

Submitted for publication 2007
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CHAPTER FIVE

The 1797 Siege of Kenai: Human Agency in Colonial
Conflict^{1, 2}

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Introduction

In 1787 a Russian consortium of investors headed by Pavel Lebedev-Lastochkin established a fortified fur trading post, St. George Redoubt, in Dena'ina territory at the Kasilof River in Cook Inlet and four years later, in 1791, Lebedev-Lastochkin established a second fortified fur trading post, St. Nicholas Redoubt, twelve miles north at the mouth of the Kenai River (Black 2004:113-4) (See Figure 1). With the founding of these two posts and the presence of Alexandrovsk, a Shelikhov Company post established in 1786 just south of Dena'ina territory at Nanwalek, European colonial expansion was squarely planted in the midst of the Dena'ina. In the emerging European world system of the 18th and 19th centuries it was inevitable that a European nation would come to dominate the resource rich Cook Inlet basin and its indigenous Dena'ina occupants; that nation, however, would not be Russia. It would be another one-hundred years, almost two decades after the Alaska purchase by the United States, before an industrial salmon canning industry would cause social, demographic, technological and ideological changes such that traditional Dena'ina culture would be significantly impacted by Western colonial expansion (Boraas 2002). But in the late 18th century until the end of the 19th century, the Dena'ina were the dominant culture in the Cook Inlet basin despite a century of Russian presence.

¹Originally presented as a paper at the Alaskan Anthropology Association Conference, Anchorage, Alaska, April 4, 2002.

²Numerous scholars have written about the conflicts surrounding the Russian colonizers that occurred in Cook Inlet during the late 1700s. Bancroft (in a section written by Ivan Petroff) (1886) and Chevigny (1965) characterized the drama through historical narrative. The story is recast as historical fiction by Ethel and Paul Roesch (1990). Mischler (1985) provided a summary of the historic accounts and Solovjova and Vovnyanko (1999, 2002) have described the events from a histiographic perspective. Recently Black (2004) provided a contextual overview.

--insert Figure 1 Map about here--

The Dena'ina were able to maintain cultural sovereignty and resist Russian hegemony in part because of a series of battles and skirmishes between 1786 and 1797 which take on the character of an indigenous siege in which Dena'ina forces attacked and defeated the merchant-militia of the Russian Lebedev and Shelikhov Companies. The Kenai Dena'ina success in these encounters contributed significantly to the withdrawal of the Lebedev Company from Cook Inlet and subsequent Russian presence in their territory consisted of a few operators of a small trading post, first by the Shelikhov Company (1798-1799) and then by its successor the Russian American Company (1799-1867) and, after 1841, a small number of Orthodox church personnel; the whole contingent generally totaling about ten in number.

Initially the Dena'ina forcibly resisted Russian incursions into their territory but eventually many villages entered into trade alliances with one or the other of the two redoubts to obtain items made of European manufacture in exchange for sea otter and other furs. Reciprocal trade was undermined, however, by two acts perpetrated by the Russian merchant militia of the Lebedev and Shelikhov companies. First, because of their economic structure the Russian traders of the Cook Inlet redoubts were, in effect, competitors and undermined one another's trade alliances through sabotage directed at villages allied with an opposing fort. Second, subjugation of Dena'ina women as concubines and prostitutes and child abuse by Russian men was intolerable. To rid themselves of oppression, the Dena'ina chose to wage war and because of their success were able to exert a measure of control of their destiny by driving a corrupt mercantile company away from their homeland and divert Russian expansion from Cook Inlet. Whereas history is seemingly subject to forces beyond individual and local control, the outcome of specific events are subject to human agency and the will of individuals who make choices, sometimes with significant consequences—such were the decisions made by the late 18th century Dena'ina.

The Initial Resistance

Dena'ina conflict with Russian colonists began before the first Cook Inlet forts were built. In 1784 Grigori Shelikhov and his 130-man merchant-militia invaded Kodiak

killing several hundred (possibly over a thousand) of the island's Alutiiq population and was able to establish the first intended permanent colony in Alaska (Dmytryshyn et al. 1988:299-300; Black 1992, 2004). The Dena'ina became directly involved in confronting Russian colonial expansion the next year when in 1785 a Shelikhov Company party attempted to exert control of Afognak and Shuyak Islands in the northern Kodiak Archipelago south of Cook Inlet. In an effort to block northward expansion an alliance of Dena'ina and Alutiiq attacked Shelikhov's men reportedly killing all of them (Tikhmenev 1978:16-17; Dmytryshyn et al. 1988:310; also see Petroff 1882:99). In 1786 Konstantin Samoilov and Vasilii Malakhov led a counter attack that destroyed the Alutiiq/Dena'ina alliance and established Shelikhov posts on Afognak and Aleksandrovsk Redoubt at in outer Cook Inlet (Tikhmenev 1978:17; Pierce 1990:440; Black 1992:174-6).

The Dena'ina also resisted British incursions into Cook Inlet and appear to have been responsible for the disappearance in 1786 of the trade ship Sea Otter commanded by William Tipping (Black 2004:124-5). Not all European incursions were resisted, however. The same year, 1786, the Trading Bay area Dena'ina engaged in several weeks of peaceful fur trading with Nathaniel Portlock and George Dixon (Breresford 1789; Portlock 1789). Portlock developed a mutually respectful relationship with a Dena'ina qeshqa or chief he called "The Factor" because of his role in facilitating trade between the Dena'ina and the British. Once their own furs ran out the Trading Bay area Dena'ina acted as middle men extending trade to interior Dena'ina presumably in the Lake Clark and Mulchatna area. The qeshqa tried to enlist Portlock's support to attack the Russians then establishing themselves in the southern Inlet but Portlock declined (Portlock 1789: August 11th).

In 1787, the Lebedev Company succeeded in building St. George Redoubt at the mouth of the Kasilof River³ and Dena'ina hostilities toward Russians continued. A report by the Kodiak-based Shelikhov Company manager Evstratii Delarov stated that in 1788 four Russians at St. George Redoubt and ten of the Shelikhov Company at Alexandrovsk Redoubt were killed by "Kenai natives" (Dmytryshyn et al. 1988:385). In 1790 Salvadore Fidalgo visited the Shelikhov

³ Solovjova and Vovnyanko (2002:11-2) believe the initial Lebedev Post may have been at the Kenai River mouth, not Kasilof. The confusion seems to be whether documents translated as "Kenai Bay" refer to Cook Inlet in general or specifically to the Kenai River estuary. Russian and Spanish documents refer to the post as being at the Kasilof River mouth.

post of Alexandrovsk Redoubt at Nanwalek and one of his officers, Estevan Mondofía, and a small crew were sent in a packet boat to the Lebedev post at St. George Redoubt. Fidalgo reported that both the Shelikhov post and Lebedev post were heavily fortified against Native attack and three Russians had been killed by the Dena'ina just eight days before Mondofía arrived (Patrick 1981:360).

Dena'ina attempts to prevent the establishment of Russian redoubts in Cook Inlet failed. An apparent reason was the decision to engage in a mutually beneficial fur trade obtaining desirable European goods in exchange for furs.

Trade Alliances and Sabotage

After the second Lebedev Company post at St. Nicholas Redoubt was established in 1791 the Dena'ina and other south-central Natives became embroiled in conflict between the two redoubts and allied artels of the Lebedev Company. To obtain trade items a qeshqa, or senior chief of a village, would ally to one or the other redoubts: St. George at Kasilof or St. Nicholas at Kenai. The structure involved an elaboration of the Dena'ina redistributive economy centered on the qeshqa (Fall 1987). In the case of the fur trade the villagers, called qukilaga or 'their clan helpers', (Kari 2007:xxx) would hunt and collect sea otter and other pelts and exchange them with their qeshqa for trade items. The qeshqa then traded the pelts to the Russian manager in exchange for further trade goods and the process repeated itself. The alliance was often cemented through the exchange of "hostages" though the term is misleading because each side willingly exchanged a few men as a demonstration of good faith in the alliance and they were treated well (Black 1989:50). Trade alliances served to channel trade goods to the Dena'ina and furs to the Russians and to protect the redoubt and its satellites from attack. As Fall (1987) has pointed out, the position of the qeshqa was enhanced during the fur trade because as the key figure in the exchange the position accrued enhanced status. But the qeshqa's also became a target for sabotage in the ensuing trade wars between the two Lebedev posts, St. George and St. Nicholas, and also involved the Shelikhov post of Aleksandrovsk.

Though they became land-based, each fort started out as a maritime expedition (Berkh 1977: 60-2, 64) and was organized as though it were a ship in the sea-going fur trade where each voyage was backed by a unique set of

investors who financially supported a fur-collecting expedition that only lasted several years. After the ship returned, the furs were sold, profits dispersed among employees and investors, and the company disbanded. Using this same company structure on land meant that each fort in Cook Inlet were competitors vying for the scarce sea otter particularly of the upper Inlet (Boraas 2002; Solovjova and Vovnyanko 2002). Pavel Lebedev-Lastochkin was the principle investor in St. George and St. Nicholas but of the 22 investors in St. George Redoubt and 16 in St. Nicholas Redoubt, only three including Lebedev-Lastochkin, had a common interest in both redoubts (Berkh 1977:60-2). At sea, one ship could simply move away from the other to resolve conflicts over resources but the same company structure fixed at redoubts on land meant competition over scarce resources could not be resolved in the same way. Each employee, from supercargo to laborer, knew that any pelt obtained by the opposing fort was one less for him and a corresponding reduction in profit and sabotage ensued to minimize the profits of competitors.

In a complex sequence of attack and counter-attack, the two Lebedev factions and the Shelikhov Company engaged in corporate sabotage of one-another's fur gathering operations primarily by assaulting the qeshqa's or Native hostages allied with an opposite redoubt. The sabotage attempted to accomplish two aims: first, impede the flow of furs to the competitor, and second, disrupt alliances leaving a redoubt or its satellite post vulnerable to Native attack.

--insert Table 1 about here--

Table 1 summarizes the attacks of this time period as described in Russian reports and letters, many self-serving, and Dena'ina oral tradition of which the latter adds an important dimension to our understanding of the conflict. Attacks perpetrated by the Russians against the Dena'ina came in the form of assault, killing, kidnapping (often involving torture), or theft and were directed at a qeshqa allied with an opposite redoubt, his wife, or a Native hostage. An estimated 138 instances occurred and there were probably many more unreported. Some of the attacks by the St. Nicholas post were against Kamchadal, ethnic Itel'men or possibly Koryak, that made up 29 or the initial 67 St. George Redoubt contingent (Pierce and Donnelly 1979:39). There is no evidence of an attack of a Russian against Russian. The Dena'ina retaliated killing an

estimated 94 Russians throughout the siege. The Manager, Grigor Konovalov, and Assistant manager, Amos Balushin, of St. Nicholas Redoubt and Peter Kolomin, Manager of St. George Redoubt were investigated by Russian authorities in Siberia 1792) and by Archimandrite Ioasaf (1795) for their role in the attacks and were exonerated (Pierce and Donnelly 1979:44,84) probably under pressure from Shelikhov who was seeking a trade monopoly and sought to cast a positive light on Alaskan colonization.

When George Vancouver visited Cook Inlet in 1794 he makes no mention of St. George Redoubt though he made an excellent chart of the entire inlet so the fort must have been abandoned by this time and the men consolidated with the St. Nicholas Redoubt or the new post of St. Constantin in Prince William Sound established in 1792. Thus the acts of sabotage between the Lebedev posts occurred between 1791, the founding of the Kenai post, and Vancouver's 1794 visit. After 1794 sabotage continued between Lebedev and Shelikhov posts expanding to Voskressensk (established in 1792) a Shelikhov post at Seward and St. Constantine Redoubt.

Concubines, Prostitution, and Child Abuse

The second major reason for the Dena'ina attacks on the Russian posts was in retaliation for taking their women as concubines, in forced prostitution, or for child abuse. The beauty of Dena'ina women appears to have played a role in gender abuse perpetrated by frontier men far from social and legal restraint. In 1786 Beresford, on the Portlock and Dixon expedition, admired the attractiveness of Dena'ina woman and John Sheriff, a master's mate on the 1794 Vancouver expedition stated "They [Dena'ina women] are in my opinion the finest Indian women I have seen, not excepting those at the Sandwich or Society Island, "(Sheriff n.d. cited in Menzies 1798:130 footnote 88). Petroff (1882) also comments on the attractiveness of Dena'ina women. Dena'ina oral tradition praises the beauty of their women but at the same time laments that this made them sexually desirable to Euro-Americans and targets of abuse (Alexandra Lindgren, personal communication, 1999).

The practice of keeping and sharing Native women was widespread in 18th century colonial Russia; on his 1794 tour of St. Nicholas Redoubt, George Vancouver described, in addition to three large main buildings, about 23 small buildings for use as storage, a school and, "...the residence of such of the natives as were the companions, or the immediate attendants of the Russians," (Vancouver

1984:1258). Sheriff stated that the Lebedev Russians at St. Constantine Redoubt in Prince William Sound each had a Dena'ina woman from Cook Inlet and there were several whom they all shared who "granted every request," (Sheriff n.d. cited in Menzies 1979:130, footnote 88); although whether "requests" for sex were granted without some form of coercion is debatable. Menzies cites Second Lieutenant James Johnstone, on the Chatham who observed in 1794, "... the Russians retain in their service a considerable number of women as well as men of the Natives of Cook's Gulph [sic, Cook Inlet], of whose fidelity and attachment they speak in the highest terms of praise and employ them indiscriminately with their own parties on the most confidential services, (Menzies 1993:129-130). Presumably the "confidential services" involved sex.

When Archimandrite Ioasaf arrived in Alaska in 1795 he was incensed at the Russian treatment of Native women. Ioasaf wrote that "Everyone keeps one or more mistresses, which is very offensive to the American natives," (Dmytryshyn et al. 1988:465). Alexander Baranov had an Alutiiq mistress (whom he married after his Russian wife died) and when a Native man had an affair with her, Baranov exiled him after shaving his eyebrows and hair and forced him to run the gauntlet, a punishment capable of inflicting death (Pierce and Donnelly 1979:79). Ioasaf further observed that Russian promshlekkini frequently take Native women as prostitutes and that sometimes these were pre-teen girls. Ioasaf wrote:

Not only are the barracks full of prostitutes, but....he [Baranov] instructed the baidarka leaders that not only the old hunters but the newly arrived should keep mistresses openly. At present the one who does not keep a girl is despised....They exchange them [Native women] frequently too, though some of the girls are less than ten years old, (Pierce and Donnelly 1979:79-80).

Hieromonk Makarii corroborated Ioasaf's observation stating the Russian traders took both married women and young daughters as sexual partners (Solovjova and Vovnyanko 2002:21). Father Juvenali had been killed before he could write a report of his 1796 visit to St. Nicholas Redoubt so there is no direct clerical observation of forced prostitution or child molestation at Kenai. But there is other evidence of gender intimidation.

In 1791 when Russians from St. Nicholas Redoubt captured the daughter of a qeshqa a riot ensued (Pierce and

Donnelly 1979:41). In 1883 museum collector Johan Jacobsen, recorded an attack by Lebedev Company Russians on a Dena'ina village in Kachemak Bay called Soonnoondra (Jacobsen 1977:196-9). Jacobson's information was provided by "an old Indian," presumably a Dena'ina, from Seldovia whose father had lived at the village. According to Jacobsen, a large party of Russians went to Soonnoondra about 1794 to steal women and, "they took as many of the young girls and women as they could back to the fort and kept them as wives," (Jacobsen 1977:198). Another encounter occurred in the Iliamna area where Hanna Breece, a teacher from 1909-1912 at Iliamna who had anthropology training at the University of Chicago, recounted an oral tradition story that told of Russians at the Iliamna artel taking Dena'ina women after bludgeoning their men as they returned from a hunt (Jacobs 1995:97-8).

An Iliamna Dena'ina story involving child abuse was recorded by Joan Townsend (1965:317-9) and the severity of the Dena'ina reaction suggests the abuse was either brutally physical or sexual in nature. Like the Breece story, the exact date of the event is not specified but Townsend places it between 1792 and 1800 and it is associated with the Lebedev Company artel at Russian Point in Pedro Bay on Lake Iliamna. At Pedro Bay the Russian and Dena'ina children played together and the Dena'ina children often went to the Russian post. According to the story the Dena'ina children were mistreated by the Russians and the infuriated Dena'ina men killed all of the Russians and burned the post. During the attack the son of the Russian post foreman was at the Dena'ina village a thousand yards away playing with the chief's son. When the incensed Dena'ina returned they wanted to kill the Russian boy too, but the chief prohibited it and adopted him into the tribe as his son.

As a consequence of forced prostitution venereal disease was rampant in the late 1700s which Baranov, and perhaps other managers, treated with wine laced with mercury (Pierce and Donnelly 1979:67). This treatment was common in 18th century Euro-America and triggered excessive sweating and other emetic responses as the body purged itself of the toxic heavy metal expelling venereal pathogens at the same time. Unfortunately, accumulation of mercury causes a neurological problem known as "mad hatter's disease" which triggers bizarre behavior including excessive aggression and may have contributed to Russian cruelty in the late 18th century.

In 1796 the Ahtna, aided by a Kenai Dena'ina named C'uket Ta' (literally "Father of Buys Something"), killed all 13 of a Lebedev Company party making incursions into the Copper River territory from Kenai as retaliation for stealing some of their women (see Davydov 1977:189; Tikhmenev 1978:42; John and John 1986:75-86; and Kari 1986:75 for elements of the story). Gavriil Davydov, writing in 1802, reported the leader of the ill-fated expedition, Samoilov, was crucified, castrated, and had his severed penis shoved into his mouth and told: "You took away our women--now see if you can [do] anything with them." Then the Ahtna blinded him and finally killed him (Davydov 1977:189). Pierce (1990:440) feels the Davydov account is embellished because it would have been seven years after the event that Davydov heard it. The rest of Davydov's account, however, agrees with the Johns' story so the torture of Samoilov, however lurid, may be an accurate reflection of Dena'ina and Ahtna feelings toward the Lebedev oppressors whether or not it happened just that way. (For another version see Chevigny 1965)

Traditional Dena'ina society was largely egalitarian in terms of male/female relations (Osgood 1976:137-8). A woman could be a geshqa, and many were shaman or performed the role of the dreamer, doctor, sky reader, or prophet--all esteemed roles in a village (Boraas and Peter 1996). Moreover, as a matrilineal society, removal of women would have disrupted the clan alliance system that was critical to their sedentary food gathering economy. Both non-consensual sex and child-abuse are wrong in Dena'ina society and abusive acts of dominance were abhorrent no doubt contributing to the decision to counter-attack the Russian posts.

The Story of Jadequyuł

Dena'ina oral tradition records several hostile encounters between the Lebedev Company at Redoubt St. Nicholas and the Dena'ina. Although the date is not specified, Nickefor Alexan, a Dena'ina from Tyonek, recorded one account titled "Russian Settlement: Where Knik People Made Their Mistake," (Alexan n.d.; see also Standifer and Chickalusian 1979). The events may have occurred between 1791 and 1794 during construction of Redoubt St. Nicholas since the story includes a Russian work party cutting poles for the fort along the Kenai River. In this story, Dena'ina from Knik in the Susitna area traveled south and after conflict with the Tyonek Dena'ina intended to attack Redoubt St. Nicholas which the

Dena'ina called an uch'daltin ("uystaltin" in the Alexan manuscript) a 'palisaded fort' and derives from a traditional Dena'ina word for a spiritually induced protective shield the Dena'ina created around themselves in warfare (Kari 2007:xxx). According to Alexan, as the Knik Dena'ina traveled to St. Nicholas Redoubt the young men became enflamed with the passion of war. When they arrived the Russians, unaware of the impending attack, let eight of the Dena'ina leaders into St. Nicholas Redoubt and the others were kept outside guarded by musket-carrying sentries at the gate and had canons in the blockhouse trained on them probably loaded with grapeshot. One of the young warriors outside, overzealous with war fever, impetuously attacked a guard who diverted his spear and was able to lock the gate. In the ensuing battle the Russians killed all of the Knik Dena'ina including the eight leaders inside the redoubt.

Alexan recounts a second part of the story. Three days later a young man named Jadequyuł (spelled Jaydecuoyouth in the Alexan version) which means 'as much as his legs could carry him' and his elderly uncle went to St. Nicholas Redoubt from their home at Kenai Lake to trade. As the two sat near the fort walls a Russian, thinking it was a renewal of the Knik attack, shot the old man dead. Jadequyuł hid his uncle's body in the brush and fled back toward Kenai Lake. At the same time a party of Russians was somewhere up the Kenai River in two nearby camps cutting poles for the fort. That night while they were sleeping Jadequyuł speared one of the sentries through the heart and then clubbed the second when he came to investigate. He then set upon the sleeping Russians clubbing them one after another until one awoke and his screams alerted the camp. The Standifer and Chickalusion (1979) version indicates 50 of the work party were killed although not all were necessarily Russians: some may have been Alutiiq, Aleut, Kamchadal or even Dena'ina employees. Jadequyuł escaped in his bidarka going down river past St. Nicholas Redoubt at night, then down the coast to the Kasilof River where he went upriver to Tustumena Lake hiding out in the Kenai Mountains at the head of the lake.

The Russian search for him was fruitless and they threatened the Kenai Dena'ina with reprisals if they did not bring Jadequyuł in. Jadequyuł's clansmen went to his mountain sanctuary and together they engaged in a spiritual steam bath and ritual meal. At last Jadequyuł, without discussion, made his will and boldly returned to St. Nicholas Redoubt where he was met by armed Russians who he

asked to dance his death dance. The Russian manager (either Grigor Konovalov or Stephan Zaikov) allowed this then demanded to know why he attacked the Russian work party and Jadequyuł said it was in retaliation for killing his uncle and showed them the body which he had hid. The Russians knew they had shot a man and, according to the Dena'ina story, no action was taken against Jadequyuł because the Russians admired his bravery. It might be added that in freeing Jadequyuł the Russian manager diffused further reprisals over the incident.

The Final Battle

The climax of the Siege of Kenai occurred in the summer of 1797 when the Dena'ina attacked the Lebedev artels at Tyonek and Iliamna and followed with an attack on the main post of Redoubt St. Nicholas at Kenai. Unlike the well-known Battle of Sitka (1801) in which Tlingit forces defeated those of the newly formed Russian America Company, there are no first-hand accounts by British or American observers. But through Dena'ina oral tradition and second-hand Russian sources an outline of the events emerges.

The Tyonek attack is described in Nikifor Alexan's (n.d.) "History of Tyonek" with another version recounted by Vladimir Stafeev (1985; retold in Mishler 1985:19-21a). Alexan's version is told within the context of a shaman battle which, in traditional Dena'ina mythology, is indicative of tensions splitting the people into two ideological camps with each side represented by a powerful shaman (Boraas and Peter 1996:192-3). From the storyteller's point-of-view, the shaman "from the other side" is evil while one's own shaman represents the correct way. Alexan states that a stalwart but disturbed man named Hkokuz was affected by the will of two powerful shamans which caused Hkokuz to kill the Russian post commander at the Tyonek artel. That night the entire contingent of fifty Russians (possibly including Native employees) were killed in a rampage. In Stafeev's (1985) account the Russians provoked the Dena'ina attack by stealing women and winter food supplies and intimidation through beatings. As with most Dena'ina oral tradition, the calandrical date is not mentioned but I place it in 1797 because it generally conforms with Baranov's account although the number killed is different. Baranov wrote in April, 1798: "The Kenai people arose because of their [the Lebedev Company's] cruelties and wiped out their two artels on Kodiak [all other sources agree it was Tyonek, not Kodiak] and Iliamna, killing twenty-one Russians" (Pierce and Donnelly 1979:92).

In 1861 Tikhmenev, chronicler of the Russian American Company gives this account of the Tyonek and Iliamna part of the siege: "Dissension among the Russians and persecution of the natives reached such an extreme that the infuriated Kenais destroyed the two outposts at Iliamna and Tyonek killing twenty Russians and almost one hundred subject natives" (Tikhmenev 1978:46).

The attacks appear to have shifted to the main post of St. Nicholas Redoubt at Kenai. Davydov writing from information gathered in 1802 describes escalation as follows:

The Lebedev Company collapsed...all its settlements were destroyed one after another and the settlers killed. In Kenai Bay [Cook Inlet] the savages gathered near the fort and asked to be allowed in to trade with the animal skins they had brought with them. Once inside the fort they sat on the ground as was the custom. When they saw that the Russians were not armed, at a signal from the chief they suddenly leapt on them and stabbed them all with daggers they had hidden under their cloaks (Davydov 1977:188).

Davydov did not visit Kenai, but the detail and accuracy of his Dena'ina ethnography and language studies (Davydov 1977:197-202, 241-9) indicate he interviewed one or more Dena'ina at considerable length while at Kodiak and it is probable he heard the details in the course of these interviews. Baranov, writing in 1800, describes the 1797 St. Nicholas attack as follows:

I sailed in July [1798] to Kenai to quiet the people, who were in a state of revolt after Lebedev's occupation. They killed over one hundred men among themselves...many were made bold by the success they had (Pierce and Donnelly 1979:107).

Kiril Khlebnikov, a Russian American Company agent at Okhotsk and Kamchatka (1801-1812) and later Assistant Manager in Sitka (1818-1832), also recorded information on the battles at Kenai. During the early 1800s he would have had access to oral reports from ship captains and others sailing from the colonies and was a self-taught scholar who kept detailed notes (Pierce 1990:229-230; Liapunova and Fedorova 1994:xv-xvi). Khlebnikov wrote:

The Lebedev Company remained in Kenai...up to 1797. The bad behavior of the leaders of these detachments was not only

contrary to the good intentions of the partners, but also antagonized the natives and the hunters of other companies. At first they controlled the Kenaitsy [Kenai Dena'ina] by force, [and] irritated them to such an extent that they killed more than 25 Russians in various places and would have vanquished all of them if...Malakhov had not arrived in time to give assistance to the besieged fort and to disperse the savages," (Khlebnikov 1994:41).

Tikhmenev also describes the siege of Redoubt St. Nicholas:

When Baranov learned of the extreme danger threatening the remnants of Lebedev's company, he sent Malakhov to their aid with a well-armed party, who fortunately arrived in time. They found the fort under siege by the Kenais, who were prepared to set fire to it (Tikhmenev 1978:46).

These reports agree on the following: in 1797 the Dena'ina attacked the Russians at Tyonek, Iliamna and Kenai. Between 25 and 40 Russians were killed and 100 Natives, presumably Dena'ina sympathetic to the Russians, were killed by outraged Dena'ina. There is no record of the number of Dena'ina attackers who were killed by Russians but it was probably large. As the Dena'ina were about to set fire to Redoubt St. Nicholas, Vasilii Malakhov with a detachment of Russians from Alexandrovsk Redoubt arrived. The Lebedev Company abandoned Kenai, leaving in the spring of 1798 and Malakhov and a small detachment of Shelikhov personnel occupied the post (Khlebnikov 1994:41). The Lebedev Company withdrawal from Alaska involved intrigue between Shelikhov and Lebedev-Lastochkin back in Siberia (Solovjova and Vovnyanko 2002), but the precipitating event was the siege of Kenai complemented by similar attacks in Prince William Sound by the Chugach Alutiiq.

The Dena'ina continued to threaten Redoubt St. Nicholas after it was taken over by the Shelikhov Company in 1798. Baranov wrote to Larionov of his July, 1798 trip to Kenai:

I sailed in July [1798] first to Kenai Bay to quiet the people who were in a state of revolt after Lebedev's occupation. They killed over one hundred men among themselves and gangs of robbers were increasing in many places. Many were threatening our establishment on the Kenai River [St. Nicholas Redoubt] which we took over from Lebedev's Company. Luckily even before my arrival the rebel leaders were caught by the men who did not want war and

most of them were exterminated. Several hostages were given to our leader Vasilii Malakhov, but in remote places there are still many who were made bold by the success they had and they think about robbery and raids (Pierce and Donnelly 1979:107).

Later in the same letter, Baranov again refers to the Iliamna Dena'ina killing three Russians and describes the Dena'ina rebellion as follows:

The natives living close to the fort [St. Nicholas Redoubt] organized a plot to exterminate Russians everywhere on the Bay [Cook Inlet]. The plot was discovered by accident and the leaders confessed....The natives readily admitted that their intention had been to exterminate us just as had been done with Lebedev's men, and to plunder all Russian property (Pierce and Donnelly 1979:115-116).

Hostilities resulting in loss of life ended after an 1801 Dena'ina attack on Russian American Company agents at Iliamna.

Consequences of the Siege of Kenai

In the late 1790s, the Shelikhov Company and its successors and, after 1799, the Russian American Company, were in the process of selecting a site for a mainland capitol to replace the one at Kodiak. The purpose of the mainland capitol was threefold: first, to gain greater access to sea otter the principle commodity of the company, second, to extend Russian influence to an area not yet effectively controlled by England or Spain, and third, to enable the Russians to feed themselves through subsistence agriculture. Selecting the site of the mainland capitol fell to Alexander Baranof, Chief Manager in Alaska, who, of course, selected Sitka.

One of the factors that contributed to the failure of the Russian American Company in the mid-19th century was the location of the capitol in southeast Alaska. Because of that location not only was the Russian American Company overextended making communication difficult, decision-making slow, and transportation costly, but was unable to feed itself in a European manner (Golovin 1979(1862):34; Gibson 1976). To satisfy the Russian diet, grain for bread flour, potatoes, and other foodstuffs had to be shipped overland from Siberia and then across the North Pacific to Southeast Alaska: if the food arrived at all it was often rotted and unfit to eat. Alaska never had more than about

850 Russians because that was the carrying capacity of this remarkably inefficient system.

Agriculture is marginal due to the climate and soil of southeast Alaska and Kodiak, though it received considerable agricultural attention by the Shelikhov Company (Gibson 1976:93-7), is primarily suited to raising cattle. A failed agricultural experiment at Yakutat also suffered from an unsuitable location. But there are a few places in Alaska where subsistence agriculture of a scale needed to grow vegetables, grain, and to sustain dairy cattle is possible: these include parts of the Matanuska and Tanana Valley's and parts of the Cook Inlet basin. Had Baranov chosen Kenai as the mainland capitol the Russians would have certainly discovered the subsistence agricultural potential of the Cook Inlet hinterland. European vegetables and other foods were grown by the small population at 19th century Kenai and Ninilchik for local consumption but their agricultural potential was not realized perhaps because of their less than favorable coastal locations where microclimatic conditions do not favor agriculture. That Baranov and other managers ignored the agricultural possibilities of the Kenai Peninsula was considered deplorable in 1859 by State Councilor Sergii Kostlivtsev and Captain Pavel Golovin (1863-64) and a major failure of the Russian American Company. They write:

[We] think that the country [Cook Inlet] is adapted to permanent colonization and especially the Kenai country is remarkable for its moderate climate, fertile soil, rich pasture and abundance of forest and game. The company, however, when urged to colonize this part of their domain answered that the Kenai country was "entirely unfit for settlement" (Kostlivtsev and Golovin 1863-4:43).

Golovin further criticizes the Company for not actively seeking areas for subsistence agriculture like the Kenai Peninsula (Golovin 1979:35).

It would appear from the sequence of events and from his letters and documents that the 1797 "troubles at Kenai" had a significant effect in deflecting Baranov's mainland capitol preference away from the hostile Natives of Cook Inlet (and Prince William Sound) and toward Southeast Alaska. Before choosing Sitka, and before the Tlingit attacks there, Baranov was clearly antagonistic toward the Kenai Dena'ina and aware of plots to exterminate Russians in Cook Inlet by the war-club wielding, slat-armor clad Dena'ina (see above). In June, 1800 Baranov wrote to

Malakhov at St. Nicholas Redoubt:

...the spirit of rebellion is very strong in them [the Dena'ina] and all their movements should be watched. When you come into contact with them take precautions. Let us not be deceived by flattery and meekness in these bloodthirsty barbarian people (Pierce and Donnelly 1979:105).

The same year (1800) Baranov wrote that the Dena'ina of Cook Inlet were in a state of "unrest" and referred to them again as "barbarians" (Pierce and Donnelly 1979:120).

Baranov was clearly influenced by the siege of Kenai and it is reasonable to assume this weighed heavily on his decision to site his capitol in Sitka, not Kenai. In choosing southeast Alaska over the Kenai Peninsula he, in effect, traded subsistence agricultural for temporarily lucrative sea otter hunting dooming his company to ultimate failure due to its inability to feed itself and to territorial over-extension. And, of course, he encountered the formidable Tlingit, but by that time the decision had been made.

In effect the Kenai Dena'ina defeated the Russian merchant-militia, and the siege of Kenai became a major event in their history and the history of Alaska. With the number of Russian occupants on the Kenai Peninsula reduced to no more than a handful of traders and priests, the Dena'ina preserved sovereign control of their territory for the latter part of the 18th century and most of the 19th century. Not until after the Alaska purchase by the United States and the establishment of commercial fish canneries in 1882 did Dena'ina cultural sovereignty erode to the point where the institutions and ideology of the old ways of their traditional hunting and gathering culture began to disappear. Though Kenai may have been perceived as "Russian" by the Russian America Company, Cook Inlet was dominated by the Dena'ina who maintained their language, continued to practice much of their traditional religion, and maintained their redistributive economy with its matrilineal/avunculocal clan system. Had more than 100 Russians continued to operate in their midst and the colonial population grown, the pace of cultural change at Kenai would have significantly accelerated during the early 19th century.

That is not to say that the Kenai Dena'ina were unaffected by Russian influence. The smallpox epidemic of 1838 to 1839 generated a spiritual dilemma resulting in

adoption of some elements of Orthodoxy including using church Slavonic as a ritual language creating inroads into traditional Dena'ina cosmology and cognition (Boraas 2007). This and other divisions that resulted from later Euro-American colonial expansion into Dena'ina territory generated a cultural crisis that split villages, families, and sometimes individual psyches into a choice between fighting to maintain the "old ways," indigenizing new cultural elements, or adopting a new culture and rejecting the old ways altogether. The fact that one hundred Dena'ina who aligned themselves with Russian occupiers in 1797 were killed by traditional Dena'ina in the battle at Kenai is indicative of the magnitude of the discord caused by colonial occupation. The battle was both a physical battle resulting in bloodshed and an ideological battle as individuals searched for the beliefs, rituals, and cultural practices that would sustain them in times of change. For the Dena'ina, the consequence of a successful siege of Kenai was not only to retaliate against intolerable wrongs, but to give them time to consciously and subconsciously consider what the course of action should be and slow the impact of cultural dominance.

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Figures and Tables

Figure 1. Map of South Central Alaska, 1797

	Dena'ina against Russian	Russian against Dena'ina	Dena'ina against Dena'ina	Russian against Russian
Killing	94	25	100	0
Assault	1	68	0	0
Theft	0	17	0	0
Kidnapping	0	18	0	0
Kidnapping of Women	0	50	0	0
Total	95	178	100	0

Table 1. Summary of violent acts, Cook Inlet, 1788-1798.
Compiled from letters, reports, and oral tradition stories.
Some numbers are estimates.