

September 22, 1988
Knowledge of Native Elders
Summary by Kathy Craft

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Edward and Margaret Penatac
Inupiaq

"Our grandparents lived the hard way; we lived a little easier."

Personal History:

Both Edward and Margaret were born on King Island. Edward completed the 8th grade and Margaret completed the 4th. They were both raised speaking their own native language. In 1959, the village was forced to move to Nome and in 1978 Margaret and Edward moved to Fairbanks. When Margaret was 11, she began to help her crippled grandmother. She did chores around the house and ran errands. Edward was raised by his mother and stepfather (his biological father died when he was a baby). His stepfather taught him to hunt.

Margaret and Edward raised 14 children. On one of their daughters first birthday and older sister spilled boiling hot water on her. The radio was used in the BIA school to call Kotzebue for an airplane. The men cleared a path on the ice on the North end of the island for the plane to land. Margaret went to Kotzebue, with her daughter, on the small plane (her first time in a plane). Margaret was disappointed because Edward had killed his first polar bear and was to dance his polar bear dance that night. She missed it.

As long as Margaret and Edward can remember the village always celebrated Christmas. They would have a big dinner and dance. On New Years day they would play Eskimo games.

King Island History:

In 1927, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) built a school for King Island. The same year a Catholic Church was built and a priest moved to the village. Things changed after the church erected the statue of Christ the King. "No more scary things happened." There was approximately 150 people living in the village at that time. In 1959, the BIA closed the school because they were afraid a rock avalanche would destroy the village. The village was relocated to Nome. Margaret told a story of her brother. He had put his whole family on a boat to return to King Island. BIA officials got on the North Star boat and took all the children of school age. They sent them to live with their grandparents

and relatives. The school in the village only had eight grades, if parents wanted their kids to continue their education they were sent to Mt. Edgecombe.

Living on King Island:

The women would cook and make sure there always a hot meal for the hunters when they returned home. Afterwards, they would sew. The men hunted different things depending on the season. They were careful to always watch the weather.

Winter: polar bears (after the north wind blows for 2-3 weeks), sometimes walrus and seals

Winter and Spring: ugruk (bearded seal), king crab, walrus and fish for bullheads

Food was stored in a very large cave. The food was kept cold by the permafrost and stayed cold all year round. The village members were always willing to share food if it was scarce. They melted snow for water. They would cut a chunk from the hillside above the village, tie it with a rope and pull it home. All the homes were heated by Eskimo lamp. They would burn seal oil in it. They cooked and melted snow on these lamps.

A store was opened on King Island before 1940. It stocked coffee, tea, sugar, lard, rice and beans. Other essentials such as guns, ammunition, knives and axes were purchased in Nome on their annual summer trips. A clubhouse was shared by the village. It was used for skinning, drying and storing hides.

Physical Aspects of King Island:

The houses were located on the south side of the island. The cave, for food, was near the houses. The ice flowed north and was very noisy. They would crab, on the ice, 100 feet from shore and hunt polar bear on the north side of the island. They walked out on the ice to get to the north side of the island.