

2 Native Life —By Alan Boraas, Ph.D.

One Hundred Centuries of Native Life on the Kenai Peninsula

FIFTEEN thousand years ago most of the Kenai Peninsula was covered by several thousand feet of glacial ice and, therefore, uninhabitable. For a million years during the Pleistocene ice age, glaciers advanced and retreated in four major episodes and numerous minor ones, eroding the Kenai Mountains as they advanced, and building gravel moraines as they retreated. The final episode of the great Pleistocene ice age was the last retreat of glacial ice to its present position in the Harding Ice Field. The river systems of the Kenai, Kasilof, Fox, Chickaloon, Snow, and Resurrection Rivers defined themselves as they drained the melting glaciers, and the peninsula began to revegetate (R. Reger and Pinney: 1996:27-28). Before 13,700 years ago the unglaciated portions of the peninsula were vegetated with lichen and moss tundra. Between 13,700 and 10,500 years ago dwarf birch, willow shrubs, grasses and sedges began to replace the tundra. Poplars (aspens) appear 10,500 years ago followed by alders a thousand years later, giving the peninsula the look of today's high brush country south of Denali Park. The peninsula lowlands were entirely ice free and revegetated by 6,000 B.C. (R. Reger and Penney: 1996:27-28).

Into this environment walked (or paddled) the first humans to set foot on the Kenai Peninsula. Though the record is sparse, the current evidence is that the first people came to the peninsula sometime between 7000 and 8000 B.C. (Workman 1996:40-42). Only three sites are known from these first peninsula people, and each indicate the initial settlers were members of a group archaeologists call the Paleo-Arctic tradition. (See Figure 1). People of the Paleo-Arctic culture were related to Bering Land Bridge migrants with roots extending west to the 18,000-year-old Ushki and Dyuktai cultures of Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula and Lena River area. Like their Russian relatives, the Paleo-Arctic people made distinctive artifacts called microblades, which consisted of thin, extremely sharp slivers of flint-like rock skillfully struck from a carefully prepared

core. Elsewhere in Alaska, the Paleo-Arctic people hunted mammoths and giant bison and other large mammals collectively referred to as megafauna. On the Kenai Peninsula it is likely they hunted caribou and bear, since no mammoths or other extinct megafauna have been found on the peninsula ... yet.

As with the Paleo-Arctic tradition, there is tantalizingly slim information from other Kenai Peninsula sites dating before 1000 B.C. At some sites, such as the Beluga Point site, the cultural affinity of the occupants is undetermined. Others seem to have affinities to the

Arctic Small Tool tradition and Northern Archaic tradition. The details of these cultures await the trowels of future archaeology.

Recently, archaeologists have found evidence of a culture called the Ocean Bay tradition on the southern Kenai Peninsula (Workman 1996:43-44). Best known from Kodiak Island, the Ocean Bay people represent the first maritime adaptation in Alaska, possibly in the entire North Pacific. The abundance of calo-

ries and nutrients available from sea mammals was not readily accessible to subsistence hunters until the invention of harpoons by the Ocean Bay culture. When shot with arrows or speared, seals and whales dive and are impossible to retrieve. A harpoon head, on the other hand, when thrust into a sea mammal at close range, detaches from its handle and foreshaft and the barbs prevent the head from coming out. A seven to ten foot line is attached to the harpoon head and a sturdy, inflated buoy made of seal intestines is attached to the other end. When struck with a harpoon, the animal dives to escape, but now is forced to drag the buoy through the water. Even a small buoy, say two cubic feet in volume, will weigh the equivalent of 124 pounds as it is pulled through the water. Quickly the mammal tires and surfaces exhausted, whereupon the hunter dispatches it with a killing lance and tows it home. Ingenious, and a technological innovation as important to their time as the automobile is to ours.

After 1000 B.C. the prehistoric record becomes

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much clearer with the appearance of the remarkable Kachemak tradition. There are two closely related Kachemak tradition groups: the Marine Kachemak culture of Kachemak Bay, the outer Kenai Peninsula, and Kodiak Island; and the Riverine Kachemak people who occupied the salmon spawning rivers of upper Cook Inlet (See Figure 1). The Kachemak people first appeared on Kodiak Island around 1800 B.C. where they, in turn, developed from the Ocean Bay tradition mentioned above.

The Marine Kachemak people added even more efficient toggling harpoons to their tool kit as well as an amazing assortment of slate points, slate ulus, chipped stone points, abraders, drills, scrapers, fishhooks, ivory pins, awls, and needles. Some sites in Kachemak Bay are over ten feet deep, with the soil matrix consisting mostly of shells and bone refuse —

by-products of a thousand years of subsistence. Analysis of the refuse reveals a diet of sea mammals, fish, and shellfish, but few land mammals (Boraas and Klein 1992).

Further north along the Kenai and Kasilof Rivers a related group called the Riverine Kachemak people thrived. Their food staple was salmon. Recent excavations at the Kenai River Site (KEN-147) indicate the Riverine Kachemak people were primarily driftnet fishermen, however, they may have employed seine techniques at other sites. For drift fishing, they selected an appropriate stretch of river devoid of large boulders, rapids, and overhanging brush, and set gill nets made of spruce root weighted by notched stones to

KENAI PENINSULA PREHISTORY

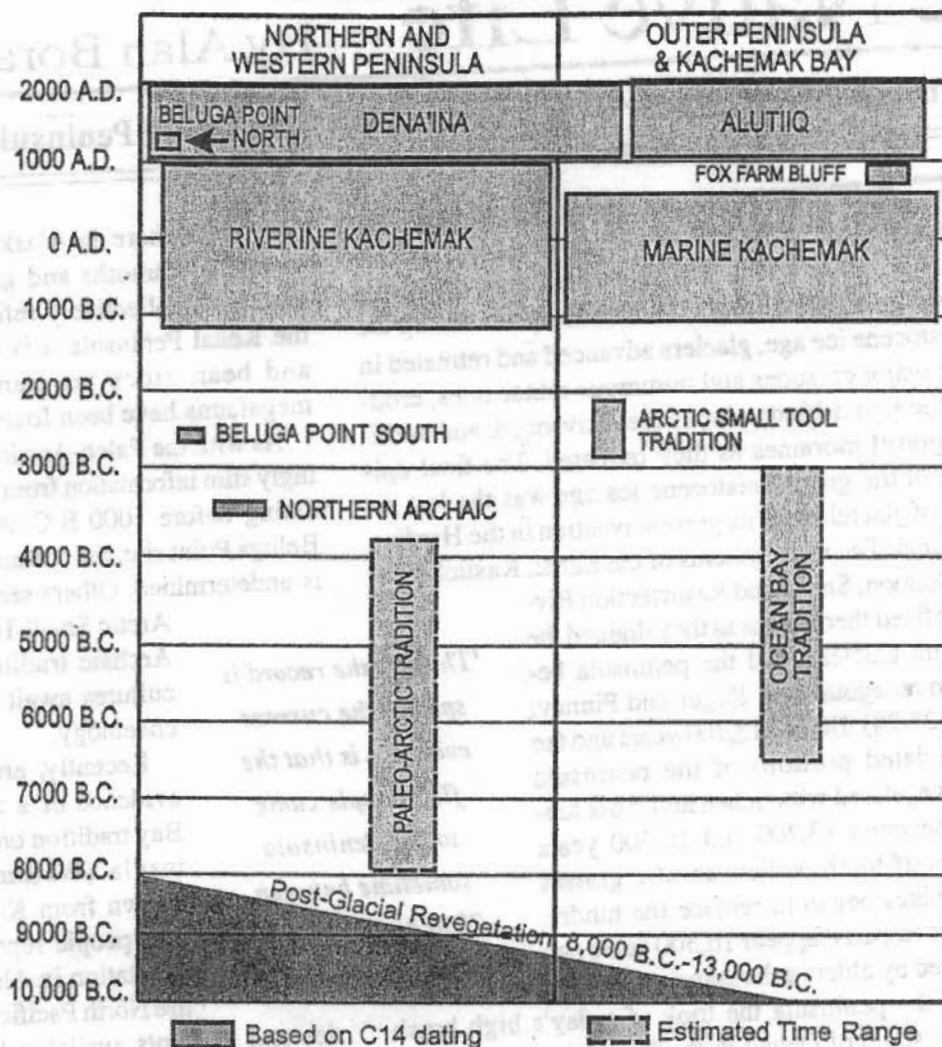


Figure 1. Chart of Kenai Peninsula Prehistory
(Data from Reger and Boraas 1996, Workman 1996 and others)

keep the net just off the river bottom where the red (sockeye) salmon run. The gill nets caught salmon as they drifted downstream to a take-out place where they were hauled onto the bank, picked of fish, and the nets taken upstream to repeat the process. The fish meanwhile were cleaned and processed at the village by the take-out place. The Kenai River Site has seven to nine multi-family houses suggesting a population around 150-200. The Riverine people of the Kenai and Kasilof Rivers probably numbered between 500-1,000.

Both the Riverine and Marine Kachemak peoples also made beads, pendants, labrets, carved human and animal-like figurines, rock paintings, and remarkable

stone lamps. These artifacts indicate there was more to their culture than simply eking out a miserable existence living from hand-to-mouth, passing the time until a merciful death. On the contrary, these artifacts indicate the Kachemak people experienced a rich spiritual and artistic life in which they sought to understand and express the mysteries and wonders of their life on the Kenai Peninsula.

Most impressive are their stone lamps weighing up to sixty pounds and shaped from fine-grained igneous rock or, in one case, limestone. Some are plain, though elegant, while others display various decorative shapes and human forms. Imagine the lamp in Figure 2, filled with seal oil, a moss wick burning at one end and placed in the center of a house on a dark winter night. The flickering fire illuminates the plaintive face of the lamp-person as well as the faces of those gathered around. Drums, the universal instrument of circumpolar peoples, beat a rhythm of the north. Songs are sung, stories are told, and the mysteries of life are expressed, explored, and defined.

Curiously, the Marine Kachemak culture disappears around A.D. 600 and the Riverine Kachemak disappears around A.D. 1000.

Just after A.D. 1000, the Dena'ina appear on the Kenai Peninsula. They are Athabaskan speakers and linguist James Kari believes they came from the upper Kuskokwim area north of the Alaska Range (Kari 1988). Why the Dena'ina became the only Athabaskan speakers besides the Eyak to occupy tidewater is not clear. Most likely the explanation has to do with the environmental changes associated with the Medieval Warm Period that were occurring in Alaska at that time.

At the same time, the Alutiiq appear to inherit many of the traditions of the Marine Kachemak tradition and occupy parts of the outer Kenai Peninsula coast, Nanwalek in Kachemak Bay, as well as Kodiak Island and Prince William Sound. Alutiiq from Prince William Sound reoccupied Port Graham around 1900.

With the Dena'ina we have more than archaeological information to understand their culture. We also have the ethnographic reports of Cornelius Osgood (1966) who interviewed elders in the 1930s. We have the reports of Russian, British and Spanish explorers and missionaries, and the oral tradition and traditional stories (*sukdu*) written or recorded in Dena'ina by Peter Kalifornsky (1991), Fedosia Sacaloff, Bertha Monfor, Nellie Chickalusian, Shem Pete and others.

When pieced together, the culture that emerges is one of the most sustainable and egalitarian in terms of equitable access to resources the world has ever known¹. The Dena'ina lived in villages of substantial log houses usually spread out along a ridge above a lake or a tributary to one of the major rivers. The married men of a village were members of the same matrilineal clan and their wives and children were members of a different clan.

The village comprised what anthropologists call a corporate kin group, that is, a family group connected by blood and marriage and allied for economic purposes with various individuals performing assigned tasks. The Dena'ina called this group the *ukilqa* or clan

¹ Alutiiq culture is equally remarkable. Its heartland was on Kodiak and the upper reaches of Prince William Sound. Space does not permit a detailed description of their pre-contact culture.

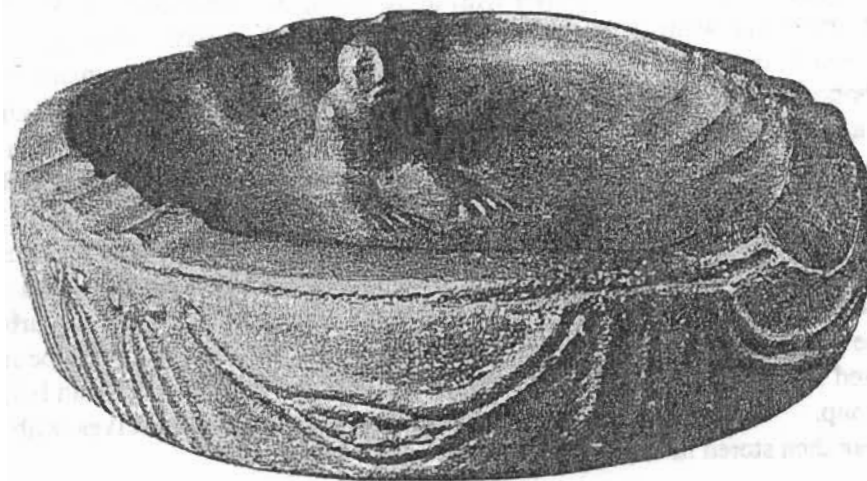


Figure 2.
Stone Lamp of the
Riverine Kachemak
Tradition (de Laguna
1934: plate 70)

helpers. The clan helpers informally elected a chief called a *qeshqa*, who could be either a man or woman (Fall 1985). The *qeshqa* had numerous characteristics, among them wisdom, experience and generosity, and rose to his or her position through successful potlatching. He or she had three primary duties: to arbitrate and resolve disputes, to care for the elderly and orphaned, and to assure the survival of the clan helpers through the equitable distribution of food. Regarding the latter, the *qeshqa* controlled the foods gathered, processed and stored by the clan helpers, and had authority to redistribute the food back to people throughout the winter on a need basis.

These foods consisted primarily of salmon, but also included caribou (later moose), bear, beaver, beluga, shellfish, and about eighty edible plants. The primary salmon the Dena'ina harvested were the early run kings (chinook) and the late run silvers (coho). The early run kings coming in late May were the first fresh fish of the summer. Catching and exchanging king salmon among friends and relatives was the most important event of the year and was marked by the First Salmon Ceremony. The late run silvers came in August and September and were the primary winter food. Silver salmon were caught in weirs made of poles sunk into the bottom of a stream and strung with a lattice-like thatch allowing water to pass through but trapping migrating fish. When the Dena'ina were not fishing they simply opened a gate and the fish swam through to spawn upstream. Some of the clan helpers pitched out fish, some cleaned them, some dried them; and the older people gave advice and watched the little ones. Everyone worked for, and received the benefits of the clan-based family, which is why it is called a corporate kin group.

The dried fish and other foods were then stored in

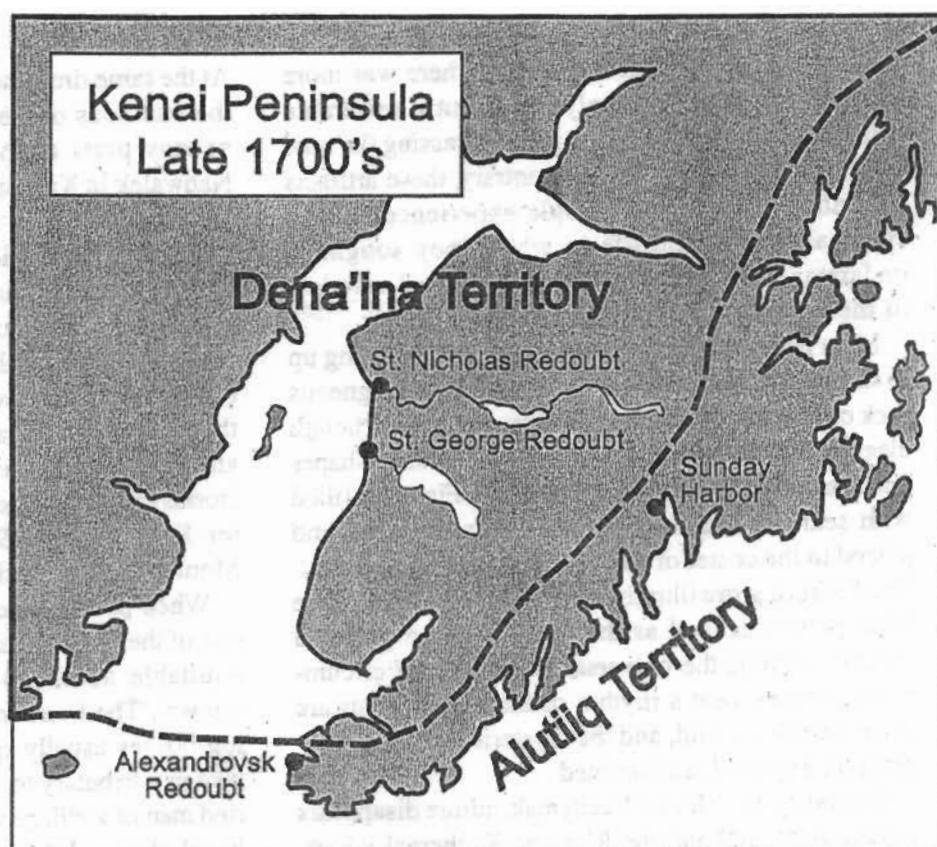


Figure 3. Map of Dena'ina and Alutiiq Territory and Russian Forts, late 1700s.

underground cold storage pits. Food storage, humble as it sounds, was what made the Dena'ina so successful. The pits were up to six feet deep and eight feet across and lined with birchbark for waterproofing and moss for insulation. Alternating layers of dried fish and other foods and grass were placed in the pit until it was full, whereupon it was allowed to freeze and covered with more moss, birchbark and planks and rocks to keep scavengers out. Essentially, the cold storage pit was a giant freezer, which would remain frozen throughout the winter and well into the next summer. Periodically during the winter, the *qeshqa* would send clan helpers back to the food caches and distribute the food as needed. If the *qeshqa* timed things well, the food would last throughout the winter with a small surplus left over. If not, the people faced starvation. A *qeshqa* who managed food poorly or who was arbitrary and capricious in food distribution would be replaced by a vote of the clan helpers, or the clan helpers would simply leave and ally themselves with a better *qeshqa*.

Their system also provided a safety net. Each qeshqa had a partner in a distant village called a *slocin*. If one village ran low of food, the qeshqa could request aid from his partner who would divert some of his village's food resources to the needy village. The second qeshqa would be willing to do this because at some point his village might be short of food and the partner he helped would return the favor.

Summers were devoted to gathering and storing food — but winter was the good time for the Dena'ina. Winter was the time of visiting and feasting — usually in the form of a potlatch. Whole Dena'ina villages, young and old, were said to travel hundreds of miles on snowshoes to visit relatives, enjoy one another's company, play games, tell stories, court potential spouses, and celebrate the potlatch. Potlatches were multi-day feasts either to honor deceased relatives (Big Potlatch or funerary potlatch) or to resolve disputes (Little Potlatch). In either case the culmination of several days of storytelling, dancing, and feasting was a gift-giving "battle" in which the loser could not match the winner in giving away items of wealth such as furs, parkas, beaded and quilled moccasins, bows, snowshoes and so on. The winners gained high prestige and hence the motivation to accumulate wealth to potlatch again. The losers lost face, but obtained material items. The funerary potlatches were also the final episode of mourning and had the effect of resolving all feelings of guilt and anxiety associated with a deceased relative (Lambourn 1997). This was necessary because the Dena'ina believed that, upon death, the deceased knew the thoughts of the living. The Little Potlatch resolved disputes that could not otherwise be settled and suggests that truth lay on the side of the one who worked hardest and accumulated and distributed the most wealth.

The Dena'ina spiritual world revolved around a quest for *K'ech Eltani* which translates as True Belief (Boraas and Peter 1996). The Dena'ina believed that social and ecological harmony was affected by an individual's attitudes and actions toward other Dena'ina or the natural world. To maintain harmony, the Dena'ina sought True Belief, a kind of mind set expressed through hunting practices and rituals which resulted in having a "good attitude" toward the natural world. Many of the Dena'ina traditional stories (*sukdu*) describe the dire consequences of having a bad attitude by not practicing the prescribed rituals. Usually a bad attitude resulted in the animals, which

were believed to be both sensate and willful, withdrawing and not allowing themselves to be hunted. The result was starvation. If the bad attitude involved other Dena'ina, social turmoil or mental illness may be the consequence and giving a potlatch or some other public display of rectitude may be required to establish a positive mind set.

Dena'ina mythology describes a pantheon of characters like the Dreamer, the Doctor, the Sky Reader, the Prophet, the Shaman, the Gashaq (Kari and Boraas 1991). The Gashaq was a kind of spiritual leader similar to Odin in Norse mythology or Zeus in Greek mythology. The others had specific powers. The Dreamer used the medium of dreams to solve problems and determine "how things will be." The Doctor had expertise in what today we would call internal medicine, while the Sky Reader predicted the weather and other natural phenomena. The Prophet predicted future events and was considered dangerous because of these powers. And the Shaman practiced herbal and psychosomatic healing. Individual Dena'ina men or women might choose to seek these powers through a psychologically difficult quest for a more advanced form of True Belief. If successful, he or she would become a Dreamer, Doctor, Sky Reader, Prophet, or Shaman for their village and use their powers for the good of the people.

Not only did the Dena'ina believe animals and even plants to be aware of human thoughts and to have the capacity for willful action, but they had an amazing array of spirits which populated their world. Some embodied evil such as the *Nantina* (the one who steals us), the Half Human, and a shape-changer called *Gujun*. In addition, there were Evil Shamen, who must be counteracted by the powers of one's own Shaman. Other spirits were crafty and mischievous, such as the House Spirit who hid items so you could not find them, or tangled your hair at night without you knowing it, so you awoke to a "bad hair day." The Mountain Spirits (*Dghili Dnayi*) were very powerful and could be either giants or "little people." They were feared and respected, but were helpful to those with True Belief. Tree Spirits might be good or ominous, depending on the feelings associated with a particular place. Another powerful spirit was the Steambath Spirit, who represented soul cleansing associated with taking a sweatbath.

During the late eighteenth century, two rival Russian trading companies, the Shelikhov Company and

the Lebedev Company, invaded Dena'ina and Alutiiq territory. In 1786 a Shelikhov Company fort was established at Nanwalek (Alexandrovsk Redoubt²), in 1787 a Lebedev Company fort was established at the mouth of the Kasilof River (Saint George Redoubt), and in 1791 a second Lebedev fort was established at the mouth of the Kenai River (Saint Nicholas Redoubt). Last, a shipbuilding post was built by the Shelikhov Company in 1792 at modern Seward, called Sunday Harbor. (See Figure 3). About 200 Russians occupied the Kenai Peninsula during the late eighteenth century. Qeshqas allied themselves with one or the other Russian companies for the purposes of fur trade. Unfortunately the Shelikhov Company undermined the efforts of the Lebedev Company, and vice versa, by terrorizing Dena'ina and Alutiiq villages allied with the rival company. Terrorist actions included assault, kidnapping, rape, and murder.

In addition, Russians kidnapped Dena'ina women, said to be the most beautiful of all Native women to European eyes, and held them at the forts as concubines. In 1797, the Dena'ina attacked the Russians first at an outpost at Tyonek, and then, at the fort at Kenai. In what is called the Battle of Kenai, the Dena'ina succeeded in driving out the Lebedev Company, which left Alaska in the spring of 1798.

In 1799, the Russian American Company was established from the remains of the Shelikhov Company. Shortly after, Alexander Baranov chose Sitka over Kenai as his new mainland capital, in part because the Dena'ina had been so successful in the Battle of Kenai. For the remainder of the Russian occupation of Alaska, there were seldom more than five or ten Russians occupying the small trading post at Kenai. After 1847, an equal number of Russians lived along with their Native wives at a retirement village established at Ninilchik. The peninsula remained Dena'ina and Alutiiq territory.

Beginning in 1838 a terrible smallpox epidemic decimated the Dena'ina, Alutiiq and most other coastal Alaskan Natives. An estimated 4-6000 Dena'ina

occupied Cook Inlet with approximately 1600 living in the Kenai River area³ in the early nineteenth century (Fedorova 1973:275-278). Russian records indicate that in 1846 the Kenai River Dena'ina population was 55 percent of what it was in 1838, mostly due to the ravages of smallpox. The psychological impact was doubly difficult because the Dena'ina believed disharmony and chaos was caused by improper thoughts and actions. Traditional shamanic practices were ineffective against smallpox and, after 1840, many Dena'ina were baptized as Russian Orthodox, accepting the church's explanation for the epidemic as "God's will." At the same time the Orthodox Church undertook an inoculation program vaccinating baptized Dena'ina against smallpox.

After the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867, the United States Army established a fort at Kenai in 1869. After constructing parade grounds, officers'

² Redoubt is a term for fort. The Russian forts were not garrisoned by soldiers, but were occupied by company employees under the direction of a foreman. The Shelikhov and Lebedev Companies received special permission from the Czar to use cannons and operate as quasi-military units on the frontier.

³ The Dena'ina of the Kenai River called themselves *Kahtnuht'ana*, "people of the Kenai River." The Alutiiq called them *Kenaiyut* which also means "people of the Kenai River." This term was Russianized to *Kenaitze* which is still used today.

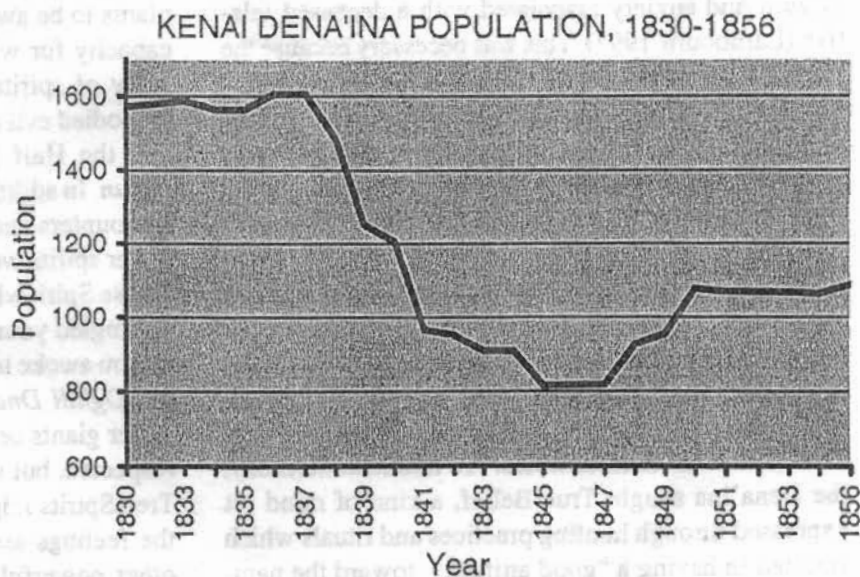


Figure 4. Kenai Dena'ina population, 1830-1856, (data from Federova 1973:275-279)

quarters, enlisted men's quarters, a stable, a blacksmith shop, an infirmary, and numerous other buildings, the army pulled out in 1871, sending the troops to fight more hostile Indians in the Indian Wars of the American West.

It was not until 1882 that the Dena'ina began to lose sovereign control of their part of the Kenai Peninsula. Beginning in that year a commercial salmon cannery was established on the Kasilof River, and shortly thereafter the industry spread to the mouth of the Kenai River. The influx of Americans, northern Europeans and Chinese (later Filipinos) into the area during the summer fishing season impacted traditional ways of life. The greatest impact, however, came in the form of cannery-owned "company stores" and the closely allied Alaska Commercial Company (ACC). Both granted easy credit for rifles, ammunition, traps, bolts of cotton and wool, food staples such as rice, and other industrial items the Dena'ina desired. The credit was paid off by working for the cannery during the summer canning season, which both disrupted their traditional food gathering and left them with little or no cash reserves in the fall. Again they were granted credit for staples to get them through the winter, and again they paid off the debt by working for the canneries the following summer. The vicious cycle, known as debt peonage, assured the canneries of a work force and was difficult to break. The net effect was to shift individual and family energies from contributing to the corporate kin group mentioned above, to paying off the cannery store or ACC debt. Consequently, the clan system institution of the potlatch, and shamanic practices began to disappear by the turn of the century and were largely a memory by mid-century.

A second epidemic, the influenza epidemic of 1917-18, devastated the Dena'ina, and for the first time the non-Native population exceeded the Dena'ina population. The "Spanish flu," as it was called, was worldwide, but was particularly devastating for small, isolated populations with little previous contact with influenza. Between 1915 and 1920, the Kenai Peninsula Dena'ina population dropped by 34 percent from 680 to 450. Many Dena'ina villages including Kalifornsky Village, Stepanka's Village, Humpy Point, Kustatan, Polly Creek, Point Possession, and Nikiski became too small to operate and the survivors moved to Kenai, Tyonek, or Eklutna (Mishler 1985:42-47).

Among those who moved to Kenai was the Kalifornsky family. Nikolai Kalifornsky moved his

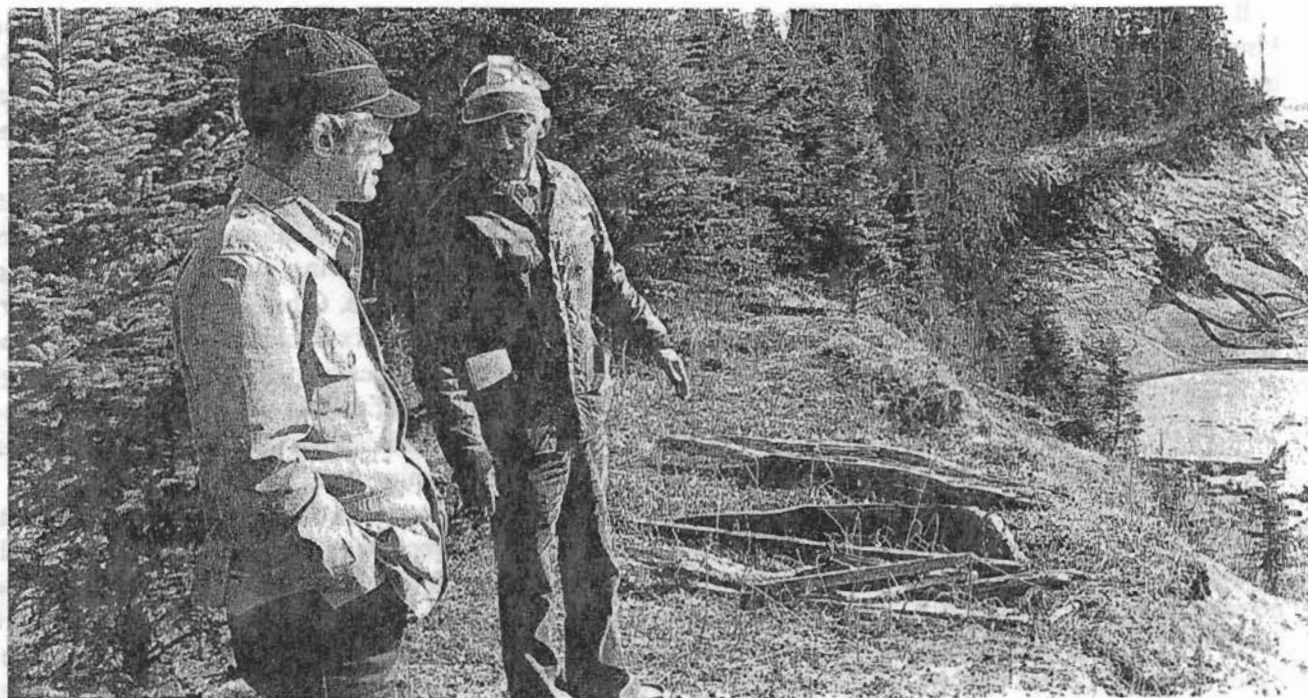
family to Kenai after his young son, Peter, had spent time at Polly Creek apprenticing in the old Dena'ina ways under the tutelage of an elder named Old Man Karp. Peter and his older sister Mary were enrolled in the American school. As with most of the children, Peter's first language was Dena'ina, which was forbidden in the American school because of the forced assimilation policy of the Federal Bureau of Education that ran the school. One day young Peter slipped and spoke Dena'ina, for which he was beaten with a stick by his teacher. It was neither the first nor the last time the man, who was destined to become an award winning writer of Dena'ina, was punished for speaking his Native language. Other Dena'ina children were forced to kneel on rock salt, or had their mouths washed out with soap for speaking Dena'ina. The language eradication policy of the Federal Bureau of Education lasted well into mid-century and was quite effective in almost extinguishing the Dena'ina language.

By the mid-twentieth century, the Dena'ina population had been decimated by epidemics and their culture had been devastated by debt peonage and forced assimilation practices. Moreover, the non-Native population exploded with a postwar influx of homesteaders, military families, oil field workers and, after 1970, baby boomers from the lower forty-eight states, looking for a last frontier to establish a family and make a life. The Dena'ina found themselves to be what Dena'ina elder Clare Swan has called "strangers in our own land."

Coincidentally, during the late twentieth century, a number of Kenai Peninsula Native organizations formed, in what has become a revitalization of Native culture. The Kenaitze Indian Tribe and Salamatof Tribe formed as Indian Reorganization Act (I.R.A.) tribes. As a consequence of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), the Kenai Natives Association, Salamatof Native Association, Ninilchik Native Association, English Bay Corporation, Port Graham Native Association, and Seldovia Native Association formed for-profit village corporations. Village corporation members are also members of the larger for-profit regional corporation, Cook Inlet Region, Incorporated (CIRI), one of the largest land owners on the peninsula, and among the most successful corporations of any kind in Alaska at the start of the twenty-first century. The Ninilchik Traditional Council operates as an independent organization not affiliated with the I.R.A. tribes or ANCSA corporations.

Each of these organizations has a different agenda, and in many cases, they disagree with the philosophy or tactics of the other. However, they all seek to find a way to remain connected with the spirit and land of their ancestors while living in the modern world. They are forming communities within communities, consistent with

the late twentieth century trends of the peninsula as a whole. Culturally, the efforts of Peter Kalifornsky to write his language has received national attention; and programs, such as the Kenaitze Indian Tribe's Yaghanen Program, have done much to heal old scars and renew a sense of pride and identity in being Dena'ina.



- Mary Ford photos

Above: Alan Boraas, left, and Peter Kalifornsky visit the Kalifornsky village site where Peter was born in 1911. On this day in 1981 they are standing inside a shallow house depression, most of which has been lost to erosion. The village was abandoned in 1927.

Right: Linguist James Kari speaks with Peter Kalifornsky at a gathering in 1976 to discuss preserving the Dena'ina language.



—Alan Boraas was born in 1947 and lived in Minnesota until 1969 when he came to Alaska. Except for brief stints to finish a M.A. (1970) and a Ph.D. (1983), he has lived here ever since. Alan has taught at Kenai Peninsula College since 1971 where he is now Professor of Anthropology. In 2000 he was made an honorary member of the Kenaitze Indian Tribe. With James Kari he edited *K'tl'egh'i Sukdu: The Collected Writings of Peter Kalifornsky*. He has also written over 100 natural history, archaeology, and anthropology articles for the *Peninsula Clarion* and professional publications. Alan Boraas lives in Kasilof, overlooking the river.

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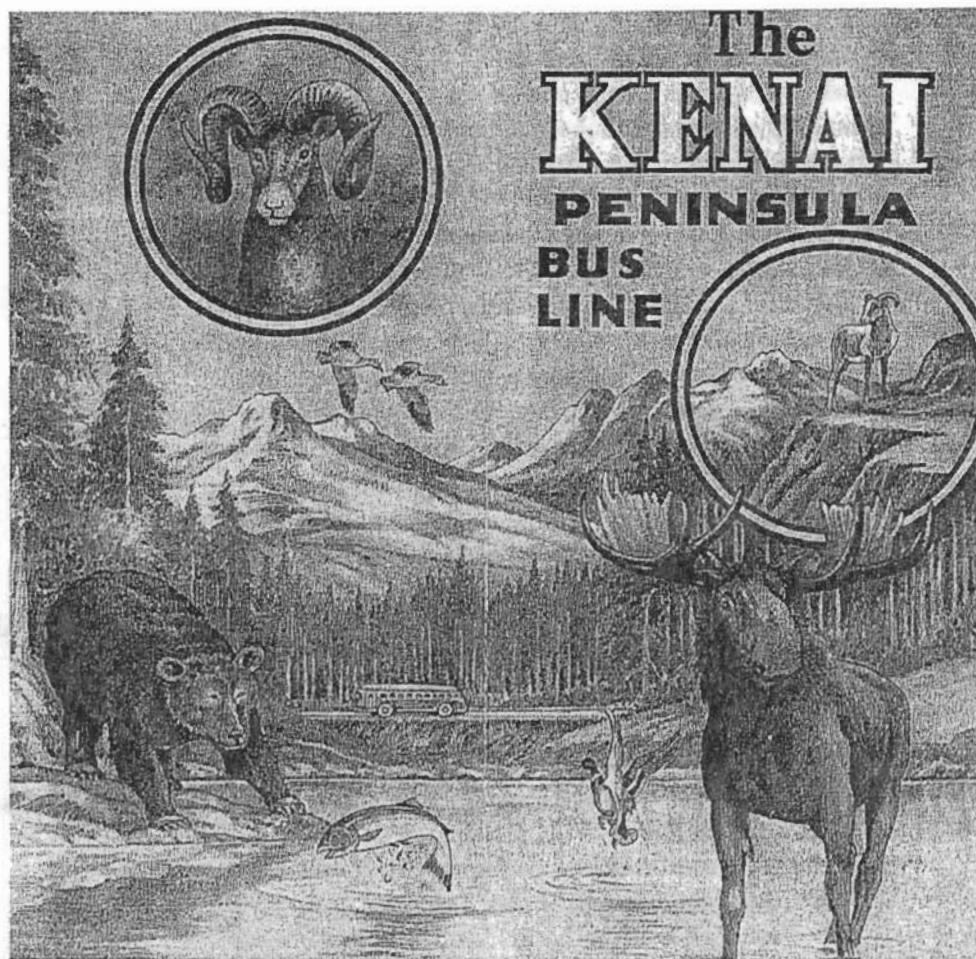
3 Kenai Peninsula Time Line

How the communities of the Kenai Peninsula grew and came closer together

- 7000 B.C. First people arrived on Kenai Peninsula (Paleo-Arctic tradition)
- 1000 B.C. The Kachemak tradition established on Kenai Peninsula
- 1000 A.D. Dena'ina Athabaskan people settled on Kenai Peninsula replacing Kachemak tradition
- 1778 Anchor Point named by Cook Expedition
- 1785 Russian Alexandrovsk Redoubt (Fort Alexander) established (Nanwalek)
- 1786 Russian Georgievsk Redoubt (Fort Saint George) established (Kasilof)
- 1786 Port Graham named by English explorers
- 1791 Russian Nikolaevsk Redoubt (Fort Saint Nicholas) established (Kenai)
- 1793 Russian Voskresenskaia (shipbuilding site) established (Seward), and ship (*Phoenix*) built
- 1797 Dena'ina defeated Russian Lebedev company at Battle of Kenai
- 1838 Smallpox epidemic devastated Dena'ina population
- 1847 Russian community of Ninilchik established for company retirees
- 1848 Russian company found traces of gold on Kenai Peninsula
- 1850 Russians established Coal Village near Port Graham
- 1867 U.S. purchased Alaska from Russia
- 1869 U.S. Army established Fort Kenai (military spelling) at Kenai
- 1882 U.S. Secretary of the Treasury began leasing Alaskan islands for fox farms
- 1882 First Kenai Peninsula cannery established on Kasilof River
- 1883 Lowell family started homestead and trading post (Seward)
- 1884 Influenza epidemic killed many in Alexandrovsk (Nanwalek)
- 1884 Joseph Cooper discovered gold in Cooper Landing area
- 1888 American prospector discovered gold on Turnagain Arm (Hope-Sunrise)
- 1891 Saint Nicholas Orthodox Church built (Seldovia)
- 1892 First Russian school in Alexandrovsk (Nanwalek)
- 1893 First gold claim staked on Resurrection Creek (Hope)
- 1894 Orthodox Church of the Holy Assumption of the Virgin Mary built (Kenai)
- 1896 Russian school built in Ninilchik
- 1896 Turnagain Arm Gold Rush began (Hope City and Sunrise City established)
- 1897 First Hope post office
- 1897 First Russian school in Seldovia
- 1898 U.S. Homestead Law included Alaska for the first time
- 1898 Agricultural Experiment Station established at Kenai
- 1898 Alaska Commercial Company established station in Seldovia
- 1898 First Seldovia post office
- 1899 First Sunrise post office
- 1899 Wharf and railroad built at Coal Bay (Homer)
- 1899 First Kenai post office
- 1901 Transfiguration of Our Lord Russian Orthodox Church opened in Ninilchik
- 1902 Hope social hall built
- 1903 First Seward school
- 1903 Alaska Central Railway established railroad camp in Resurrection Bay (Seward)
- 1904 *Seward Gateway* newspaper first published
- 1904 Seward started electrical power and telephone service
- 1904 First Hope school

- 1904 First Homer post office
- 1905 Alaska Road Commission created as a branch of the U.S. Army
- 1906 First English language school in Seldovia
- 1909 Chugach National Forest expanded to include northern Kenai Peninsula
- 1909 First Moose Pass roadhouse
- 1909 First Seward Mount Marathon Race
- 1909 Alexandrovsk named English Bay (Nanwalek) on American map
- 1910 Failed Alaska Central Railway became the Alaska Northern Railway
- 1910 First Seldovia cannery
- 1911 First English language school in Ninilchik
- 1911 Halibut Cove established as herring fishing community
- 1911 Fidalgo Island Packing Company established in Port Graham
- 1911 Iditarod Trail opened from Seward
- 1912 Seward incorporated
- 1912 Congress made Alaska a territory, and first territorial schools established
- 1912 First Port Graham cannery
- 1914 Federal government purchased Alaska Northern Railway, renaming it the Alaska Railroad
- 1915 Miller's Landing established (East Homer)
- 1916 Alaska Railroad completed to Anchorage
- 1917 Influenza epidemic devastated Dena'ina population
- 1919 First Miller's Landing school (East Homer)
- 1920 Bureau of Public Roads first managed roads inside Chugach National Forest
- 1921 First Kasilof post office
- 1923 Roosevelt Roadhouse renamed Lawing Roadhouse (Lawing)
- 1924 First Homer school (Homer's West Side)
- 1925 First Ninilchik post office
- 1925 Methodist Jesse Lee Home moved to Seward from Unalaska
- 1925 East End Road built between Homer and Miller's Landing
- 1926 Alaska Railroad first offered sightseeing excursions from Seward
- 1928 First Moose Pass post office
- 1929 First Cooper Landing School (Riddiford)
- 1930 First Moose Pass school
- 1930 *Seldovia Herald* first published
- 1932 First Kasilof-Cohoe school
- 1932 First Port Graham school
- 1937 Forest Highway's "missing link" south of Moose Pass completed
- 1938 *Moose Pass Miner* newspaper first published by Lois Allen
- 1938 Cooper Landing connected to Seward by road
- 1940 Seldovia hospital built
- 1941 Kenai National Moose Range established (now Kenai National Wildlife Refuge)
- 1941 Troops stationed at Fort Raymond (Seward)
- 1941 Fire damaged Seward business district
- 1942 Homer airstrip built
- 1943 Second fire in Seward business district; new buildings constructed of concrete
- 1944 *Homer Homesteader* newspaper first published
- 1945 Seldovia incorporated
- 1946 Homestead office established in Alaska
- 1946 Sterling Highway started and survey crew tent camp established (Soldotna)
- 1946 *Alaska's Kenai Peninsula*, the peninsula's first tourist guide published by Lois Allen
- 1946 Seward Sanitarium for tuberculosis patients opened

In 1948, two years after Lois Allen published her tourist guide, the road opened from Cooper Landing to Kenai, and although parts of the highway system were still under construction, it was possible to drive from Seward to Kenai and Kasilof, more than 100 miles, passing through the Kenai Lake area, Moose Pass and Cooper Landing. Two Seward businessmen started the Kenai Peninsula Bus Line and distributed a brochure touting the wonders of the Kenai Peninsula.

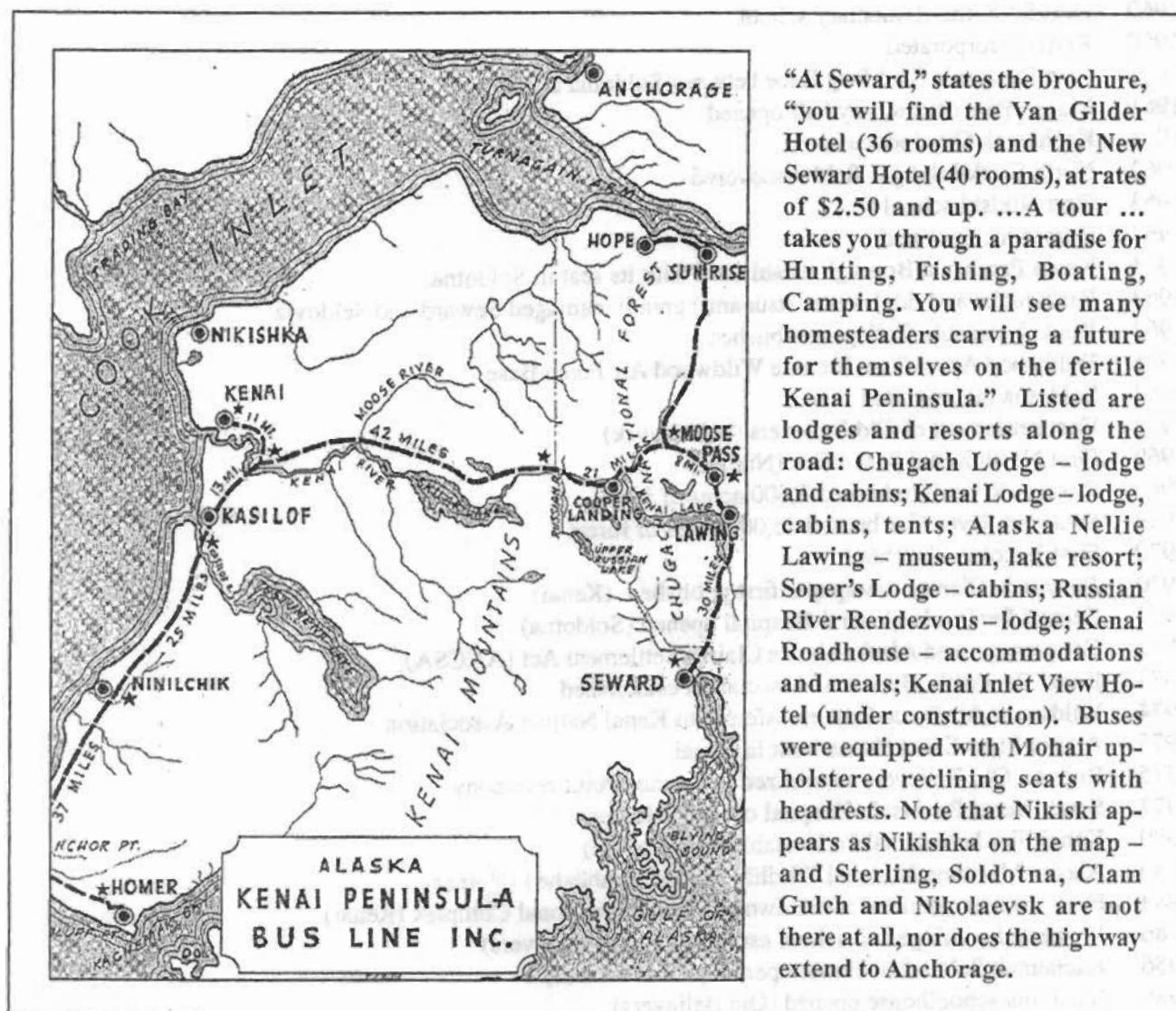


SEWARD, ALASKA

Bringing the world-famous KENAI PENINSULA within easy reach of Tourist, Sportsman, Business Man

- Brochure courtesy of Dawn Lotti

- 1947 Forty-seven Burn destroyed 310,000 acres of forest between Soldotna and Hope
- 1947 Soldotna, Sterling, and Clam Gulch areas opened for homesteading
- 1947 Sunrise Eliminations land surveyed
- 1947 First Cooper Landing post office
- 1948 Road opened from Cooper Landing to Kenai
- 1948 First *The Milepost*, annual guide book, published
- 1949 Highway construction started from Anchorage south
- 1949 First Anchor Point post office
- 1949 First Naptowne post office (Sterling)
- 1949 First Soldotna post office
- 1949 First Anchor Point school
- 1950 Cooper Landing community hall opened
- 1950 Kenai Spur Highway extended from Kenai to Nikiski (known locally as the North Road)
- 1950 Sterling Highway completed from Homer to Seward Highway
- 1950 First Clam Gulch post office
- 1950 First Cohoe post office
- 1951 Seward Highway linked Kenai Peninsula to Anchorage



- 1951 Seward Station (Wildwood) Army Base established
- 1951 First Ninilchik State Fair
- 1952 Soldotna community club opened
- 1952 First English language school in English Bay (Nanwalek)
- 1953 Sunrise’s only homestead staked
- 1953 North Kenai community club established (Nikiski)
- 1953 First Sterling school
- 1953 *Peninsula News* newspaper first published
- 1954 Kenai civic center opened
- 1954 Clam Gulch community hall opened
- 1956 First Seward Silver Salmon Derby
- 1957 Swanson River oil strike, followed by oil and gas production and manufacturing facilities (Nikiski)
- 1957 *On the Kenai, Peninsula News and Views*, a weekly newspaper, published briefly in Kenai
- 1959 Alaska Statehood
- 1959 *The Cheechako News* started in Kenai, then moved to Soldotna in 1961
- 1959 Tustumena school opened (Kasilof-Cohoe)
- 1959 Anchor Point community hall opened

- 1959 English Bay airstrip constructed (Nanwalek)
- 1960 First Soldotna elementary school
- 1960 Kenai incorporated
- 1961 First Peninsula Sled Dog Race between Soldotna and Kenai
- 1961 Moose Pass community hall opened
- 1961 Kachemak City incorporated
- 1962 North Cook Inlet gas field discovered
- 1963 First Nikiski school
- 1964 Homer incorporated
- 1964 Kenai Peninsula Borough established with its seat in Soldotna
- 1964 Earthquake and tidal waves (tsunami) greatly damaged Seward and Seldovia
- 1964 Kenai Peninsula College established
- 1965 Wildwood Army Base became Wildwood Air Force Base
- 1967 Soldotna incorporated
- 1968 First settlement of Old Believers (Nikolaevsk)
- 1969 First North Kenai post office (Nikiski)
- 1969 Russian River Fire burned 2,600 acres of forest
- 1969 Swanson River Fire burned 86,000 acres of forest
- 1970 First Nikolaevsk school
- 1970 *Peninsula Clarion* newspaper first published (Kenai)
- 1971 Central Peninsula General Hospital opened (Soldotna)
- 1971 Congress passed Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA)
- 1973 Kenai Peninsula Historical Association established
- 1974 Wildwood Air Force Base transferred to Kenai Natives Association
- 1975 Alaska State Court House built in Kenai
- 1975 Russian Old Believers naturalized in Anchor Point ceremony
- 1977 South Kenai Peninsula Hospital opened (Homer)
- 1980 Kenai Fjords National Park established (Seward)
- 1980 Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge established (Homer)
- 1983 First prisoner admitted to Wildwood State Correctional Complex (Kenai)
- 1986 Voznesenka village and school established (Old Believers)
- 1986 Kachemak Selo schoolhouse opened (Old Believers)
- 1986 Razdolna schoolhouse opened (Old Believers)
- 1988 Spring Creek State Correctional Center opened (Seward)
- 1989 *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in Prince William Sound spoiled some Kenai Peninsula beaches
- 1990 Port Graham salmon hatchery established
- 1991 English Bay changed its name to Nanwalek
- 1997 Alaska SeaLife Center built for education, research and rehabilitation (Seward)
- 1998 Pacific Rim Institute of Safety Management (PRISM) began training sessions (Kenai)
- 2000 Challenger Learning Center, featuring space education for children, opened (Kenai)



- Mary Ford

A "burning aircraft" situation is staged for fire fighting trainees at PRISM, where classes are held in many areas of emergency response