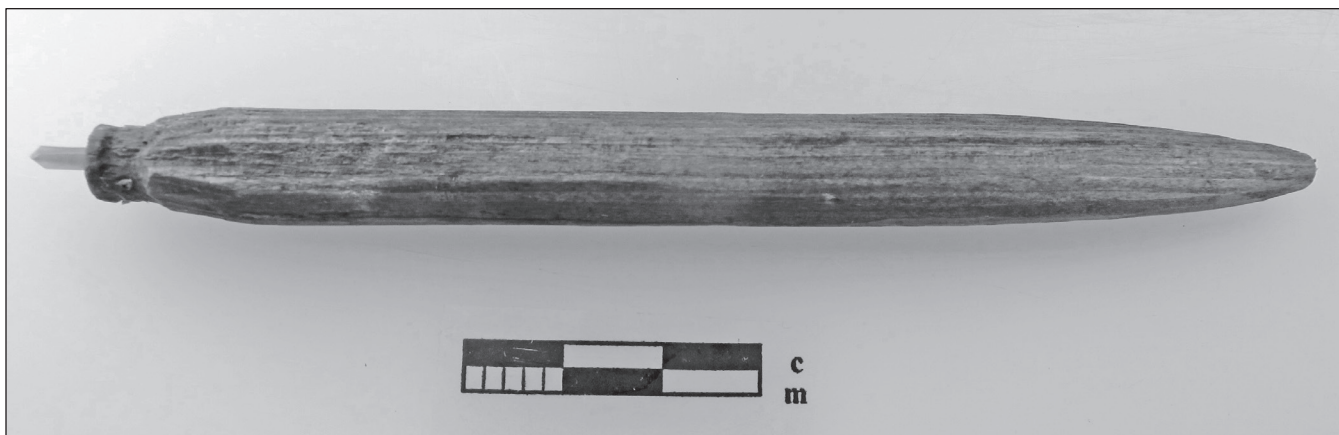


Figure 5. Drill with nephrite bit found at the Nunalleq site, August 2014. Courtesy Rick Knecht.

us are able to tell what they're for." All they could say was that it was used to cut something. Joshua compared it to a military knife, adding: "They probably worked on one thing for a very long time when they tried to finish it. These aren't things that could be finished right away. These are amazing."

Having handled and examined this array of small pieces, I asked them which were their favorites. Each answered differently. Annie liked a tiny circular earring the best. Joshua's favorite was also an earring, the delicate linked piece that we had all admired, "one that is amazing and hard to make" (Plate 3). George liked the toggle.

Annie asked about where people from the nineteenth-century village of Agaligmiut went, and George (p. 65) described how people moved from small villages to form Quinhagak in the early 1900s: "There were many small villages around here. There was Kuignerraq, Uuyarmiut, Sayalitulirmiut, Suratuqeryararmiut. They all got together and the people who lived at Agaligmiut also gathered, and they moved and became residents of Kuignerraq [Quinhagak]." Later he explained that there were many villages when his grandmother was a girl, including Uuyarmiut and Sayalituli, but that Nunalleq was much older. Pengurpagmiut and Agaligmiut, George (p. 104) noted, were the same age: "Since Pengurpagmiut and Agaligmiut fought [in war], the place where the Pengurpagmiut lived will have things like these since they're from the same time."

Joshua (p. 65) then mentioned the idea held by a number of elders that a museum in Quinhagak showcasing these world-class artifacts might generate money for

much-needed social services in the community: "When they bring these [artifacts] here, and they get a place for them, people will probably go and see them. And they will pay. They were asking if they could use that money for people who lack things and want to go to hospital appointments." Pauline Matthews, a Qanirtuuq Inc. board member, told him that profits from bingo or other tribal funds could be used for that purpose. She (p. 66) then explained in Yup'ik why the artifacts needed to be sent away—to keep them from deteriorating:

They're working on them down states [in the continental U.S.] where they're from. If they are here, they'll deteriorate right away. They will crack and dissolve. That's why after finding them here, they're constantly wetting them. If they don't wet them, they will become nothing...they will disappear. Finally, after they are in good condition, they'll bring them back.

As you know, things and even wood rots. Then in a few years, they become nothing. Since the archaeologists know how to do their work and how to care for those so they won't disappear or break, they use their own methods down states. We don't have tools here. And they cannot bring their tools here since they have laboratories down states.

Joshua's concern is well founded. Quinhagak has limited means, and it makes sense to many in the community that if the artifacts are indeed world-class, they be used to fund the community's "visible needs." Melia and I, as well as Pauline, explained that museums and cultural centers generally do not make money, and that any money they generate usually goes toward the care of collections. The

purpose of a cultural center is to educate, and there are (or should be) other ways to get money for emergency medical travel or burial assistance. Pauline told Joshua that so far, grant money had been used to take care of the things found at Agaligmiut. Joshua (p. 68) concluded: “There are apparently many amazing things here. These things that aren’t usually seen, we cannot say what they are.” George added, “By doing something, it would be good if they got a place to house them.”

SECOND DAY

With the funeral now set for Tuesday afternoon, we reconvened Tuesday morning. We began looking at stone tools: *uluat* (semilunar knives) with slate blades and *ellitet* (whetstones). George remarked that the darker stones were from Sayalek River down the coast. George and Nick discussed the properties of slate, considered a soft stone, as opposed to “real stones.” Nick (p. 71) noted: “When scraping them with a nail, marks are made. They aren’t real stone. They make those [slate pieces] into semilunar knives, and they are even the points of the first warriors’ arrows. The real *uluat* are made of those soft stones. . . . When we lived down the coast we used to bring some home and make things.” George (p. 72) added that such stones could be found at Security Cove, south of Goodnews Bay: “Down the coast, down along the upper part of Security Cove . . . along the mouth of the river that comes out from up there, there are many of those soft stones that aren’t real stones, and even those that a person can carve using a semilunar knife.” Later, when looking at slate end-blades, George identified the stones from Security Cove as *kukupat* (ones with spots), dark stones one can carve and make into things.

We then turned to kayak parts and models. I showed Nick (p. 74) an *ayapervik* (kayak stanchion), decorated with a face, and he explained how the piece supported the cockpit opening of the kayak: “They are along the side [of the kayak] situated across from one another. Since we no longer see those traveling with kayaks today [it’s hard to tell]. They call it *ayapervik*.” As he reached for another piece, Nick spilled the contents of his coffee cup, and our assistants scrambled to clean up the mess. Nothing

was damaged, and Colleen (p. 74) quipped: “It’s alright, they’ve been in the ground for 500 years.”

We also examined an unusual *qayaruuaq* (model kayak), with a Kodiak-style bow piece divided into two parts rather than a closed tote hole typical of kayaks used in the Bering Sea through the 1950s (Fig. 6). I asked the men if they had ever seen anything like it, and George said no. They did, however, acknowledge a historic relationship with the people of Kodiak. Joshua (p. 76) recalled: “They say the people of Kodiak down there were drift-aways from here. Or did they flee when they fought in war?” George (p. 76) noted: “There are many people originally from here who moved out [to Kodiak]. . . . In their stories also, our ancestors said that when they were going to kill all the warriors [who had escaped during the battle preceding the destruction of Agaligmiut], [the warriors] tied together logs and drifted away. They beached down on the Aleutians, and some of them probably beached at Kodiak Island.” Annie (p. 77) summed it up: “So we have a lot of ancestors living in Bristol Bay and Kodiak” (see Fienup-Riordan and Rearden 2016: 71–72, 78, 80, 82).

Continuing his examination of the kayak parts, Nick remarked that although they had seen kayaks when they were growing up, they had not made them or studied their parts. He recognized an *amuvik* (bow piece) and *anguarutem teguyaraa* (paddle handle). Looking at an ivory deck piece, used to attach lines to the outside of the kayak, Joshua (p. 79) explained: “On top of the kayak, they have [sealskin lines] to tuck things underneath, made out of skin rope.” Annie identified the piece as representing a snowy owl.

All in our group had some experience with kayaks. Laughing, Nick (p. 83) recalled playing in a kayak when young: “I didn’t use a kayak. But . . . Caiggluk and I . . . pretended to fight in war in a kayak. The other person we were playing with would appear from the other side of a high spot and run down to that kayak, and my companion would get inside underneath the tote hole and I would go inside the back. Then when he would appear, we would run away.” Joshua (pp. 83, 87) described using a kayak during one spring season: “Apurin got me a kayak. . . . I used my kayak muskrat hunting from lake to lake and into the rivers. And it had a sled under it. I used to pull it over



Figure 6. Wooden parts of a model kayak found at the Nunalleq site, including the kayak stanchion, lower bow piece (in two parts) as well as the unusual, mouth-like bow top. This style is seen on some Kodiak-area kayak bow tops but is not found on nineteenth-century kayaks from Southwest Alaska, which have a central tote hole. Courtesy Colleen Lazenby.

ice. And when we got in the water, we put the sled on the back of that kayak and started paddling. These two never had [kayaks], but all of us had a chance to look at a lot of them from our parents.”

Joshua (p. 87) noted that their parents used kayaks in the ocean as well as rivers and lakes: “Our parents used those kayaks to travel down to the ocean. They probably spent a night down there on the ice when they wanted.” George (p. 87) recalled: “They went seal hunting towing their kayaks on kayak sleds down to the ocean. They told stories about those going down there during those times. They would spend nights down [on the ocean] since it didn’t get extremely windy during that time.”

Discussion then turned to Atertayagaq, the young boy who had drifted away on the ice when it detached while he was seal hunting in the early 1900s. He stayed on the ice for three months before being rescued and returned to shore by a steam ship traveling north from the Aleutians. All the elders in our group had seen Atertayagaq as an older man, when he served as a lay pastor for the Moravian Church in Quinhagak, and they all knew his story. George (p. 89) explained:

When Atertayagaq was a drift-away, they say the ship that took him didn’t immediately bring him up to land. But after having him stay on that ship for a number of days, they finally brought him up to the village of Igiugig. He said he was worried thinking that the place he was going to didn’t have people who spoke like him.

Then they say from up there, the lay pastor of that village went down. When he spoke, he saw that he spoke the Yup’ik language like him. After having him stay at Igiugig for a long time, they mended his kayak, and he slowly headed home. From Kwigillingok or Kipnuk, he drifted away from one of those places.

Returning to the wooden kayak parts, I pointed out that some were painted with *uiteraq* (red ochre). Annie (p. 89) agreed: “These wooden pieces that are on the kayak, they apparently painted them with *uiteraq*. They probably did that because they thought they might deteriorate right away.” Nick (pp. 89–90) noted that *uiteraq* can be found in the mountains to the southeast of Quinhagak, where Tagculleq River enters the Qanirtuuq River: “They would get *uiteraq* up in the mountains. They say it’s back there on

the other side of those Ing’erpiit [lit. “Large Mountains” back there.” Nick (p. 91) said that *urasqaq* was available at Ciranaaq: “It is clay that is very soft; they would dry it. They called it *urasqaq*. They would paint that kind of *urasqaq* on their kayaks.” George (p. 91) added: “Many people tell stories that they used to obtain clay from Ciranaaq to work on, to make into pots, to make things to use. They seemed to work on clay that was grey when they made bowls and pots. I’m not sure what they added to it. Do they mix them with those things out there that are white and look like cotton [tall cotton grass]?”

Nick (p. 92) recalled seeing people covering kayak frames: “When I saw those who constructed kayaks, they finished the frame. Then they sewed what was to be the skin covering of the kayak, and although it fit tightly, they put [the frame inside it]. Starting from the front [of the kayak], they [pushed it forward] and two people situated across from one another sewed the top of the kayak [skin covering]. They made it tight. Then they dried it when it was done.” George (p. 93) recalled the sinew thread his grandmother used for this purpose: “Back before things became readily available, my grandmother made thread from animal sinew by drying them. Then she would split them and use them for sewing.” Nick agreed: “Yes, that’s the kind of thread they had. [They made thread] out of caribou sinew and beluga sinew. After drying them and scraping them, they split them.”

George (p. 85) continually wondered what kind of tools people used in the past, before Western needles and metal tools were available: “They probably didn’t have *mellgaraat* [carving tools with curved blades] with metal blades. They had some kind of tools that looked like stone. And their working tools were sharp. Yesterday, when I was touching one of the semilunar knives with a stone blade, it was almost as sharp as a razor blade for shaving. But it was sharpened with a stone. They probably used *arviit* [whetstones from Platinum] to sharpen them.”

Next we turned to a tray containing various toys, including tally sticks, darts, gaming pieces, and even a die. George (p. 99) said that the gaming pieces looked like small spine bones, and Joshua added: “These are old things that they made for fun.” I mentioned that the excavators had found many darts at Nunalleq, and Joshua noted that they were used for a game inside the *qasgi*. Nick

(p. 96) remarked: “These were evidently for playing darts. They used to call those toys with points *aavcaat* [darts]. They would suddenly penetrate, and the points would get stuck.” George (p. 95) mentioned again the dart incident from which warfare was said to have begun: “You know how I told you yesterday about how one [boy] popped the eye of another and then his father popped both the other [boy’s] eyes. War evidently started from that time on.”

We turned to hunting tools, including a throwing board and spear shaft. Nick (p. 96) described how throwing boards were used: “I think that was a throwing tool for a *nagiiquyaq* [seal-hunting spear], the small harpoons that had points and barbs. They would insert the end [of the spear] here [at one end of the throwing board]. Then they took it and threw it, and its point would go toward an animal.” George added: “They threw it high in the air, even though [the animal] was far.” Nick (p. 98) continued: “I used to see those once in a while. Kayakers used those in the past when they chased young bearded seals [in open water]. The first person who hit a young bearded seal with one of those would keep it. That’s why these younger [hunters] have the one who hit the young bearded seal keep it. That [tradition] has been passed down to us.”

Our last tool was a *cavek* (toggling harpoon point), made to turn sideways in the animal’s flesh, holding it fast (Fig. 7). Nick (p. 190) later explained its use:

They also had wooden handles. But they had lines that were tied to that wood. And these *cavget* [toggling harpoon points] were also tied to the wood. And when [the point] pierced [the seal], when it entered underneath its blubber, it would turn sideways, and the line that was tied to it held it there. The [harpoon point] wouldn’t come off and would stay in the blubber inside [the seal]. It was stuck and anchored to the spotted seal that he harpooned. Although it sank, he would pull it up.

George (p. 191) added: “Those brass [points used today] are those kinds. It would turn sideways in the flesh of an animal, and it would not come out.”

Later, looking at the point of a small *tegun* (retrieving harpoon), George (p. 183) described how men used the *tegun* along with the *cavek* when hunting seals:

If a spotted seal is floating, one goes to it and harpoons it and takes it with this [*tegun*]. We used



Figure 7. Toggling harpoon points. Courtesy Rick Knecht.

these when I first started accompanying people going down [to the ocean]. They would throw that *cavek* at something, at a spotted seal, and it would enter. After entering, when it came off [the shaft], it went sideways and they would catch [the seal]. After letting [the seal] die, they would take it [with the *tegun*] and place it inside the boat.

Nick (p. 183) added: “Those hunting spotted seals take [seals] when they are floating by harpooning them. Here is the point of the harpoon, the *tegun*. They used to have ivory ones that looked like this. Those first kayaks had them. I used to see these *tegutet* [harpoons], those that weren’t *cavget*.”

Annie asked for another tray, and Melia brought us a collection of carved wooden animals (Fig. 8). At first everyone just looked at them, Joshua commenting again that some of them were like new, and Annie remarking, “They

were amazing,” referring to her ancestors. Each of the models was of interest, including an *arrluguaruaq* (model killer whale), *qucillgaruarraq* (model crane), and a tiny *qangqiiq* (ptarmigan) and *anerrluut* (spring Dolly Varden). George (p. 106) commented: “They are very nicely made *yaquleguat* [model birds]. They apparently used some kind of carving tools when they carved small things, and they didn’t break them.” Joshua agreed: “These are very difficult to make. They were good at making things.” Once again, Annie (p. 106) was struck by the archaeologists’ skill: “Those searching apparently find them although they are very small.”

Nick (p. 105) was of the opinion that the models were toys made for fun: “These handmade models are apparently toys. They probably used them to teach their children.” Nick then identified a wolverine, a *mangayaaq*



Figure 8. Carved wooden animals including (from top to bottom) a beluga whale, crane head, grey whale, and seal. Courtesy Rick Knecht.

(porpoise), a *paluqtaruaq* (model beaver), and a *cetuaruaq* (model beluga whale). Discussing another whale model, George (p. 123) noted that it was probably an *arveq* (grey whale) as it lacked a dorsal fin: "Only killer whales have those [dorsal fins]." Looking at a tiny land otter, Joshua (p. 110) noted, "It is the head of a *ciugnilnguq* [land otter] with small ears. Those who worked on them made them recognizable." Nick (p. 110) agreed: "They made things they saw." Annie asked Nick if he had played with such models when he was young, and Nick said no, he had only played with darts. Annie said girls played with *jaaruit* (story knives) and *inuguat* (dolls). I asked again which pieces were their favorites, and Nick said it was hard to tell. Annie (p. 114) was quick to reply: "I like them all."

After a break I asked again about Atertayagaq, the boy who drifted away. Nick (p. 116) remembered seeing him at Quinhagak: "They say when he drifted [out to the ocean] across there, when he would think of [his nephews] Nermercuk and Atsaq, he used to get sorrowful." Then Nick took me by surprise, saying that he had a tape of Atertayagaq telling his story, and George (p. 117) said that Paul Trader also had the story on tape: "It's him speaking, recorded on a tape, the story of Atertayagaq. If Paul Trader hasn't broken his tape, he still might have it. I will call and ask him."

The elders then took turns recalling parts of the story. George (p. 118) said: "When he was a drift-away, sometimes, since he was alone on the ice, he said those small gulls were compassionate. He said those would turn into humans, they looked like humans and stayed around him and beyond him. He said when he would approach them thinking they were human, they would fly away as small gulls." Annie (p. 118) added:

He said he drifted away at fifteen years old. He said at the church at Kwigillingok when he was going to tell the story of drifting [out to the ocean], he said to the people inside the church, "One of you who is fifteen years old, stand up." Then that person named Peter Jimmy who we went to school with stood up. Then [Atertayagaq] said to people, "This is how young I was when I drifted away, like this person."

Nick (p. 118) continued with Atertayagaq's experiences out on the ice: "He said animals would transform and

let him see them as humans when he drifted away, even these walruses. He said he suddenly got happy when he saw kayaks on ice and he approached them. He said there were people walking around near those kayaks. When he looked over at them, he saw walruses that were going down [into the water] backward, those that had been human when he saw them. He had gotten happy to see people and approached them."

Nick said that while he was a drift-away he probably moved from one piece of ice to another. George (p. 119) recalled: "When he told the story, he said that ice evidently deteriorated up until [the time] the ship took him. He said when he got inside a ship, he looked at the piece of ice that he had been on top of, and it was just foam floating." Joshua (p. 119) added: "That's what I heard about [the ice] that he was on. It evidently was no longer ice. But here he was staying on it." Annie (p. 119) concluded our discussion: "He was taken care of by his creator." The next day, to my immense pleasure and surprise, Annie brought me the tape of Atertayagaq telling his own story, asking that I make copies for everyone, including the school. She (p. 148) said: "It's Atertayagaq's story told in person."¹³

Our second day's work ended, and after lunch all attended Susie Foster's funeral, burial, and parting feast.

THIRD DAY

Wednesday morning we gathered again in a room full of visitors, including journalists and photographers from the *Alaska Dispatch* in Anchorage and Bethel's KYUK-TV. Although the atmosphere was busy, our group looked with interest at wooden and ivory dolls laid out before them (Plate 4). George (p. 128) noted: "Some of these are *inuguat* [dolls] that our ancestors used to tell stories about. My grandmother used to tell stories about *inuguat*, about their toys." Nick asked if these were *irniaruat* (baby dolls, lit. "imitation children") and Annie and George both said no, they were *inuguat*, dolls representing people of all ages. Picking up a doll with chin tattoos, Nick (p. 129) remarked: "It's probably a pretend old woman." Joshua noted that he had seen one elderly woman with a similar decoration. Annie (p. 127) commented on a group of wooden dolls: "Since they probably didn't have cloth, they made wooden ones. Susie Qanyuli had some cloth

inuguat, some *yut'ayagaat* [small pretend people].” George (p. 127) told a story about white men stealing his grandmother’s *inuguat*:

When my grandma was a teenager, she said they lived at Tunguung. Then they went to their camp to go spring camping, when it was about to be spring. This was after people were around here for the gold rush. Then she said when they went inside their home they saw that a white person had taken all the *inuguat*, one of the people from the gold rush.

Speaking of white people, Annie (p. 127) noted that some used to dig at Nunalleq and find masks, and sell them to sports fishermen. Later she (p. 172) added, “Many people used to sell the things they found to white people.”

I mentioned that elders I knew on Nelson Island had described playing with families of dolls when they were children. I asked Annie if it was the same in Quinhagak, and she (p. 130) replied: “My first cousin had a whole bunch of [dolls], mom, dad, children. . . . She never liked me to play with them. She and Martha Mark, [Nick’s] wife used to play with *inuguat*.” We looked at a tiny wooden doll with downturned mouth, but Annie didn’t know if it represented a male or a female. Nor did she recognize the small, flat wooden dolls from Nunalleq. I mentioned that dolls like these were not in museum collections, perhaps because collectors preferred ivory figurines. Joshua (p. 135) suggested that their dolls were wood rather than ivory out of necessity: “Maybe that was a time when they couldn’t easily carve ivory. It has been a mystery to us what kind of tools they were using when they made those things. So they must have made ancient tools out of bones because they had no steel available in those times in our area.”

A small wooden figure with pointed head excited considerable interest. I asked what it might be, and Annie answered in English, “Little people.” She had heard of two types, *cingssiik* (a small person with a pointed head) and one other (Plate 5). Joshua (p. 134) helped her out, “*Ircenrraq* [extraordinary being, other-than-human person found in mountainous areas].” Nick and George agreed that the figure did not look human, as it had a

snout. Annie teased the men that they needed binoculars to recognize it.

Melia brought in the next tray containing tools relating to warfare—an arrow point and slate end-blades, as well as a small piece of armor made of antler and an ivory wrist guard. Joshua (p. 137) declared that these were tools made before their time: “These are hard to tell for one who has never seen them before. So those are the things beyond our time. We can’t tell how they’re used.” Joshua (p. 143) did, however, recognize the armor piece after Melia explained its use: “They call them *qat’gailitat* [bone armor for the chest]. . . . They were used for protection against warriors.” Nick (p. 138) commented again on the character of slate compared to *ellitit* (whetstones) which he considered “real stones” and which tend to break: “These are the kinds of stones that are made into things. There are many stones like these down the coast, on top of the mountain, *unailnguut teggalqut* [soft stones], ones used for carving. These don’t break although they work on them and make them into things.”

The arrow points elicited discussion of hunting with bows and arrows rather than warfare (Fig. 9). These were *pissurcuutellrit* (their old hunting tools), Nick said, *pitegcautet cingilgit* (arrow points). I asked if they had used bows and arrows when young. Annie (p. 139) replied: “I got a bow and arrow. Aaluulaaq made me one. Never killed or hit anything with it.” George (p. 140) also had a bow and arrows as a boy: “I did have a bow and arrows, but since it was after white people came around, they had tips, points made out of old shell casings in more recent times.” Joshua (p. 147) also used a bow and arrows: “When we were small, they used to make us those bows and arrows so that we can practice our skills in killing larger animals when we grow. Our parents used to have those real ones to hunt with. And us kids used to hunt birds and little things with bow and arrows.”

When it was his turn, Nick (p. 131) talked about how men made *akitnat* (blunt-tipped bird arrows), with nails inserted in the shaft, that skidded along the water when shot: “Some had points with two nails situated across from one another. Although the birds were flying, when they pierced them they would fall. When shooting red-necked phalaropes, although one missed, when [the arrow] skidded [along the water] and grazed them, they



Figure 9. Annie Cleveland holding an arrow point with slate end-blade.

would get injured and die.” Nick (p. 145) noted that he had used wooden *akitnat* when he was young: “They were our points when we were children, ones used for hunting small birds.” George added that they were made of *tegg’eraq* (hardwood).

After a break Melia replaced the arrow points with an array of items made of grass. George (p. 151) commented on two types of grass used to make baskets and cordage:

They gathered *iitat* [tall cotton grass, *Eriophorum angustifolium*] and let it wilt before weaving it. And those that grow along the shores of streams, those they called *kelugkat* [coarse grass, from *ke-luk*, “stitch,” lit. “those used as stitches”], they probably also made them into things after letting them wilt.

“Our ancestors’ rope,” remarked Nick (p. 151). “Yes, they were very pliant,” added Joshua. Annie then brought out her *issran* (grass-carrying bag, twined from the bottom upward) made from *taperrnat* (coarse seashore grass, *Elymus molis*). The *issran* looked new in comparison to the twined and woven fragments spread before us. Few women know how to make these twined bags today (Fig. 10).

George (p. 152) identified the large twined bag laid out for us to examine as an *ukilqaaraq* rather than an *issran*: “Those who made them called them *ukilqaaraat* [grass-carrying bags]. This was one of these *ukilqaaraat* made of *taperrnat*.” Annie (p. 155) recalled gathering *taperrnat* in the fall, something women still do to gather material to make coiled baskets for sale both locally and in Bethel and Anchorage: “We pick them from the ocean shore. They [gather them] when they wilt and turn white in the fall.”



Figure 10. Nick Mark examining the *issran* (grass carrying bag) made by Annie Cleveland alongside the remains of grass cordage excavated at Nunalleq. Courtesy Colleen Lazenby.

Annie and George remembered eating the tender lower stems of *iitat*. Annie (p. 157) recalled: “Sarah makes *akutag* [lit. “a mixture” of greens, berries, shortening, and sugar], cutting them into small pieces. *Iitaq akutag* is delicious.” George added, “Not cooking them, but after peeling them, this [lower] part is good dipped in seal oil.”

I mentioned how people in the past were said to have used grass in many ways. We then examined an ancient *alliqsak* (grass boot-liner). Nick (p. 159) remarked:

“I used to see *alliqsiit* made of *iitat*. They used *iitat* for many things.” George (p. 159) agreed: “When they wilted, they’d make them into things. They were also made into *ikaraliitet* [grass kayak mats].” Nick later added that these mats covered wooden slats, which were placed underneath for support. George also recalled *piineq* (grass wrapped around one’s foot) and, more recently, fox- or rabbit-fur socks worn under *alliqsiit* for added insulation.

Joshua and George then spoke generally about using grass to keep warm out in the wilderness. One spring Joshua stuffed his shoes with grass when he fell through the ice and his snowmobile sank near the mouth of Sin'iq. George (p. 166) added: "Grasses that aren't wet are warm insulation. And if someone is cold in the wilderness, if he places a little bit of grass inside his clothing, he is warm."

The men identified another large grass fragment as part of a *kuusqun* (woven grass fish container). George (p. 165) said: "My grandma, when they were going to prepare frozen fish, they would weave them like this, and they used to have woven grass containers; they used to prepare containers for them. This looks like it was a *kuusqun*." Nick later added that *kuusqutet* were wide at the bottom and narrowed toward the top.

Nick (p. 165) identified another mat as a grass door covering: "Probably, some doors had those covers, they would call them *naliit* [woven grass door covers]. They were woven. The outer doorways of the porches also had grass coverings." Annie (p. 166) said that grass mats were also used for bedding as well as for insulation for sod homes: "I think they had woven grass mats like these, they had bedding, they had *curut* [mattresses]. And I saw a mud house that had a wooden frame, then after placing woven grass mats on it, they covered it with mud." Indeed, grass had many uses.

Looking at a clothing fragment, a small piece of hide possibly part of a parka, Nick (p. 164) noted: "Only a person who makes parkas can say what these are. I think those small pieces of skin are for some part of their parka designs." George (p. 164) then told how a man was recognized by the designs on his parka: "My grandma told a story and said that her late husband, Alexander Oldfriend, that one day he arrived up at the Yukon River and went to the large *qasgi*. He said across from them, an elderly man would watch him, he would stare at him. He finally asked him [where he was from]. When he said he came from this village [Quinhagak], he said he recognized him through his parka designs. He said he recognized how he was related to him through his parka designs." George (p. 160) remarked: "Agaligmiut were evidently rich with amazing things, with many things." Annie (p. 164) agreed: "I don't think those first people did things in just any way."

We turned to a variety of fishing gear, including a net gauge, fish-spear barb, sinker, and wooden float (Fig. 11). George (p. 187) described using a *kakirpak* (fish spear): "You know how we go to the upper parts of rivers to fish for red salmon. The spears are almost like that. When we try to catch [salmon] that have turned red [from spawning], we spear them. But we only put a few barbs on the newer [type spears], not a lot. They are metal and not bone." Nick (p. 188) noted: "These were old *kakissuutet* [implements for spearing fish]. These two [points on the spear] situated across from each other have a third [point]. They had long wooden handles. The one to harpoon it would quickly pierce it and pull it up." Annie then asked about the river called Kakiyaraq [lit. "place where one speared fish"]. George (p. 188) explained: "Kakiyaralleq was a slough, but it completely eroded away. It disappeared. They mention that they used to spear *imarpinraat* [Bering cisco] there in fall and winter, probably at freeze-up. They would watch the bottom of that [river]. Then they would quickly pierce [the fish]. At the present time, we use a single hook, letting it sink, and we watch the fish, and when it goes above the hook, we pull [the hook] and poke it."

Holding a stone sinker in the palm of his hand, George (p. 196) explained:

That can sink down to the bottom of the river or the ocean or under the water and has a small string attached to it. Then the line would be stretched by



Figure 11. Fishing gear, including wooden net gauge, bone fish-spear barb, and stone sinker. Courtesy Rick Knecht.

the current and wouldn't touch the bottom....Or in the river when they go burbot fishing that could probably be used. [The sinker] would touch the bottom. Then the [hook] that the burbot would bite would be hovering [above the bottom].

Annie (p. 196) added that when they fished for pike, they also let the hooks touch the bottom: "This is a *kic'aqutag* [sinker] like a halibut [sinker]; this line would probably be used for fishing with hooks." The group noted that people probably used bone hooks in the past. George said that his grandmother had told him stories of using ivory and bone hooks at Sin'iq to fish for tomcod, and Nick agreed that was a good fishing spot.

At this point our group was enlarged by the entry of John Fox, whom everyone called by his Yup'ik nickname, Aatassuk. Aatassuk was born in Quinhagak in 1961 and

although young, was full of stories. His adoptive father was Martha Mark's father, James Fox, who was born in 1911 and grew up near the historic village of Agalik. Jacki and Annie had both asked Aatassuk to join us.

We were just turning to a tray of ceremonial pieces. Our next object was an owl mask (Fig. 12). Annie said it might be an *anipaq* (snowy owl). Aatassuk suggested it might be a short-eared owl. Aatassuk added that he had seen a spotted seal mask found at Tengluk, and George said that Tengluk had now eroded away.

Later, looking at a wooden drum handle—*cauyam epua*—George (p. 274) spoke: "Since some of us were born after they stopped dancing, we can't understand some things. But before that time, when my grandmother told stories, she said that Uuyarmiut and even sometimes people from this village would have Kevgiq [the Messenger



Figure 12. Joshua Cleveland examining an owl mask with appendage held in place, while Nick Mark looks on.

Feast] and dance. But when the [Moravian] missionaries came, after the Russian Orthodox were here, starting from then on, they apparently stopped dancing.”

Aatassuk (p. 207) said that another small mask in the shape of an animal’s face was probably made by a shaman: “That wouldn’t be like that for nothing.” Annie remarked that she had never seen such small masks, and Aatassuk said that the small pieces spread before us were probably models used on a dance stick. He (p. 210) then explained how the carved pieces would have been arranged along a stick displayed during a Messenger Feast:

I think that is one of those [models]. There is a person in a kayak, a hunter. Then along here in front of him are the things that he catches laying sideways, various models of animals that have pretend spears and arrows in them. In front of a [model] kayak, there are different model animals or fish.

They say when dancers are going to start [the Messenger Feast] they use those [dance sticks] first. Two men situated across from each other would continually push [the dance stick back and forth]. Before dancers start dancing, those men apparently do that first.

We were done looking at objects for the day, but Aatassuk continued telling stories. Jacki asked him to talk about the nineteenth-century village of Agalik. Aatassuk (p. 216) teased Jacki that she should have brought her drum: “You would have heard a song that James composed about when he was just growing up at [historic] Agaligmiut. I recalled it when I went inside that [community hall] out there and saw many things [from the excavation]. It’s the song of those people who made those things out there.”

Aatassuk then told us the story that his adoptive father, James, had told him of two messengers arriving to invite them to [historic] Agalik for a dance. James’ mother had brought him inside the *qasgi* at Agalik. He said there was log seating all around. Then people started to bring in food and distribute it to the guests, going in a circle. Two men situated across from each other on their knees started to dance, and someone was using a dance stick, moving it back and forth to the drum beat. Aatassuk (p. 221) said: “When I saw one of the [artifacts] I recalled what [James] had said. [The dance stick] was a long piece of wood with a handle, and he said there was a kayak here with a model

of a person inside it.” People danced and teased one another at Agalik. Aatassuk (p. 228) noted that when James was young, Canineq people came to Quinhagak to dance, but James and his family danced only at Agalik. James remembered lots of gifts given during the dances, including a large, dark dog: “There weren’t many people who lived at [historic] Agalik, but they used to go and [attend dance festivals] at Agalik.”

Aatassuk (p. 226) agreed with George that dancing took place in many old villages in the past: “There were many old villages that used to dance, including the place Sayalituli up there, and those first people of the village of Kuingnerraq. Then there was Uuyarmiut upriver. Uuyarmiut also had a *qasgi* and invited [other villages to dance].” Aatassuk told the story of how once the people of Sayalituli got mad and refused the invitation to dance at Uuyarmiut. When they heard that each guest had received an entire spotted sealskin poke full of seal oil, they regretted their decision.

Aatassuk (p. 225) reiterated what George had said about the abandonment of many small villages, including Agalik, after the missionaries arrived in the early 1900s:

Agalik down the coast, Apaculuq and family were from Nakirnerpagmiut. Then when he became an elderly man, when he couldn’t travel far anymore, they moved down the coast to Agalik. They moved closer to [Quinhagak] by moving down the coast. When the [Moravian] mission arrived, they gathered here [in Quinhagak]. The various small villages that were dispersed [moved] and gathered here. We aren’t originally from the village of Quinhagak. And my ancestors are from Qinaq, from across there at Tuntutuliak.

Aatassuk (p. 226) also spoke briefly about the animal figures we had looked at the day before, and which he had seen when visiting the archaeologists’ workshop:

Those who were sick, they would doctor them. Then when the person was better, they would make [that person] a necklace. That figurine necklace was his *naparta* [lit. “thing that held him up,” that is, kept him alive]. You probably know about how it was that person’s *naparta*. They used to make them necklaces using that as something that would hold them up.



Plate 1. Charlotta Hillerdal talks with Quinhagak young people during the 2014 show-and-tell, which the archaeologists hosted for the community in the old corporation store. When Qanirtuuq Inc. built a new store in 2010, they converted the first floor of the old store into a combination storage room, work space, and dining area for the archaeologists.



Plate 3. Annie Cleveland holding up a linked earring, which was Joshua Cleveland's favorite among pieces of jewelry we examined during the August 2014 gathering.



Plate 2. From left to right, Joshua Cleveland, George Pleasant, and Annie Cleveland examine a tray of artifacts from the Nunalleq site, including a wooden cutting board. Annie is holding a large stone blade, and Joshua is examining an uluaq (woman's knife) with stone blade.



Plate 4. Carved wooden doll with chin tattoos. Courtesy Rick Knecht.



Plate 5. A tiny wooden doll head, pointed at the top, thought to represent a cingssiik. Courtesy Sven Haakanson.



Plate 6. Nick Mark examining an ivory wedge, decorated with raven's foot design, as Pauline Matthews looks on.



Plate 7. George Cleveland examining a wooden labret.

Fannie Small had a *tuullek* [common loon] necklace when she was small. They say when she was extremely sick, that *tuullek* inside [her clothing] would make noise.

People buried their amulets before moving to Quinhagak (p. 227):

Then when James and family were going to come from Nerviar down the coast to this village, Tulukaruk and others said that the Moravian mission had become strong here in this village. Then he gathered all his children's necklaces and made a deep pit. Their necklaces that a shaman made, after removing them, Tulukaruk buried them, and then they left Nerviar down the coast and came here. Tulukaruk's children went to go and be baptized [here]. One of them lives here today.

Jacki asked Aatassuk to sing songs he had learned from James who had heard them sung by the people of Agalik, and Aatassuk (p. 227) laughed and responded: "Where are

those who are older than me who should be singing? I was born yesterday." Speaking of his older sister, Martha Mark, Aatassuk said: "I am their *piipiq* [baby, their last sibling]," and for the rest of our gathering, *piipiq* became his new name.

LAST DAY

Nick, George, and Annie gathered in the blue duplex for the last time Thursday morning. Joshua was absent, and Aatassuk would come later in the day. Melia brought us a tray of artifacts, including what she identified as snare pins, a root pick, a bucket handle, and a net sinker made from a seal rib bone, admonishing us to wet them every twenty minutes (but not with coffee).

The morning was full of surprises. Nick identified the piece the archaeologists had suspected was a bucket handle as a *pugtaqutaq* (net float) used on a sinew net (Fig.



Figure 13. Net-making tools (three-inch-long ivory "needles" with large eyes) and a curved net float originally thought to be a bucket handle. Courtesy Rick Knecht.

13). George (p. 236) observed: "During their times, they probably split the sinew of small animals and tied them together to make small [mesh] fish nets." Annie (p. 236) described how nets were made and remade depending on the fish size: "I heard that for king salmon, they made bigger [mesh nets]. Then they said for chum and other smaller fish, they took that net apart and made their [mesh size] smaller. When they didn't have twine, since they had no other materials, they used that [sinew line] over and over."

Nick (p. 236, 240) described how nets were set in the past using a *kis'un* (net sinker) but without lead or float lines:

Those people I saw had bone [sinkers]; they had just antler sinkers like this. It was just tied to the bottom of the line of the net down there. They had holes like this. . . . [The sinker] would be placed along the end of a fishnet that didn't have floats. [The sinker] held down the end of the net. Then these wooden stakes held [the net] up. It didn't have a lead or float line. I used to see Anrutaq's fishnets down at Tengluk that looked like that. They removed its catch when the tide went out.

I think this [sinker] was along the end of one of those nets that was staked upright. It weighed down the bottom [of the net] and kept the top raised. The end of the net was tied [on shore]. It was tied down to the bottom, and [the net] wouldn't fall.

George (p. 240) recalled his grandmother setting a fishnet in a lake using a sinker to weigh it down:

Since they didn't have tools like these when we became aware of life, we have a hard time recognizing some of them. But my grandma would process fish down below a large lake; this was after they got those [nylon] fishnets that weren't long. They would stake a piece of wood, then they would also stake another place to tie the net up there. Since she didn't have rope, she made rope by braiding wilted tall cotton grass.

Then she would string that small net through the top, she would thread through [the net] that didn't have a lead or float line, she would first put it upright there and then tie the top, and those two down there on the bottom. She would tie and thread the small fishnet through after braiding wilted tall cotton grass to make rope.

The archaeologists had also identified two wooden pieces, each with a hole at one end, as snare pins, but Nick and George thought that they were probably net-making tools. Nick (p. 243) stated: "These look like *qilagcuutet* [tools for tying nets together]." George (p. 243) explained: "My grandma would tie [the net] together, making small squares, making a dipnet for smelt. The [net] opening was large, and then it got narrower and narrower as it went down. And its opening, she got a piece of wood and bent it [to hold the net open at the mouth]. When the smelt entered, she would dipnet them and pull them up." Nick (p. 261) added: "Since we haven't seen some of these things, we don't know what they are. But since I have seen one of these, I recognized this net-tying tool right away, the measurement for the mesh size of the net."

Both men then talked about *makikcat* (squirrel snares), with wooden snare attachments that did not resemble what the archaeologists had found. Nick (p. 244) said: "Snares have [wooden pieces] that come off right away. They aren't these. But it has a hole, and they put [the wooden piece] sideways. When it suddenly closed, when it caught, [the wooden piece] came off." Nick (pp. 246–249) continued talking about traps.

Those *makikcat* were used during squirrel-hunting season in spring. And those they called *ipuutat* were used in winter for trapping beaver underwater. I used to see them, but I never made one. . . . The only snares that I set were wolverine snares by putting *ipuutat* on them when I used to go trapping. . . .

I became aware¹⁴ after metal traps were used. . . . I used to see those hunting implements. They had no metal traps. They would catch squirrels with those *makikcat* up along the mouth of Negeqliq. There were many squirrels. And now that they no longer hunt them, they are no longer around today.

In the past families stayed in the mountains for two months during March and April, returning downriver by boat in May in time for the salmon-fishing season. George's grandmother once trapped fifteen bundles of squirrel skins in one season, each bundle containing 45 skins.

Melia now brought us another tray of tools, including chisels, a tiny drill bit, an adze handle, a decorated wedge, net gauge, and small ax. Annie picked up the net gauge and recognized it right away as an implement for making

a net for small fish, such as trout. Nick (p. 257) agreed: “This is the mesh size for a small fishnet.” All had seen antler and wood net gauges used in the past. They also recognized the handle as belonging to a *kepun* (adze). They identified a wooden tool flattened at both ends as a scraper to remove fat from animal skins, such as fox or squirrel. Nick (p. 259) recalled: “They would remove the fat from fox skins that were easy to tear. They would remove the fat very quickly.” George (p. 260) added: “Cingarkaq said Tagkayak had a bone tool that he used to remove the fat from squirrel skins.” Nick noted that the fat-scrapers he saw in the past were plain without designs.

Next we turned to a *qupurriisuun* (splitting tool, wedge) (Plate 6). Nick (p. 261) declared: “That rock really seems like a splitting tool, a tool for splitting wood.” Looking at a tiny drill bit, Annie (p. 263) noted, “The people back then apparently had everything.” Nick said that it looked like the tip of a screwdriver, and George (p. 263) quipped, “They didn’t have things to unscrew in the past.”

Melia brought in more tools for us to examine. Among them was a cache of small items found together includ-

ing a piece of *uiteraq* (red ocher), drill bits, a small labret, and porcupine teeth (Fig. 14). Examining an antler piece decorated with line drawings of a caribou traveling to the mountains (Fig. 15), George (p. 275) said: “They probably made this for something, to be used as a decoration. It’s just a piece of antler.” Looking at the tool with the tiny tooth inserted as a blade, George (p. 270) said, “They apparently made things that we never saw before.” Looking at the collection of cached items, however, Nick and George thought that the teeth were actually bird claws. Nick (p. 273) declared: “They are probably the nails of a hawk owl or snowy owl.” George said that they were nails of a mountain bird that hunted things by clawing them. Nick (p. 283) agreed that they belonged to a predator: “They look like a bird’s nails. Birds that hunt mice, fox, and various things.” George (p. 282) concluded: “They are all good since they are all amazing to see” (Plate 7). And Nick (p. 282) added: “They have things among them that we’ve never seen. . . . The only thing I recognized right away was the net-making tool, the measuring gauge for a fishnet.”



Figure 14. Cache of items, including red ocher (top) and porcupine incisors (center). Courtesy Rick Knecht.

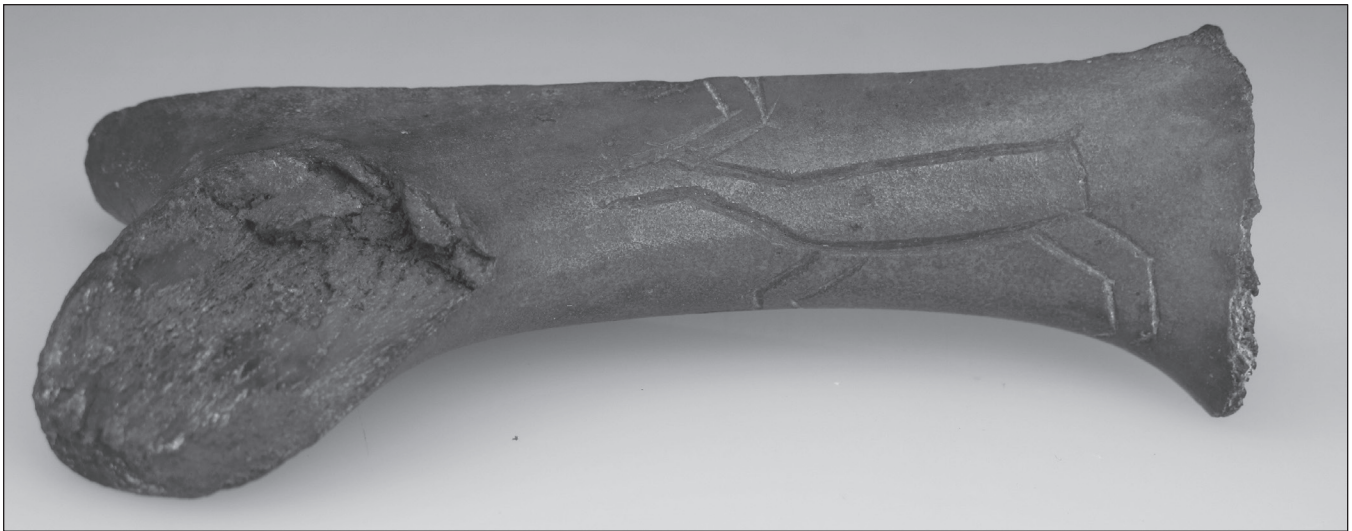


Figure 15. Antler decorated with incised image of a caribou. Courtesy Rick Knecht.

Just as we finished, we heard the sound of a four-wheeler stopping outside, and Annie (p. 278) exclaimed, “Come in. Just as expected!” Aatassuk entered, saying, “I slept long.” We then took a short break before continuing.

The next group of objects included a beautiful semi-lunar knife with slate blade, and Annie wished she could take it home. With Aatassuk among us, conversation turned from the objects to stories of the past. Aatassuk (p. 290) recalled the tale of how war ended when the Messenger Feast was created and people began to “compete through dance”: “Those first people who fought in war, they stopped going to war and replaced it, wanting to start having Kevgiq.... They say when the drum was struck once, the village would know that they were invited. That’s an example that I use and compare it to the church’s bell” (see also Barker et al. 2010:54).

Aatassuk continued with stories he had heard from James about other ceremonies celebrated in the past, as well as stories of animal people invited into the *qasgi* “back in the days when the land was thin, when many things were around.” He (p. 292) recalled: “When the namesake of Charlie Kavliilaq and James would get together, those two would speak for a long time and would laugh out loud and sing songs as they were talking.” Aatassuk (p. 292) remembered James’ story about how, as young men, their parents carefully controlled their water intake and only let them drink a small amount by dipping a feather in water after checking their spit: “Then he said, since we’re all mischievous, when he would go out, he would go over to

that steep place and go back to the small creek. Telling his cousin the story, he said that he would drink a large amount as much as he wanted from there.... When he told the story I also laughed for a long time” (Fig. 16).

Aatassuk (p. 296) then spoke about the power of the objects we were handling: “These various things apparently have small [powers]. As we would say, things have strength. When something was finished, it was given powers through a ritual. It wasn’t just constructed and left. Through the ways of this land that the first people practiced as their religion, these shamans, when they finished constructing something, they gave that thing strength. Whatever it was, a small thing, an item, they didn’t give it anything else but the power of a song that is from this land.” Aatassuk (p. 296) then observed that although people have become Westernized today, discarding many of the practices of their ancestors, the animals they hunt continue to be aware, as they were in the past:

During this time now, not one of us is wearing skin boots. We want to become Westernized, but only these small animals, since they haven’t become Western, they are aware of things. When someone who should be following abstinence practices or one who had their first menstrual period is [in the wilderness hunting or gathering food], these fish and animals will know about that person for sure up to this day.

And we’ve heard of people who travel to the wilderness. And back when I used to accompany others going up there, they would say there were



Figure 16. George Cleveland, Pauline Matthews, and Nick Mark listening to Aatassuk (John Fox) tell stories.

very fresh moose tracks, but they weren't able to see it. They experienced that because they had a *caagnitellria* [person who should abstain from certain activities] in their group.

For us today, there are no longer any admonishments that have to do with *eyagyarat* [traditional abstinence practices following first menstruation or death in one's family]. But since these land animals and water animals haven't become Western, they will be aware of something regardless.

Aatassuk is committed to seeing Yup'ik ways continue as lived traditions, and he is one of a small but growing number of men and women who are working to reintroduce dancing into the community, primarily by teaching dance to children at the Quinhagak school. Although many Quinhagak elders still disapprove of dancing and do not personally participate, they also do not publicly oppose such a revival. This is typical of Yup'ik commu-

nity life generally, in which it is considered inappropriate to tell others what to do. Individuals are held responsible for their own actions and, for better or worse, reap the consequences.¹⁵

Speaking about songs, Aatassuk (p. 300) said: "Those poor people would compose songs, and they had no books and no pencils; they could only be composed with the mouth and ears. Their minds were filled with all different things." Until then, Aatassuk had declined singing the song from the village of Agalik that he had learned from James and that Jacki had asked for because, as he said, he was born yesterday and wasn't supposed to be the one to sing. Realizing this was our last day, however, he (p. 301) decided to sing for us: "I will sing the first and second verses with choruses. There are actually five [verses]. I will sing the first two. They have choruses." Aatassuk then sang:

*Nani una-a Ayuqeurluum-qaa mallungiarii
mariumalii,*

Wangkugni cacirkaituq una

[Where is the small beached carcass that
Ayuqeurluq found]

To us, this person doesn't know what to do]

Yi-ya Yi-ya rra-ga-yaa rra-ga-ya

Ayi-ya Yi-ya rra-ya rra-yi-rri-ya

Piavet-tur ima-qaa miluryautaanga

Ipistulik-qaa kuignayugun-qaa

[(?) He has thrown me back there]

To the (?) *kuignayuq* of *Ipistulik River*]

Apa'urluqa marayaupialria-qaa

[My grandfather is very muddy]

Yi-ya yi-ya rra-ga-ya rra-ga-ya-rra

Ayi-ya Yi-ya rra-ya rra-yi-rri-ya

Chuckling, Aatassuk concluded: "I sang those two, the first and second verses although I was born yesterday."

Aatassuk (p. 302) continued speaking about the power of songs to reach back through time to the people who made not only the songs but the objects we had been looking at with amazement:

When I am in the wilderness and no one is listening, I sing some songs. When I see someone's old village, I say, "These places have these songs." When I come upon old villages in the wilderness, I suddenly sing them because they say that things will affect the younger generations. And there's not just one song. Since these villages have songs, when one comes to my mind when I'm near that place, I sing it.

And I say that the people who once lived in that village are happy that their song is sung. This is what they used to say, "*Uqugluirturtut* [They are taking their mold off]." When they spoke of something that wasn't uttered for a long time, they called it *uqugluirturluteng* [removing their mold].

That song that I sang just now is one of the songs that was composed by the people who constructed the objects that you've been looking at.¹⁶ Those [songs] quickly came to mind when I went inside the place next door. Then I thought, "My, I wish I could look at them and sing the song to the end when I saw those many small objects that were handmade."

Aatassuk (p. 305) then sang another song that James used to sing about traveling in a kayak in the fall when

the south wind was blowing and ice was popping up: "Since I traveled down to the ocean, when [ice] would surface, that [song] would come to mind. They had many small songs." Aatassuk (p. 305) then turned to Nick and George: "There were many activities in the past. Since these two dear people are much older than I am, I long to hear things from them." George (p. 310) followed with a story about a dream he had recently. He then commented indirectly on Aatassuk's request, with a story about how just smiling without speaking could bring great joy:

[Aatassuk] has been speaking about quiet people. At the Alaska Queen, when I first started working at a cannery, at our bunk house, they would sit in the hallway since there was seating there. I looked over at one of the people of Bristol Bay. After looking at him, he said, "This person, by just smiling here and there, fills us with joy, he makes us feel joyful although he hasn't said anything." He said he felt joy although I didn't speak. He said by smiling here and there, it makes one happy.

And our grandmother also used to say that if a speaker is talking about teachings, we should look at him in the face without looking away. They said if we looked away, we would forget what he was talking about.

Nick (p. 311) then commented on how elders in the past admonished those who followed the rules to continue to be that way, so that in the future others would look over their shoulders at them, advice which Nick did not understand for years:

Those people in the past, our ancestors, when they spoke, they evidently knew what was in a person's future by seeing him. Tagkayak would speak to us when we were gathered since we lived in the wilderness. He would speak to us [giving us advice]. There were a number of us living in a home, maybe eight of us, my real siblings. After speaking to us, [one of my siblings] would sometimes run out and say, "This person is going to start speaking again." Then the person speaking to us would stop speaking. When he stopped, he'd tell me, "If you don't let go of the way you are, your peers will look over their shoulders at you." And I didn't know what *takuyaryaraq* [the way of looking over one's shoulder] was. And before I learned what it was, I got a wife and had children.

When Paul Jones' health got bad, one day he asked for something from me, he asked, "Do you have any?" Then I said to him that I had prepared a male *iqallugpik* [fall Dolly Varden] to cook, removing its intestine. That person said something unexpected, he said since he knew that I would surely have some, he was looking over his shoulder at me. I suddenly recalled what Tagkayak used to say, a long time ago when I was just a boy. Evidently, asking for something from someone is a way of looking over one's shoulder. I suddenly understood when he said he was looking over his shoulder at me, that saying that I did not know.

Nick continued talking, describing how in the past marriages were arranged by one's parents, who would search for a spouse who didn't make a mess out of food. A woman, he noted, was in charge of her husband's catch, and her careful treatment of what he brought home ensured that he would continue to catch animals in the future.

It was the end of the day, and Jacki asked me if I had any more questions. I did. I wanted to know why people used the names they did for the old site: Agalik, Agaligmiut, and Nunalleq. George (p. 328) replied: "Agalik is the name of the river. But Agalik, in the early days, those before us said that the river ran along the edge of the old village underneath the *ingigun* [place where the tundra and marshland meet]. And the river is no longer there as we see today; that became land, but there are just some lakes. They said Agalik originally had a mouth along the edge of the old village." Jacki asked if they called the people who lived there Agaligmiut, and Nick said yes. George (p. 329) added: "The people before us called them Agaligmiut, but when it was no longer a village, they started calling it Nunalleq [Old Village]."

George (p. 329) noted that the Qanirtuuq River had also moved: "And our river here, Kuingnerraq means new river. The [river] up there that has a mouth along the mouth of Uuyaq [River], I suspect that it was Qanirtuuq River a long time ago in the early days since they call it Qanirtuulq [lit. "What was once Qanirtuuq" or "old Qanirtuuq"]. Then when it formed a river along here during our times, they would call this Kuingnerraq."

The last objects had been taken away, but stories continued about encountering *ircenrraat* (extraordinary persons) out in the wilderness, something that people con-

tinued to experience today. Annie told the story of a village elder who had fished all night along the river, where it never got dark. When she started hearing things behind her she became suspicious that they were *ircenrraat* messing with her. She remembered that her father had said that *ircenrraat* were afraid of dry fish, so she took out dry fish and placed them on her snowmobile. Not long after the searchers who had been looking for her found her. Annie (p. 348) concluded: "I do urge her to tell the whole story. I think there are still those [*ircenrraat*] in some areas of the land today. The young people must be taught about those [dry fish] [the *ircenrraat*] are afraid of."

Aatassuk (p. 344) commented, "We're talking about some of the things that we needed to talk about, *ak'allaraat piciryarat* [the old traditions]. . . . Various amazing things apparently used to be around in the past. They were amazing." Then he (p. 344) asked, "Those small things that they were looking at, have they stopped looking at them since there are none left?" Annie answered yes, they were done. Aatassuk replied, "They evidently finally finished." "But they found more today," Jacki concluded.

REFLECTIONS

There were many good reasons to hold this gathering—to learn from the elders, to hear them tell their stories, and most important to give them time to really examine the ancient pieces that were coming out of the ground, so close to home. The elders' reaction to these pieces is the heart of this story. They found the objects amazing. They judged the archaeologists amazing as well, commenting on their skill in finding tiny pieces difficult for them to see, even on a tray laid before them. Most amazing of all were their ancestors—men and women who made these things and with whom contemporary elders feel a strong connection.

We had looked at rare, one-of-a-kind pieces, such as the nephrite drill bit made with stone quarried hundreds of miles to the north and the slate-bladed *uluq* with ivory handle perfectly carved to fit a woman's hand. The most amazing pieces, however, and those that drew the elders out, were the items of everyday life, many similar to pieces still used today. The ancient *issran* (twined grass bag) and *allisak* (grass boot-liner) elicited reflections on the many uses of grass—a simple but essential material the elders

saw used when they were young before cloth, rope, and thread were readily available. Fishing tools—spear points, sinkers, net gauges—were also recognizable, as were seal-hunting spear and harpoon points. These objects were testament to the challenges of living on the Bering Sea coast and obtaining food from lakes, rivers, and the sea.

The prehistory of Southwest Alaska is not well understood compared to other parts of Alaska. While the BIA ANCSA 14(h)(1) program has done considerable work surveying sites and interviewing elders, most of this work concerns the late prehistoric and early historic periods. Although some of this work has been made available to the general public (e.g., Pratt 2009), many valuable site reports remain unpublished and difficult to access. Also archaeologists statewide have tended to turn their attention to older sites, where Alaska's first people lived thousands of years ago. Professional site excavations have been few and far between in Southwest Alaska. Although the Yukon-Kuskokwim delta is not a total "black hole" in our understanding of Alaska history, the region cries out for trained and committed young archaeologists who are willing to dedicate their lives to furthering our understanding in this rich and fascinating region.

Although Southwest Alaska generally felt non-Native influence relatively late compared to other parts of the state, within the region Quinhagak was one of the first communities to experience sustained contact. A Moravian mission was established there in the late 1800s, followed by a number of non-Native prospectors and explorers who used Quinhagak as a base of operations for exploration of the rivers and streams to the south of Kuskokwim Bay. Together they worked to establish a school, church, store, workshop, and other amenities in this hub community (Rearden and Fienup-Riordan 2013:xxxv–xl). Quinhagak residents are proud of their Moravian heritage, but recognize that they lost something in the transition. Although devout Moravians today, elders such as George and Aatassuk note the intolerance of early missionaries toward Yup'ik ceremonial practices generally and dancing in particular. While Yup'ik dancing continues to be a focus of community activity in Catholic villages to the north, in Quinhagak such traditions are only now slowly reemerging. When asked why his community wanted the archaeology project at Nunalleq, Warren Jones, head of Qanirtuuq

Inc., responded, "Because we had nothing," referring to the loss of language and cultural practices in his hometown.

Communities throughout the region are increasingly concerned about the loss of traditional knowledge. At Quinhagak, that concern has taken the form of residents actively reaching out—both to archaeologists such as Rick Knecht and to oral historians such as Alice Rearden and me—to work with them to document and share their unique heritage. Quinhagak residents are proud of the work going on at Nunalleq, and it shows. Not only did Warren Jones and Qanirtuuq Inc. invite the archaeologists to begin work at Nunalleq, but also continued community support at many levels—including organizing and attending this gathering—which has both made their work possible and ensured its success. I find this support among the most remarkable parts of a remarkable story. The people of Quinhagak are amazing.

Finally, the combination of sustained archaeological fieldwork and community interest has the potential to increase our understanding of Yup'ik history exponentially. Yup'ik oral tradition, alive in the minds of Quinhagak community members, is as rich a resource as Nunalleq and the treasures found below ground. Yup'ik history is complex and full of surprises, and it takes both physical and oral form. Bringing the two together has barely begun in Southwest Alaska, and with continued efforts by communities like Quinhagak the process will continue into the future.

The story of the Nunalleq excavation is far from over. Rick Knecht's research grant includes funds for the transport of artifacts back to Alaska. Bethel's Yupiit Piciryarait Museum and Cultural Center is anxious to be a repository for the collection, but at present their facility does not have the capacity to care for such a large collection. Quinhagak residents would prefer to have as much of the collection as possible stored in the village itself. Finding funds to expand the Bethel facility and/or build a repository in Quinhagak presents as great a challenge as the excavation itself. A promising first step has been made—in large part because of the long-term commitment by people in Quinhagak to the project. They have put their trust in professional archaeologists and in turn the archaeological team trusts the people of Quinhagak, who have the ultimate say in where and how the collections will be cared for

in the future. A happy outcome of this project is crucial to the future of such collaborative work with communities and quite possibly to the future of professional archaeology in Southwest Alaska.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, thanks to Annie Cleveland, Joshua Cleveland, John Fox, Nick Mark, and George Pleasant for all that they shared during our days together. Thanks to Warren Jones and Qanirtuuq Inc. for inviting me to work with elders in Quinhagak during August 2014. Thanks to Colleen Lazenby and the staff of Quinhagak Heritage Inc. for arranging my travel, and to Rick Knecht and his crew for their warm welcome. My sincere thanks to Melia Knecht and her assistants Jacqui Graham and Patricia Gillam for the time and effort they put into preparing and presenting objects for the elders to examine. Both their work and the larger excavation at Nunalleq were funded thanks to a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AH/K006029/1). Thanks to Jacki Cleveland for her efforts at the video documentation of our sessions. As always, thanks to my friend and colleague Alice Rearden for her excellent translations of the August gathering. And thanks to Rick Knecht for the photographs he provided, as well as Mike Knapp and Patrick Jankanish for the maps. Finally, thanks to Ken Pratt, Steve Street, Chris Wooley, Kelly Eldridge, and Rick Knecht for their detailed and thoughtful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. They taught me a great deal, and I am in their debt.

NOTES

1. There has been considerable debate as to whether it is appropriate for archaeologists to use the term “Nunalleq” (lit. “Old Village”) for the precontact site of Agaligmiut (Pratt 2013:29). Residents of Quinhagak routinely use the name Nunalleq for the site, in part to distinguish it from the nearby historic site of the same name. Agaligmiut is not unique in this respect. Throughout Southwest Alaska there are closely related sites sharing the same name. When people abandoned one site and moved downriver or down the coast, they often took the name with them.

In the past, many Yupiit believed it was inappropriate to directly refer to someone who had passed away using their proper name. I have never heard Quinhagak residents state this as a reason to avoid use of the name Agaligmiut. I do know that in everyday life, Quinhagak residents prefer to call the site Nunalleq. Their use of the name Nunalleq implies respectful indirection, not ignorance, and I have followed their lead in my discussion.

2. One concern is that the removal of the insulating layer of sod might accelerate the rate of erosion at the excavation site. Every year Knecht’s team uses surveying equipment to measure hundreds of meters of the shoreline near the site, and they have found that erosion is no worse on the site than elsewhere.
3. Because the Nunalleq excavation is not funded by a U.S. state or federal agency and is on corporation land, archaeologists involved in the project are technically not required to comply with regulations governing such work in the U.S. (i.e., Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act). While not legally bound by Section 106 or NAGPRA, Knecht’s team adheres to the spirit of these regulations in terms of local consultations and agreements.

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), their funding organization, also requires that all funds go to European Union personnel, thus precluding employment of local students as paid interns, which is done by many other archaeologists working in Alaska today. Thanks to Qanirtuuq Inc., Quinhagak youth have been paid to work as helpers at the site, but not as archaeological interns.

4. Dennis Griffin (2004) excavated at Nash Harbor on Nunivak Island, and the State of Alaska did major excavations at Hooper Bay (Hansen 2009).
5. While Knecht’s work has provided a reasonable time frame for the massacre, we will not have truly reliable dates until the radiocarbon dates are reported and calibrated. That said, the approximate date Knecht’s work has already provided has been very useful in understanding the sequence of events that took place during the period of bow-and-arrow warfare in Southwest Alaska (Fienup-Riordan and Rearden 2016:16–18, 74–76; see also Pratt 2013:29).
6. Rick Knecht immediately informed Warren Jones of Qanirtuuq Inc. and the Quinhagak Traditional

- Council when human remains were found. According to Knecht (pers. comm. June 30, 2015), all were reburied away from the site by Quinhagak residents.
7. Many of the object types that elders examined are described in detail in the ethnographic literature for Southwest Alaska (Fienup-Riordan 2005b, 2007; Nelson 1899). Readers interested in particular objects—throwing boards, wooden spoons, net gauges, squirrel snares—should consult these sources.
 8. Citations following elders' names refer to the Quinhagak Gathering Transcripts, August 25–28, 2014, Calista Education and Culture, Anchorage, Alaska. During the gathering, I recorded nine 90-minute cassette tapes. Over the next six months, these tapes were transcribed and translated by CEC oral historian, Alice Rearden, producing 350 pages. Digital copies were also made of the original tapes, which are stored at Surreal Studios in Anchorage. Transcripts are archived at the CEC Anchorage offices.
 9. Agaligmiut is one of a number of precontact sites in Southwest Alaska containing such multiroomed features (see Fienup-Riordan and Rearden 2016:22; Frink 2006:113–114; Griffin 2004:73–74; Nelson 1899:250–251).
 10. Arrow- and spear-point covers were typically small, two-sided wooden sheaths bound together with sinew. They were, in fact, difficult to make as they involved precisely splitting a shaped preform, examples of which have been found at the Nunalleq site. For examples of finished covers, see Fienup-Riordan 2007:144; Fienup-Riordan and Rearden 2016:fig. 30; Nelson 1899:plate LVII.
 11. At the end of the 2015 field season, this number was closer to 50,000 artifacts. This does not include natural materials—soil, sticks, insects, feathers, animal bones, etc.—which were also collected. Nunalleq is noteworthy for the preservation of organic material, including wood, cordage, basketry, and woven grass items not usually preserved in precontact archaeological contexts.
 12. Both are correct, as all ivory is tooth enamel.
 13. Atertagagaq's story is summarized and discussed in Fienup-Riordan and Rearden 2012:21–26, and a full bilingual text of the story as told by John Phillip of Kongiganak is being prepared for publication (Rearden and Fienup-Riordan in press).

14. To “become aware” refers to the point at which children gain consciousness of the world and begin to remember their experiences. In Yup'ik it is marked by the phrase “*Ellangellemni* [When I first became aware].”
15. For a detailed discussion of Yup'ik understandings of personal responsibility, see Fienup-Riordan 2005a:43–77.
16. Although it is unlikely that songs survived the massacre at Agaligmiut, Aatassuk is evoking shared history and common ancestry between past peoples and Yup'ik people today.

REFERENCES

- Andrew, Frank Sr.
2008 *Paitarkiutenka / My Legacy to You*. University of Washington Press, Seattle.
- Barker, James, Ann Fienup-Riordan, and Theresa John
2010 *Yupiit Yuraryarait / Yup'ik Ways of Dancing*. University of Alaska Press, Fairbanks.
- Fienup-Riordan, Ann
2005a *Wise Words of the Yup'ik People: We Talk to You Because We Love You*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln.
2005b *Yup'ik Elders at the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin: Fieldwork Turned on Its Head*. University of Washington Press, Seattle.
2007 *Yuungnaqpiallerput / The Way We Genuinely Live: Masterworks of Yup'ik Science and Survival*. University of Washington Press, Seattle.
- Fienup-Riordan, Ann, and Alice Rearden
2012 *Ellavut / Our Yup'ik World and Weather: Continuity and Change on the Bering Sea Coast*. University of Washington Press, Seattle.
2016 *Anguyiim Nalliini / Time of Warring: The History of Bow-and-Arrow Warfare in Southwest Alaska*. University of Alaska Press and Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska Fairbanks.
- Frink, Lisa
2006 Social Identity and the Yup'ik Eskimo Village Tunnel System in Precolonial and Colonial Western Coastal Alaska. *Archaeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association* 16:109–125.
- Griffin, Dennis
2004 *Ellikarmiut: Changing Lifeways in an Alaskan Community*. Aurora Monograph Series, Alaska Anthropological Association, Anchorage.

Hansen, Diane

- 2009 Fauna from the 2006 Excavations at Hooper Bay Old Town Road, Hooper Bay, Alaska. Draft report to the Alaska Office of History and Archaeology, Department of Natural Resources, Anchorage.

Knecht, Rick

- 2014 Nunalleq: Rescuing an Eskimo Village from the Sea. *British Archaeology*. May/June:42–49.

Nelson, Edward W.

- 1899 *The Eskimo about Bering Strait*. Bureau of American Ethnology Annual Report no. 18, pt. 1, 1896–97. Washington, DC.

Pratt, Kenneth L.

- 2013 Deconstructing the Aglurmiut Migration: An Analysis of Accounts from the Russian-American Period to the Present. *Alaska Journal of Anthropology* 11(1–2):17–36.

Pratt, Kenneth L., editor

- 2009 *Chasing the Dark: Perspectives on Place, History and Alaska Native Land Claims*. U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Alaska Region, ANCSA Office, Anchorage.

Rearden, Alice, and Ann Fienup-Riordan

- 2013 *Erinaput Unguvaniartut / So Our Voices Will Live: Quinhagak History and Oral Traditions*. Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

in press *Qanemciit Amllertut / There Are Many Stories to Tell: Traditional Tales and Narratives from Southwest Alaska*. University of Alaska Press, Fairbanks.