

Transcript Summary

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Narrator:	Illiadore Philamonoff
INTERVIEWER:	An unidentified interviewer
Others Present:	no
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Transcriber's Notes:	There is no Aleut but Greek.

The narrator's actual surname is not clearly distinguishable. However, according to Aleut Corporation, "Iliodor Philemonof," *Aleutian Current*, vol. 58, no. 3 (Fall 2023), 11, accessed June 2025, https://aleutcorp.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/23-TAC-040-Fall-Newsletter_V10web.pdf, the narrator's name is likely to be different from what the author of the recording's profile suggests.

00:00:00

INTERVIEWER

Today we have Mr. Illiadore Philamonoff and Alu from St. George Island.

ILLIADORE PHILAMONOFF

I am Illiadore Philamonoff. I was born and raised on St. George Island, Alaska, which is one of the five islands that make up the Pribilof Islands, which is the second largest island. And my family background, the Aleuts on the Pribilof Islands, St. Paul and St. George, have occupied the Pribilof Islands for nearly 200 years. They were brought there from the Unalaska district and a couple of other places along the Aleutian chain. My... I am an Aleut, and with a mixture of Russian, along with the rest of my family being of the same mixture. And it was in 1942 when I was just two months old, we evacuated to Southeast Alaska to a place called Funter Bay, which is on Admiralty Island. This was during the war years, and we were brought back to the islands in 1944. And I attended a grade school on St. George Island, grades one through eight, under the

Fish and Wildlife Service School. And I took the ninth-grade correspondence school on St. George Island and attended Mount Edgecumbe High School for three years and graduated in '61. And I attended St. Tikhon's Theological Seminary in South Canaan, Pennsylvania, from 1963 to '64. And in '67, I graduated in '67 with a diploma. And looking back on my high school days at Mount Edgecumbe, Alaska, I think these three years were one of my loneliest years, really being the first time away from home, and the climate and the surroundings were much different than I was used to out on the Pribilofs.

00:03:02

INTERVIEWER

And I'd just like to break in here. You mentioned that Mount Edgecumbe and going to school at Mount Edgecumbe was some of your loneliest years. And you mentioned the weather being one of the factors. Could you elaborate more on some of the other areas of loneliness that occurred to you at Mount Edgecumbe? I know there were other Aleut kids there, but I'd like to hear more. We have many, many, you might say, students going to Mount Edgecumbe. And they might be experiencing the same things that you experienced in the '60s.

ILLIADORE PHILAMONOFF

Yeah, I feel... Well, just for one thing, it's just being away from home makes you lonely. Being away from your parents, your brothers, and sisters. And how things are strange to you.

00:04:10

INTERVIEWER

Could the food have been some of the factors? Not having your own food or eating in a cafeteria style?

ILLIADORE PHILAMONOFF

Yes, yes, yes, all of this. And definitely were factors.

00:04:25

INTERVIEWER

What was it like to go to a school with, you might say, 400 kids from all over Alaska? As you know, the Native Alaskans are different, just as non-Natives are. Did you feel the difference from the other Native kids as far as them being different from you? How was it like?

ILLIADORE PHILAMONOFF

Well, I think this was one good experience getting to know people from all parts of Alaska that I was, after a while, I was able to just look at a person and just about pinpoint from which area he was from and get to know their thoughts and how they lived out in their villages. This is one good education that I received by getting to know my fellow Alaskans much better.

00:05:29

INTERVIEWER

The school you attended after you graduated from Mount Edgecumbe, you mentioned a seminar school. Could you go into more detail about the school and what effect the Mount Edgecumbe... time you spent at Mount Edgecumbe had on your studying, say, in the school in Pennsylvania?

ILLIADORE PHILAMONOFF

Well, I think by going to Mount Edgecumbe, I learned some of the rules and regulations that were imposed on us, that we had to follow, which some of them were good and some were bad, of course. But by attending the theological school in Pennsylvania, I was really not restricted as such as I was in Mount Edgecumbe. It was more... in Mount Edgecumbe was like someone was breathing over your neck at all times. And the thing that made it more enjoyable for me in Pennsylvania was that I went there on my own, on my own choosing, and I paid my own way for all them years and even the transportation. And I know I had to get an education, and I worked hard at it. But I would say that my years, four years in Pennsylvania were four of my, what I would call, one of my better years.

00:07:24

INTERVIEWER

The state of Pennsylvania is quite far from Alaska, and your loneliness there was not like the loneliness that you experienced at Mount Edgecumbe. Is that right?

ILLIADORE PHILAMONOFF

Right. Well, first of all, I had matured a little more, and I knew what I wanted. I knew what I was getting into, whereas I didn't really know when I first went down to Mount Edgecumbe. But like I stated, I was looking forward to the church life and learning something that I want to be my work in my later years of my life.

00:08:22

INTERVIEWER

You mentioned the church. Could you tell us more about the church and your involvement in the church today? And also, the past, if you can, history that you know of, of the church here in Alaska, and its impact on the Aleut people in Alaska.

ILLIADORE PHILAMONOFF

Well, in 1794, with the settling of the first missionaries in Alaska and lasting until the sale of Alaska to America in 1867, the orthodoxy in America existed within the bounds of the Russian Empire. And this was a Russian mission on Russian territory. And the church in Alaska was under the... was called the Russian Orthodox Church. And this... the faith was introduced to the Aleuts in 1794. And the Aleuts had accepted orthodoxy, and they... and it has been about 170... 178 years here in Alaska... And I think it had a great impact and a very profound impact on the Aleut people that the... that the whole life of the Aleuts after losing much after the Russians came, especially those that came just for the fur, the fur seals and the sea otters, had really taken away much from the Aleuts. And I think the Alludes above all have lost more in relation to their culture and even arts than any other Alaska native today. When the Russians came, when Alaska was discovered, it is said that there were approximately 20,000 Aleuts. But about the time of the sale of Alaska, there were probably no more than 2,000 Aleuts. And nothing was recorded, nothing was written, the Aleuts did not have a written history until the Russians came. But many of the old people, the elders that knew the culture, that knew the arts, were killed or died from diseases and in wars and on their hunting parties. And much, much was lost. But the Aleut people, especially with Veniaminov, John Veniaminov, who was a priest who later became a bishop of Alaska, had put down the Aleut language with the Cyrillic alphabet with some changes, and had written some of the prayers, and the three gospels had been translated. The Divine Services, the Divine Liturgy, and the visual Vespers and Matins were translated into Aleut. But

the Aleuts now, today, do not use too much of the Aleut, Aleut language in their services, their church services. I think one of the reasons why this happened was because that the Russian priests that came here had imposed upon the Aleut people to use Slavonic, which is about the same as the Russian language, for their own convenience that they did not want to take the time to learn the language, which was too difficult. So therefore, we had to use Slavonic for their satisfaction and not necessarily to the satisfaction and to the benefit of the Aleut people. Therefore, I feel now that the trend of the Aleuts should be to use more of the native language, whether it be in Eskimo, Tlingit, or Aleut, in their Divine Services along with English, and eventually that the Slavonic, after some period of time, will be phased out. And the life of the Aleuts, after the Russians had come to Alaska and when the mission was started in 1794, had begun to look at the church as their center, their center of life, and it was in their whole daily life from day to day and from year to year that everything they did was centered around the church. But today, with the new times, with the changing times, this is becoming less and less, but nevertheless, their faith in God is still strong, and they cling to the Orthodox religion.

00:15:33

INTERVIEWER

Today, as you mentioned, the involvement with the church is less. Where, or I might say, are your services scheduled regularly, or did? When you were growing up, did you have more church services to go to? Have the services decreased for your attendance?

ILLIADORE PHILAMONOFF

No, I don't think the services have decreased really any, but I didn't really say that the life, or the church life in itself, has decreased any. But I think within pressures and the time and the changing attitudes and with more of the white culture or the outside interference, and with all the... some evils of the world, like alcohol, or things have been attributed to the church attendance itself. But even today, many of our Aleuts still look to the church as a center of their life, but like I said, I don't believe it as much as it was perhaps 50 years or 100 years ago.

00:17:35

INTERVIEWER

The... your congregation or the number of people that belong to the church today, does it decrease as people move to places like Anchorage, do the people still attend services as they do, say, like in St. George Island? What I'm trying to ask is, your congregation... does it fluctuate very much?

ILLIADORE PHILAMONOFF

Well, it varies from village to village. At one time, there were perhaps more priests that were servicing the different villages on certain occasions during the year, but many of these villages have been neglected with no priest assigned there, or no one coming to, coming at least once a year. Therefore, the church life in some of the villages is almost nil. This is really not true so much out in the Aleutians. But I think in different parts of Alaska, where there was once an Orthodox community, there is no longer an Orthodox community because of the encroachment of other faiths. The religions that have come in have given the spiritual food to the people that they need. But I think it's the fault of our administration of the church, not only here in the Diocese of Alaska, but the jurisdiction that we are under has not supplied enough priests. But I think that, for one thing, money is a factor in this that we can't travel to every place that we'd like to because of the costs.

00:20:15

INTERVIEWER

The church today, how many members do you estimate you have here in Alaska? I know the church also includes non-Aleuts; they have Eskimos attending the Russian Orthodox Church. Could you tell us about how many people attend the Russian Orthodox Church and how many priests serve all these people?

ILLIADORE PHILAMONOFF

Well, I don't have any statistics to go by, but to approximate how many members we have here in Alaska, of all the Alaska natives as well as non-natives who belong to the Orthodox Church, might be roughly anywhere from 10,000 to 15,000 Orthodox people, and there are roughly 80 churches and chapels throughout the state of Alaska where there was an Orthodox community. Some of these communities have been abandoned, and the churches have been torn down, so they might be less than 80 or 90, perhaps maybe a good figure would be 65 to 70 churches.

00:22:01

INTERVIEWER

Ed, today, you are intimately involved in the church here in the Anchorage area. Could you just tell us a little bit about what goes on in the church? And I'd like to ask you to have a read of a prayer in your Aleut language and then translate the prayer for us if you could.

ILLIADORE PHILAMONOFF

I'm involved in the church first of all as an Orthodox Christian, and I am the choir director and the reader of our local parish here in Anchorage, the St. Innocence Orthodox Church, and our membership here fluctuates greatly, but we probably have approximately 200 steady members who live here in Anchorage, but the rest are transients who come here to Anchorage, maybe just passing through or attending school or working for a short period of time. But this is the newest parish in Alaska, which was begun in September of 1967, and we have come a long way. We now have the basement portion of the church built, where we conduct our divine services. And the language that we use here in our church is more English. We use Slavonic and Aleut, and some Eskimo, and very little of Greek. And the prayer, or the Thrice-Holy Hymn, I will say in the Aleut language.

[Speaking in Greek]

In other words, this being translated means Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us.

00:24:56

INTERVIEWER

The church today, I notice, celebrates Christmas and New Year's and other celebrations at a different time than we do. Why is this?

ILLIADORE PHILAMONOFF

Well, the Russian church, basically, where all the Orthodox churches at one time were under the Julian calendar, which is different than the Gregorian calendar that's used today. And at this point in time, we are about 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar. For instance, Christmas, the

Western Christmas, is celebrated on December 25th. But when you count the days – 13 days from that time – January 7th is when we celebrate our Christmas. But the trend now is to, in the lower 48, is to go on the new calendar, which would put us in line; we would be celebrating Christmas on December 25th instead of January 7th. In fact, there are some churches that have done this already, and I think eventually, probably, perhaps not in the near future, this will happen in Alaska. And our Easter does not follow in this manner. Our Easter dates were set up by the First Ecumenical Council in 325 in Nicaea. This had something in relation to do with the Vernal Equinox and the Jewish Passover, and the Orthodox Church throughout the world celebrates Easter on the same day, and this new calendar has nothing to do with it.

00:27:31

INTERVIEWER

Today we have been talking to Mr. Illiadore Philamonoff and Aleut from St. George Island. Thank you very much for being with us today, Mr. Philamonoff.

ILLIADORE PHILAMONOFF

You're welcome.

[end of recording]