

Narrator: Alfred Stepetin
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Transcribed by: Margaret A. Asbury

Side one:

Alfred Stepetin [AS]: I have no written summary of anything I'm going to talk about. Last time I was talking about the Aleut people, their religion, and the Russian influence on their religion.

As I stated before, the Aleut people did not practice a religion as some other tribes did. They believed in higher beings, but they never built idols or statues for their memory. The Aleut people anticipated the coming of their Maker. And when the Russians--when I say the Russians, I don't mean the church itself; I mean the Russian hunters--came and began to baptize them, they accepted this baptism as being the religion they had been waiting for. So, years before the coming of the priests and missionaries, many villages, complete villages, had been baptized by lay people, the hunters or the officers off the ships. They did this not only for their own convenience, so they could marry the Aleut girls, but to make them feel comfortable and wanted within the village itself.

At the coming of the missionaries, the Aleut people had by then had their Christian beliefs pretty well--you have to imagine that this is over a period of a hundred years--had pretty well set their goals to be Orthodox Christians. So when the priests came and started giving them the sacraments and giving them their "do's" and "don't's" about religion, they pretty much fell into place and accepted it. And as of today, it influences so much that even to this day, the Orthodox church stands first in the life of the Aleut

people. Even before his culture. But he let his culture die. He would not let his religion die. They took their culture, the men who were wood carvers, who carved masks and other tools and implements of war, took that same talent and put it into carving ornaments for the church. As a good example, you go in the Aleut art book by Lydia Black, you will see some Aleut carvings that adorn the icon screen at the church at Unalaska. Again, they left their old pagan Aleut singing and dancing pretty much. As I said before, we don't have that much of it anymore. They use their voices to praise the Lord, in their own language. And again, to this day they still do this.

Next week sometime, I will bring a Native Festival of Arts Night, Aleut Night, and show you an example of what the Aleut arts and dancing and music was like then and is like now. I still haven't been able to locate the tape. And somebody had asked on our little slip (I'm getting to that. I'll get those little answers for you.) what about Aleut taboos? Aleuts had many taboos, I believe. They must have had. They had a--what kind of belief they believed in. One was that a man was never to be near his wife the night before a hunt. Nor was a wife or daughter having her, let's say, period was to be near the hunting gear or the house of the one that's to go hunting. In the Orthodox practice, this also has a very strong significance. A woman who has a child cannot enter the church for forty days. Now this is Orthodox belief, not Aleut belief. When she begins--as a teenager she begins her periods, she is not allowed to enter the church again for forty days--or eighty days. After her second period and the end of her second period. Then she can enter the church. Likewise, after the birth of a child, the mother is not to enter the church for forty days. And in the religion there are special prayers and

everything. This is Orthodox religion, not Aleut religion. Yes?

Student: That number forty come from anything that has to do with the number forty for the forty [inaudible]?

AS: Everything that has forty in it pertains to the forty days Christ spent on earth before his ascension from the earth to heaven. And I think there was a forty day period in the Old Testament, also that--you cried for forty days or something. I don't know. So, and Lydia Black told me, later on, that there's art work at Unalaska church that was done by an Aleut artist. Of course, he went to Russia to study, but he came back and did some icons and work at the Orthodox church at Unalaska. The Unalaska church is the oldest standing structure--orthodox church standing structure in the United States. It was began in 1825. The Sitka cathedral was a little bit older than it is, it was. But the Sitka cathedral burned to the ground and now stands a replica of the church. Likewise, the Kodiak church was much older, but it burned to the ground and another replica stands in its place. But the Unalaska church, as a whole, is not the old church. The main structure, the square central piece of the church, is the piece that was built by our dearly beloved Saint Innocent way back in the 1800's. The wings and the cupolas were added much later. But even to this day, when a man is going to go hunting, he makes sure it's not the eve of a holiday, a church holiday; it is not a church holiday. He's very careful and prays before he goes on his hunt. In each home, Aleut home, you will find an icon hanging with a hanging lamp in front of it that burns for special occasions. When you're born, you are baptized an Orthodox, when you die, you're buried an Orthodox. So Orthodoxy to the Aleut is thier life. They live by it. This day, like any other, [inaudible] within the Aleut

people.

Again, this period of those World War II children that were children in World War II, grew up to be the least religious group of our people. I'm not saying that this is one hundred percent of the Aleuts. I don't mean I know everything about the Aleuts [inaudible]. It seems that this group is the most--is a group that really neglected the church for a period. At a period of time when I was much older, they had brought in a young priest and he began to influence the young people who--you see, they were his age. And he started influencing them and brought them back into the church. And Unalaska, I'm speaking of Unalaska again, life in the church became full again. There was young people, old people, babies, children. They were all in church. And by some work of somebody, [inaudible] New York. They withdrew our priest and took him and made him bishop of Japan. And these young people that had stayed away from church so long, came back and became faithful in the church, said, "What's going on? Something good happens and they take it from us." So they just quit going back to church. I'm not saying that all Aleut Orthodox people are Orthodoxy [inaudible]. There's a lot that need to be brought back into the [inaudible] Christians. On anything.

Student: Was he an Aleut, the guy you talked about?

AS: Who?

Student: The guy, you said that he came in and...

AS: No, no. He was a priest from Cleveland. We don't have a mike today, as usual, so you'll have to talk pretty loud for the pick up to get you.

Student: You said at one time, a couple of sessions back, that whenever the [inaudible] Cutter Bear was in Unalaska [inaudible], I'm not sure of the time [inaudible] that would be the same one that Wickersham went out on [inaudible] so he was there...

AS: I don't know if Wickersham was on that boat, but I seen the boat itself. And I was...

Student: [inaudible]

AS: Much bigger.

Student: Much bigger? Hmmm. They had cars and stuff, too?

AS: They have streets, cars, you know. Yeah. Unalaska is much, much bigger.

Student: How long did you go to Wrangell Institute?

AS: Four years. Five years, actually. Forty-two, forty-three, forty-four, forty-five, forty-six, six years. I graduated in '47. I started school in September of '42, so. Four years, actually.

Student: What did you think of that? Did you think it was an opportunity or...

AS: In the beginning it was forced on me. I had to go to school. I had to go to school. But once I was there, like I say, when they took me home to Unalaska after the war, I was ready to go back. To continue my education. You know, I had to sit and wait for a school to be built. For Unalaska to catch up.

Student: Did you feel alienated at all? I mean, being there in that kind of atmosphere and then going back to Unalaska?

AS: You know, lot of times you hear stories about DP's you know,

displaced people. We were called DP's for many years. 'Cause we didn't belong there and we were displaced. They used DP's as [inaudible]. But it didn't affect us in any way. We were DP's. [inaudible].

Student: Do you feel that people were thankful to have the education or look upon it, maybe, as being away from their families?

AS: I think the majority of students who were going to Wrangell-- who were going there, because they wanted to, you know. They saw it as an advantage. Many of those students who went to that school, and from there went to Mount Edgecomb, are our Native leaders today.

Student: [inaudible] as the elders are?

AS: I would say, now this is my--now I'm not saying it's the majority of Orthodox Aleuts. You know, I'm thinking of my group. There are very few interested, practicing, Orthodox teenagers. But there's, like any other religion, there are Christmas people, there's Easter people, there are people that come at special occasions for weddings, baptisms, and burials. You know? They're there to take part in these rites or sacraments, but they're not practicing. Though they know it's available to them when they want it. But they don't practice going to church as the older people do, and the babies and younger people do. Yes? [inaudible]. No her. You had a question? Oh, you did?

Student: I've heard that the Aleuts that were relocated down at Southeast, they found it real hot and everything, compared to back home. Do you remember anything like that?

AS: It was very uncomfortable the first year because of that humid heat. There was always--if the weather wasn't good you couldn't get away from it. You could go inside, but [inaudible]. It affected mostly the old people. The young people could run around and get a breather sometimes, but the old people [inaudible] they had no way to escape the heat and it affected them a lot. Especially, they became more susceptible to colds. So the weather--when it rained it rained more than it rained in Unalaska. Not only that but it rained off the trees, I mean it dripped on your house and so you had much more water around than you would in Unalaska. In Unalaska the rain fell this way. It was higher for us for it to come down.

Student: In this book I'm reading, it's describing the types children's games that they played with children to prepare them for kayaking or hunting or--do you remember that kind of training happening when you were a child?

AS: Well, I stated in one of my papers that 1935 was about the last year that anything like this was happening, you know. And this was my childhood, when I was six or seven years old. And by then I wasn't being trained in anything. I was only observing what I could. Even my dad was an Aleut dancer and Aleut game player. He wasn't teaching me how to do it. But again, you know, we already had so many years of white man's influence that we were prepared to go their way, you know. I think. Now I say, "I think," because that was my opinion, not the Aleuts. Oh, there's so much to talk about. [inaudible].

Student: What were the kinds of things they taught you in school? If you remember.

AS: Everything they taught you in any public school. There was regular high school course.

Student: So did girls go, too?

AS: [inaudible]. Anyways, boys dorm and girls dorm, but we're in-- we had classes together. And this was school for all Natives, Eskimo, Tlingit, Haida, all of these mixed Indian tribes.

Student: When you went back to Unalaska, after the war itself, how did you make your living? What did you do there? Why did you decide to take up Aleut, the language, at that time? [inaudible].

AS: Well, I told the class that it became a necessity for me to learn the language because, like I say, I never had a home when I went there and my aunt took me in to live with her. And she spoke Aleut. So to get along with her, I had to learn Aleut. So I learned it. And like I say, it was laying dormant in my mind all those years. From hearing it as a child. That it just needed some influence to get it back into place. And, once I learned it, it became part of my life.

Student: What did you do for a living when [inaudible]?

AS: I was city clerk. Almost mayor one time. Then I worked for different canneries and stuff. Bookkeeping. I'm a bookkeeper by trade and jack of all trades and master of none, I guess. But I studied to become [inaudible] the influence the church had on my [inaudible]. At the present, I'm a subdeacon. In our church we have ranks of priests, so there's patriarchs, metropolitans, bishops, archpriests, priests, archdeacons, deacons, and subdeacons. I'm a subdeacon--an ordained subdeacon. I'm the lowest on the ranks, but [inaudible]. And I worked in the church

for over twenty years before the bishop said, "Okay, we'll recognize you as a good worker. We'll award you the title of 'subdeacon'." You don't get those titles--they don't hand them out to everybody. But, I went to seminary in Pennsylvania and studied religion, so I could know more about my religion.

Student: When did you do that?

AS: That was in the late fifties.

Student: How long did you stay down there?

AS: I stayed two years [inaudible].

Student: Going back to religion, [inaudible] were there any kind of spirits or sea animals or...

AS: You know, that was one thing I never really tried to find out was the Aleut's religion before religion--I mean before Christianity. I never really looked into--tried to find if they had the pagan beliefs in spirits. There was a--Orthodox church brought in many of them. They have lots of [inaudible] going on for the church. But not all of them. They're certain little groups that [inaudible]. It's amazing that Unalaska beliefs has its belief. And I go to Tyonek and Tyonek has the same belief. And I always thought it was an Aleut belief. But of course, there was some influence that was Tyonek and there was some--but these are religious beliefs that are not part of the church, but still are part of the church. You know what I mean?

Student: When you're talking about Unalaska, are you talking from Nikolski, or what was your town or village?

AS: Unalaska.

Student: Unalaska, Unalaska.

AS: [laughs] Unalaska was the village. It's on Unalaska Island.

Student: Okay, well. How far is Nikolski from Unalaska?

AS: Five miles [inaudible] it is. [inaudible]

Student: And did you folks--previously, how did travel then, along the shore? Or did they go by land? Or did they travel back and forth?

AS: They used bidarka's to travel on, by shore. Like I told you, there's one of those things that--they had to wait for the tide, a certain tide to go out along the passes. And make sure they were trying to go north or not, the outgoing tide. That meant the water was heading from the north to the south. You don't go north on that tide, you're goint to go--and those passes, they could be like rivers at times, very tough. 'Cause they're narrow and deep.

Student: How far is it from Dutch Harbor?

AS: What?

Student: The--Unalaska.

AS: Not even a quarter of a mile.

Student: So when it got bombed did a pile of [inaudible] just come right in? Or where they already there?

AS: The army was there. The village is situated--where it's situated with the Army [inaudible] around it. So Unalaska was there, it was right in the middle of it all. And they only bombed that [inaudible], on Unalaska. That way they only hit the

hospital. But I don't think that they intended to hit the hospital, they intended for one of the gun emplacements.

Student: [inaudible] Unalaska.

AS: 'Cause they weren't trying to harm the Natives. I mean, the civilians. They were trying to...

Student: Dutch Harbor was where the military was?

AS: ...military was.

Student: Can you say something about the structure of the Russian Orthodox church?

AS: I could say a lot about it. [inaudible].

Student: I mean, Dutch Harbor, what does it look like now? Is there a lot of activity at Dutch Harbor? Are there fishing vessels? [inaudible] local fishing?

AS: There's lots of local canneries now. There's bottom fish canneries all over the place. So yeah, Unalaska isn't sitting idle like it did for years. Like I say, in the beginning there was crab canneries and then they went to shrimp canneries, to salmon canneries. Now they've got bottom fish canneries. And it's seasonal, so they have their equipment that they could change as the season goes, so they're working year 'round. They're not just bottom fish canneries. They don't wait 'til the bottom fish season opens. Once that season closes, they convert into a, you know, a crab cannery and work the crab. And then they change it over, make it a salmon cannery and they work the salmon season. So it's-- they're changeable. There's almost always steady work at Unalaska. I'm speaking of Unalaska. Dutch Harbor...

Student: So if we were to visit there, we'd see hundreds of boats out there?

AS: On a Saturday night you'd see hundreds of boats, yes. And when these come in, there's boats all over the place--so there's boats all over.

Student: I remember a lot of years ago I heard there's someone who started a cattle ranch on Unalaska. Is that possible?

AS: [laughs] Yes. I mean, no. He ran them all off the cliff for some reason. They just didn't take [laughs]. He gave it a good try.

Student: Isn't that what happened to the sheep, too? It fell off the cliff?

AS: Unalaska--too many cliffs in Unalaska [laughs]. Our sheep, if one goes over, he's going to let the others follow him. They don't fool around. But, cows didn't take too well, either. If he had taken down to the south side, Chernofski or Kushiga or Makushin, he would have made it. But he wanted to settle in Unalaska, which is the most mountainous part of the island. And I can remember him pulling his barge up the beach, shooing his cattle off the docks onto the ground. So many people laughed. He had his Texan hat on, too.

Student: Where did he come from?

AS: He was from Texas somewhere. He had brought all his cattle and gone--within a year he was heading out. He was selling [inaudible]. In fact, a couple of days before he left--he had brought a beautiful old army general's house. He burned that

building down, and there was nothing we could do about it. He had all that equipment in his house, and he wasn't about to leave it for anybody. So he set fire to it, and it was in an area where you could never get to with the fire equipment. So we just sat there and watched it burn. That's how disappointed he was. But I heard he started another [inaudible] somewhere else [laughs].

Student: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

AS: Me?

Student: Um hmm.

AS: I had--okay--I had one sister. I mean, I have two sisters now. My older sister and my sister Vera, who lives in California. My older sister lives in Nikolski. I had two brothers and two other sisters, but they're gone.

Student: Do the Aleuts have [inaudible] with the Russians [inaudible].

AS: I always wanted to check with Lydia on my work. I--you would know. [inaudible] is not Russian.

Student: What does that mean?

AS: Dog.

Student: [inaudible]?

AS: Um hmm. It's an Eskimo borrowed word. No, I guess Eskimos had their dogs, though don't they. They must have had their dogs. And I think the Aleuts even came up there and saw [inaudible]. But I don't know of dogs being in Unalaska--I mean, in that area.

Student: Aboriginally?

AS: Yeah.

Student: You don't know of dogs?

AS: I don't know of dogs. Though there's a word "dog", it's probably not Russian. There is a word for dog, but other than that-- There were no cats, of course. The only other thing they could have domesticated would be a the squirrel or a fox [laughs]. But who'd want to domesticate them, unless they wanted it for a pet. It has no, you know--you couldn't train it to do any work.

Student: In a book I was reading [inaudible] or animals to learn their way and habitat [inaudible].

AS: I'm sure they took seal pups and, you know, took them home. You know, used them as pets until they grew to big to be of any-- I'm getting tired. I don't know about you guys. We'll take a ten minute break.

Side Two:

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