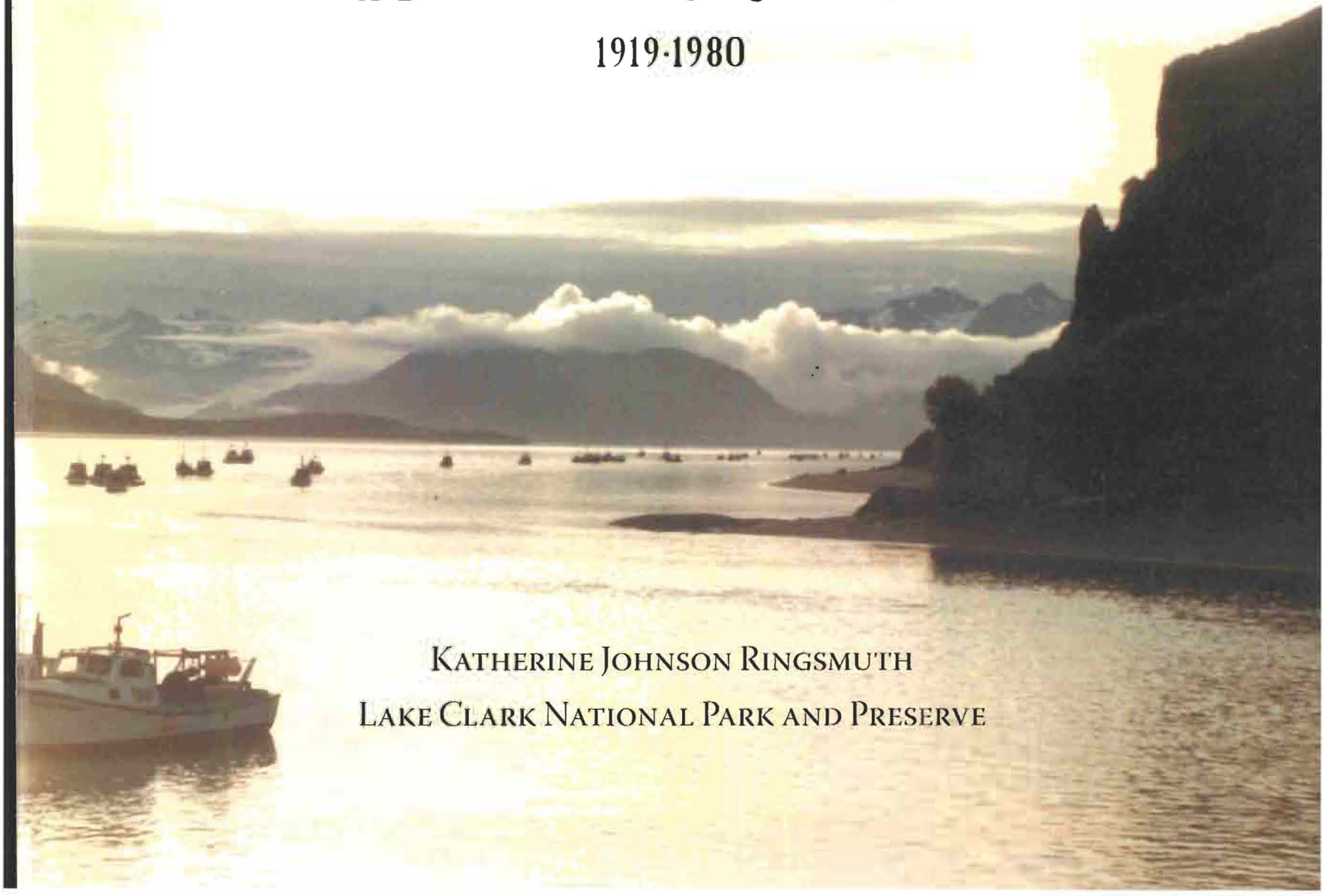
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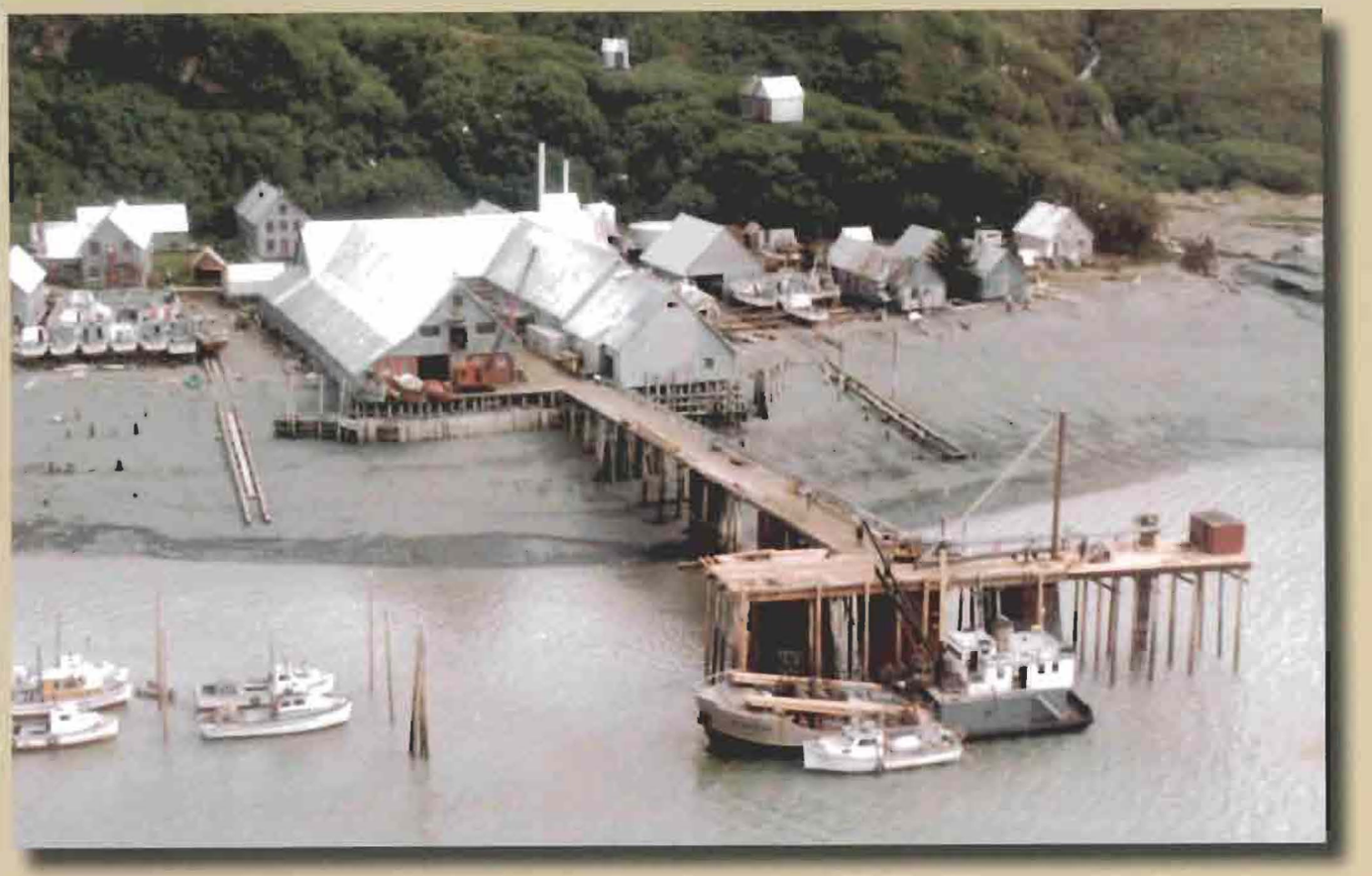
SNUG HARBOR CANNERY

A Beacon on the Forgotten Shore

1919-1980



KATHERINE JOHNSON RINGSMUTH
LAKE CLARK NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE



SNUG HARBOR CANNERY, *post statehood, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.*

Research/Resources Management Report
AR/CRR-2005-53

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National Park Service
Lake Clark National Park and Preserve

As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural and cultural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all. The department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.

Cover:
"Sunset over Tuxedni Channel," Barbara Kistler, private collection.

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Design and layout by Denise Martin

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H32 (LACL-CR)

October 25, 2005

Dear Friend:

I am pleased to send you a copy of *Snug Harbor Cannery: a Beacon on the Forgotten Shore 1919-1980* by Katherine Johnson Ringsmuth and produced by Lake Clark National Park and Preserve. The study takes readers into the diverse lives of the people who built, managed, and worked at the Snug Harbor Cannery, located just off the coast of Lake Clark National Park and Preserve on Chisik Island. Illustrating this remote industrial landscape are several historic photographs, many of which were donated by the people who worked at the cannery. Although centered on the Snug Harbor cannery, the story covers a geographical span that reaches into the larger Cook Inlet region. It shows not only what life was like for both owners and workers, but how the cannery was connected to, and ultimately shaped the larger region's history, economy, and cultures.

Snug Harbor Cannery is the result of cooperative efforts by park staff, university faculty, museum archivists, and most importantly, the former cannery workers who shared their stories. This book is a companion to an earlier publication, *Buried Dreams: The Rise and Fall of a Clam Cannery on the Katmai Coast*, which is still available.

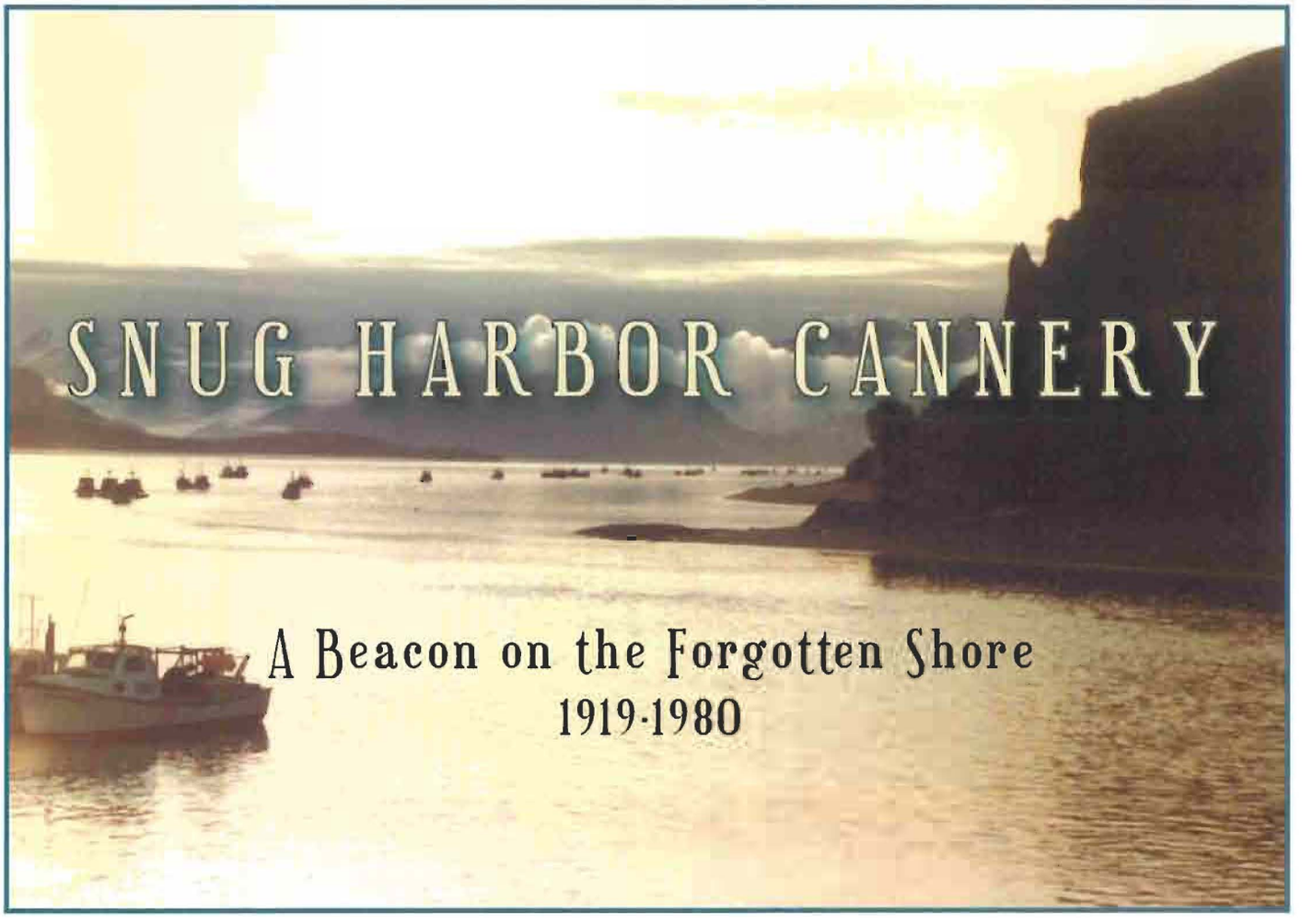
We welcome your comments and if you would like additional copies, please contact us at either address above or at (907) 271-1383. After December our address will change, so please contact us at 240 West 5th Avenue, Anchorage, 99501.

Sincerely,

Joel Hard
Superintendent

Enclosure

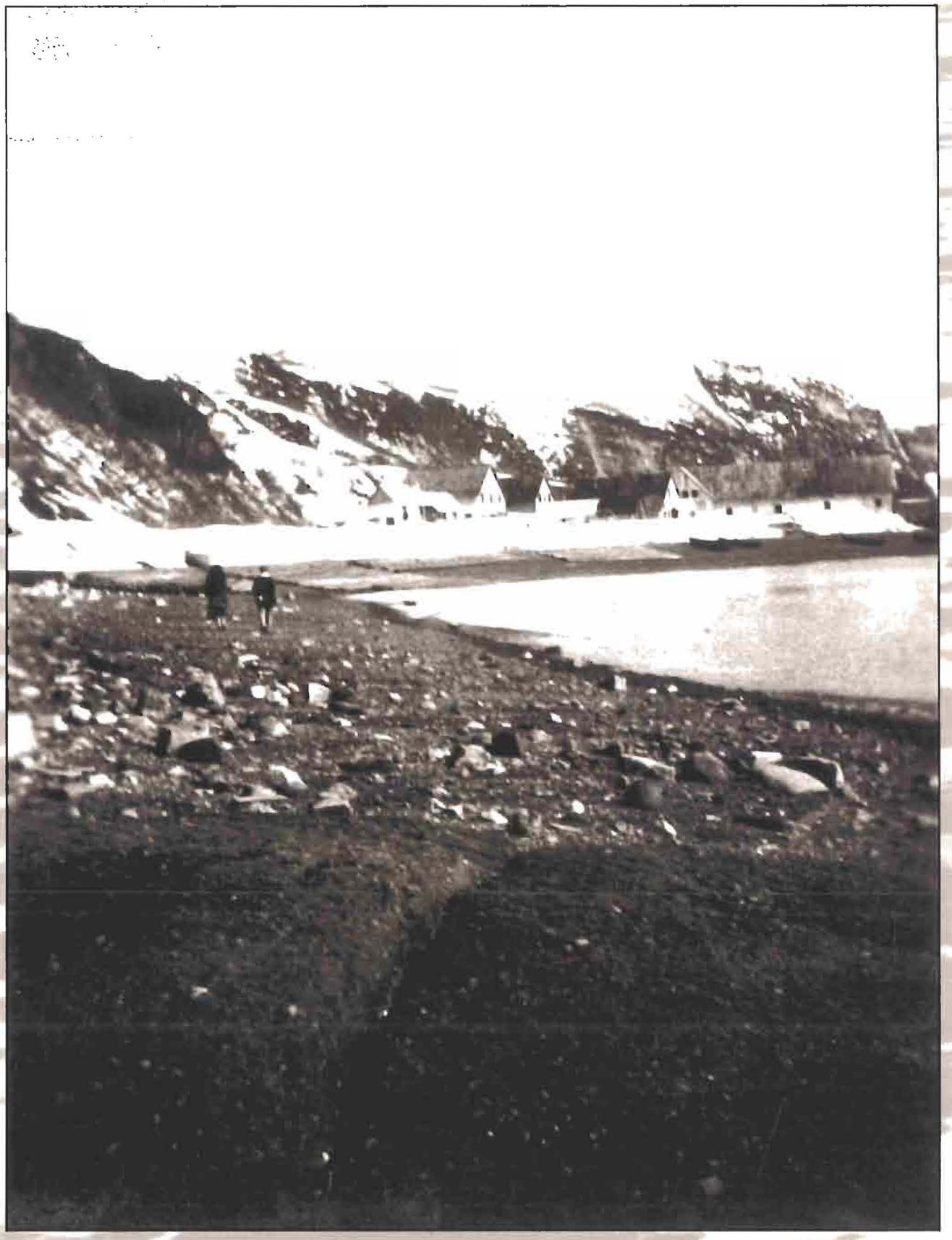
TAKE PRIDE IN AMERICA



SNUG HARBOR CANNERY

A Beacon on the Forgotten Shore
1919-1980

KATHERINE JOHNSON RINGSMUTH



"Smug Harbor 1927," Waugaman Salmon Industry Album, Accession number, 97-27-19, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska and Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Foreword
STEPHAN HAYCOX
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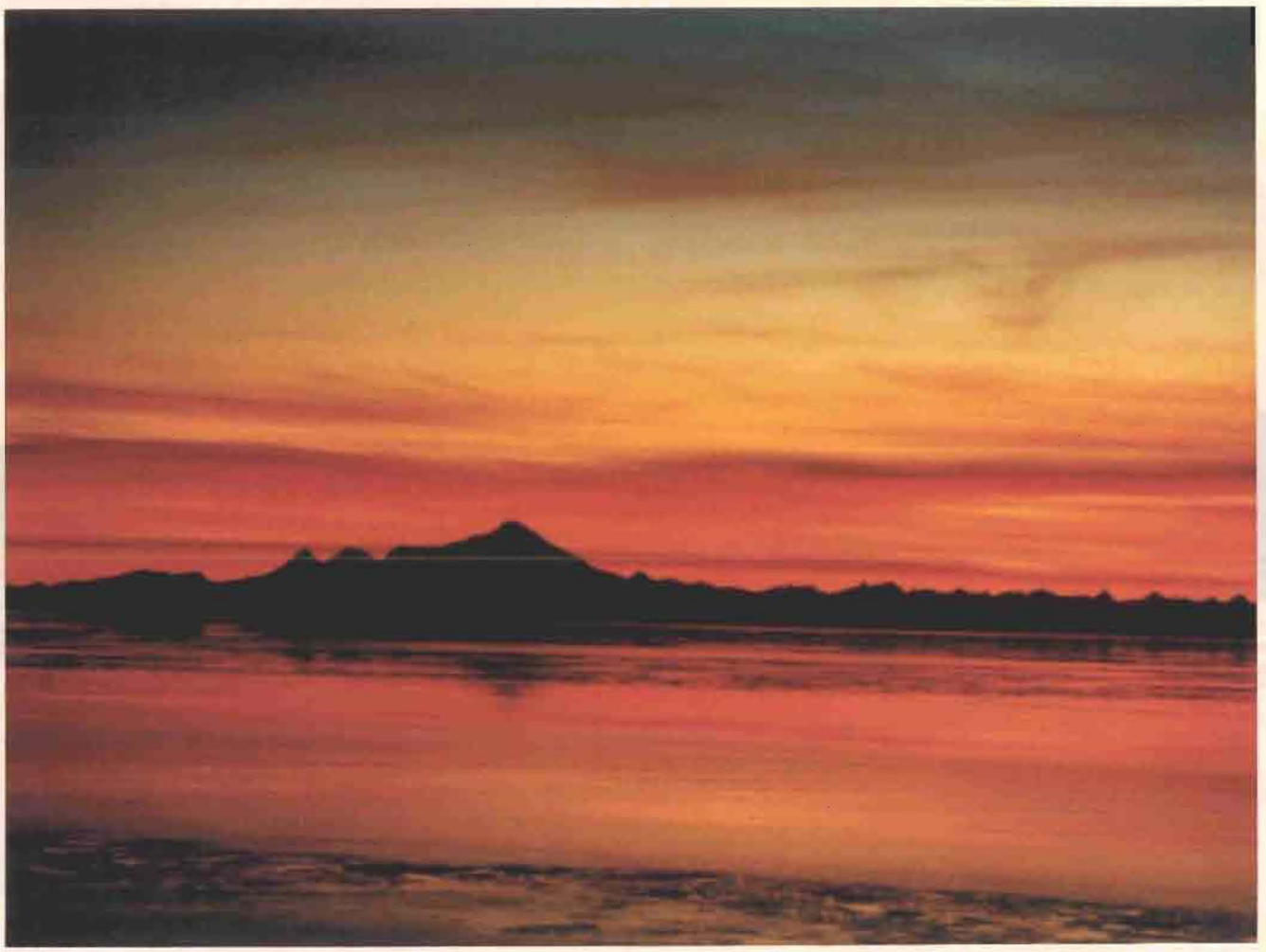
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Foreword

Katherine Johnson's *Snug Harbor Cannery: Beacon on the Forgotten Shore,* is an important, new excursion into Alaska's social and economic history. Rather than treating the cannery there as an economic statistic, an instance of the larger phenomenon of economic and resource development in Alaska, Johnson credits the people and product of Snug Harbor with an integrity of their own. She assumes that the work, aspirations, achievements, and evolution of the people of Snug Harbor have intrinsic value, a value not limited just to their family story. Using the most recent and pertinent theoretical tools and ideas, Johnson analyzes the experiences of Elmer Hemrich, George Palmer, and the Fribrock family in such roles as dreamers, producers, employers, marketers, community builders and regional boosters. In doing so she provides her reader with a view of unusual significance, looking out from the perspective of individuals, their activity and their community to the broader locale, the region, and the time.



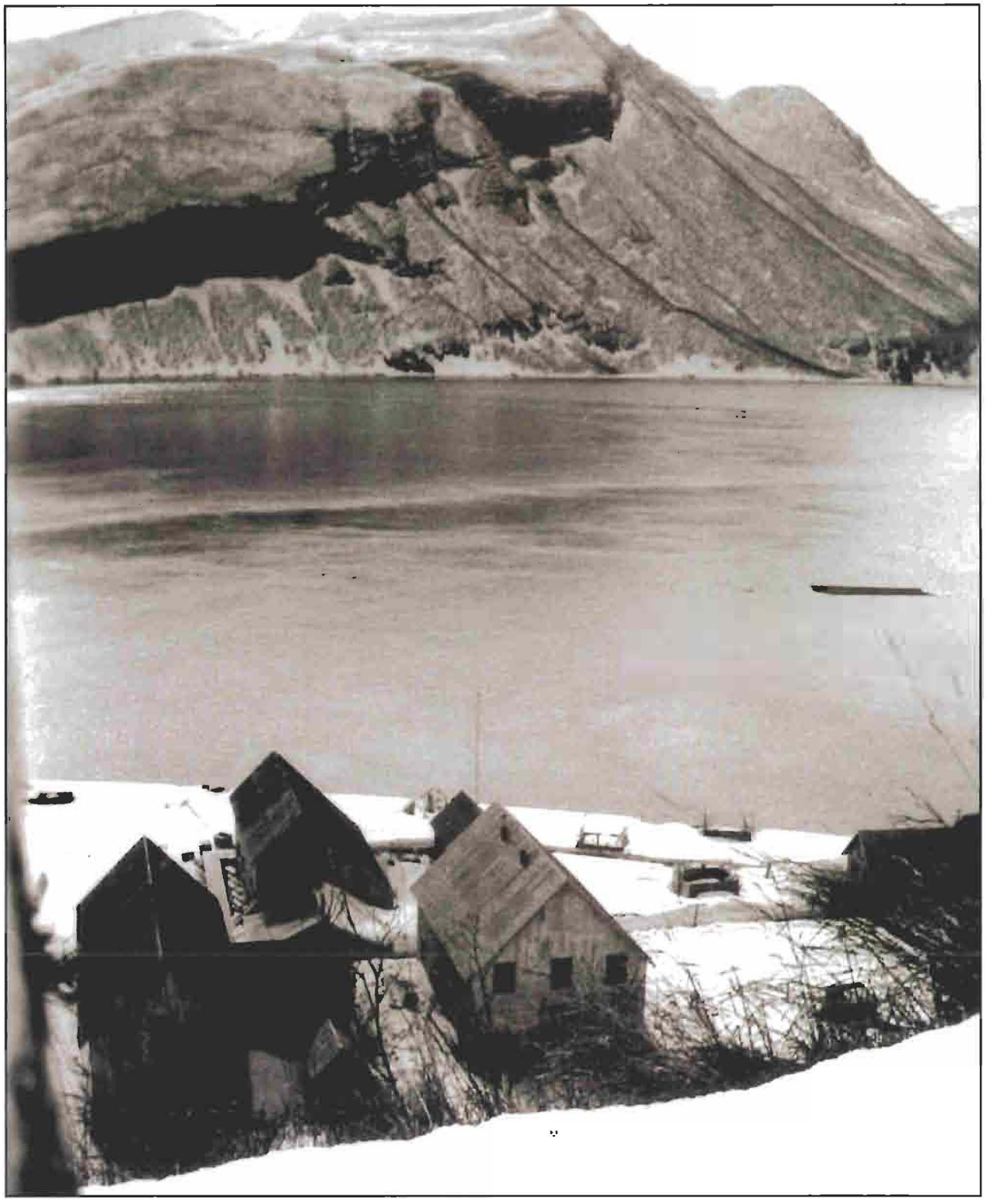
"Mainland at Sunset," Barbara Kistler, private collection.

Readers of history, particularly the history of Alaska, are used to peeking in, glancing fleetingly at individuals, families and communities as examples of regional, national and international patterns and trends. Johnson turns historical analysis around, centering her investigation firmly in one Alaska place, reconstructing its particular history, focusing on the collected achievements of the people of that place. Thus, she views the social, economic, and political changes of their community, their region, and by extension, all of Alaska from their unique perspective. In doing so she lends new meaning to such well-known episodes as the fight against fish traps, the campaign for statehood, the role of ethnic minorities, status and contribution of women, and the nature of community. This is fresh history. It gives life to a remote Alaska settlement and invites comparison with other individuals, families, and communities in Alaska and in other remote locations in the continuing search of the meaning of particular and collective pasts.

Johnson does not restrict herself to a narrow pathway. She ranges across anthropology, ethnohistory, oral history and other methodologies to reconstruct the lives and community of Snug Harbor. The result is a comprehensive understanding of the many threads manifest in the evolution of Snug Harbor's families and workers. One theme those threads weave is adaptability. Colony farm boys became fish canners; women learned how to create community by generating shared experiences, and recovering familiar traditions. Cannery owners built docks and reconfigured machinery in order to produce a marketable food, and learned how to tap transportation, distribution and marketing networks to get their product on American store shelves. Ingenuity and determination were born of a conviction that individual and collective effort in pursuit of agreed goals constituted a valuable life. In that pursuit individuals matured, endured, and occasionally prospered. More important, such efforts became the building blocks of human value. That value gives the story of Snug Harbor its most profound meaning.

Johnson's reconstruction and analysis of the Snug Harbor cannery enriches Alaska historical studies. It is reasonable to hope that it will serve as a model and aid for other historians interested in Alaska, in remote settlement, in the construction of community, and the methodology of connecting personal and family history to the story of the territory's development. If they take advantage of it, *Snug Harbor Cannery: Beacon on the Forgotten Shore* will prove an invaluable guide.

Stephen Haycox
Anchorage, Alaska
October, 2004



"Snug Harbor 1927" Waugaman Salmon Industry Album Accession number, 97-27-15, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

INTRODUCTION

Snug Harbor Cannery: A Beacon on the Forgotten Shore 1919-1980

In 1880, census taker Ivan Petroff wrote a report that described a lonely landscape along the west side of Cook Inlet. Petroff's sharp pen noted recently abandoned native dwellings on Kalgin Island, the bold and mountainous mainland terrain, and a coastline beset with dangerous outlying reefs. He described the shoreline as "deserted and desolate, a wilderness of barren rock and drifting snow, the battlefield of furious gales." "The mainland," he observed, "trembles before an increasing onslaught of a raging sea, kept in a state of turmoil by the joint action of wind and tide." To Petroff this place was not only unforgiving, but it had been forgotten by time. Fittingly, he called Cook Inlet's west side "the Forgotten Shore."[1]

"But one safe harbor exists on all this western coast of the inlet," wrote Petroff, "in the deep indentation between Redoubt and Iliamna mountains."

> It is known as [Chisik] harbor, and is protected from easterly winds by a small, high island. The cannery establishments of Kenai and Kassilof make use of this shelter to moor their large sailing vessels in safety during the season. Communication with the canneries is kept up by means of steam tenders. A salmon stream of limited capacity enters the head of this bay, and indications of the presence of minerals in the mountains are not wanting.[2]

This beacon of the "Forgotten Shore" is aptly known today as Snug Harbor. In the 1880s when Petroff described the coast, Snug Harbor was merely a safe port for cannery ships operating from the east side of Cook Inlet. Nearly thirty years later, two men—Elmer Hemrich, a progressive businessman from Washington state, and George Palmer, an old-time trader from Knik, Alaska—built a cannery there and incorporated their business under the name, the Surf Packing Company. Not long after the cannery was up and running, Palmer quit the canning business. With his partner gone and in financial trouble, Hemrich shut down Snug Harbor cannery in search of other clamming opportunities on the Alaska Peninsula.

After sitting idle for a few years in the mid-1920s, the facility at Snug Harbor (which was also the local name for the cannery) was restored in 1927 by its cannery foreman, Eric Fribrock, who ran the plant under the name Snug Harbor Packing Company. Thus began a family enterprise that continued until the cannery closed in 1980. Alec and Harold Brindle, owners of Columbia Ward Fisheries, purchased the cannery from the Fribrocks in 1981. In 2000 the company sold the cannery and all its assets to the Porter Family, long-time gillnet fishermen at Snug Harbor and good friends of the Fribrocks.

The Snug Harbor cannery operated as a family business in the truest sense of the word. First Eric brought his wife Emma and his infant son Joe to Snug Harbor in 1921. Then, when Joe took over cannery operations in the following decades, he brought with him his wife Dorothy, who assisted with the many administrative duties. During their years at Snug, Dorothy and Joe had two girls, Jan and Barbara. To the girls, life at the cannery was magical. As Dorothy recalls, when the girls were young they loved to stand in front of the fish ladder and watch the fish, appearing almost alive, climb to the top of the ladder and disappear into the cannery. "How they squealed when a huge king salmon, too big for the fish buckets, tumbled back down the ladder, landing with a plop and sending a wave of fishy, saltwater over them."[3] When old enough, Jan and Barbara worked summers at the cannery to make money for college. The Fribrocks maintained an extended family of gillnetters, set netters, and cannery workers who bought groceries at the cannery store and swapped stories around tables in the Blue Room, Snug Harbor's dining area. In many ways, the Snug Harbor cannery was the center of life for those who (even for a few months) called the west side of Cook Inlet home.

Snug Harbor is located on the southwestern shore of Chisik Island, approximately six miles long and two and one-half miles wide. The island's highest point rises 2,674 feet above Cook Inlet. Its lower reaches are covered with an almost impenetrable thicket of alders and salmonberry. A spruce forest covers Chisik's north end, while the summit plateau has a mat of alpine herbs and grasses. Nearly vertical cliffs called the "Ramparts" reach 400 feet high.[4] Chisik's high elevation separates it from other islands in the vicinity such as Kalgin Island, twenty miles to the northeast, and Duck Island, less than one mile to the east. These very flat and rocky islands are nothing more than navigational hazards surrounded by reefs and mudflats that break the surface of Cook Inlet at low tide. Tides in Cook Inlet are some of the most extreme in the world. High tide may rise as much as twenty-two feet, while low tide drains the inlet like an unplugged bathtub, lowering the waters six feet below low mean. Cook Inlet setnetter Nancy Lord described how the west side's fisherfolk measure time not with their watches or clocks, but rather, by watching the tide:

> Under a broken sky, the inlet looks leaden, cold. The rip cuts close toward the point, the water there pitching into frothy peaks. I feel the pull of the water; from now on we will live largely by its schedule, the rhythm it sets. Tide. The very word derives from the Old English for *time*.[5]

Chisik Island is located at the entrance of Tuxedni Bay. When Dr. Frederica de Laguna conducted archaeological fieldwork there in 1934, she described the region as "forbidding."[6] Along the island's shoreline, sandstones and shales fold upward against ancient lava and granite beds, which plunge deep beneath the continent in a never-ending geological collision that controls the formation of the Alaska Peninsula volcanic range. Laguna observed that most bays on the west side were silted up and the extreme tides made navigation difficult and dangerous. "It is not surprising," noted Laguna, "that we did not find many evidences of prehistoric occupation."[7]

Because Tuxedni is the only semi-deep water port on the west side of Cook Inlet, Niketa Mishakoff, a Dena'ina cannery worker, told Dorothy Fribrock that he knew this body of water as *Tukuzit*—"a place to land."[8] Mishakoff's ancestors also knew Tuxedni Bay as a good place to catch salmon, for linguist James Kari interprets the Dena'ina word *Tuk'ezitnu* to mean "fish stranded in tide river." Chisik Island, a seemingly fixed feature that separates the waters of Tuxedni was called *Naqazhegi*, literally meaning where the bay "carved around it." [9]

According to de Laguna, Tuxedni Bay was once home to the Tu'ltcena clan, one of the eleven matrilineal clans of the Cook Inlet Dena'ina Indians. The clan name means "the other side," since oral tradition explains that these inhabitants drifted across the Inlet from the Kenai Peninsula on ice flows.[10] Although she found no artifacts or old ruins to support this story, de Laguna was told of a shelter with dull brick red rock paintings in a place she described as "very difficult to access," and probably chosen by ancient hunters "for its secrecy."[11] The cultural deposits point to a considerable antiquity, as Laguna surmised, "probably greater than that of any of the known Indian sites."[12] Whether the rock paintings, which depict whales, ravens, and human hunters, connect Tuxedni Bay to a past once inhabited by Yupik Eskimos, or they were made by Dena'ina Indians to record their hunt—no one really knows for sure.[13] What researchers do know, however, is that the region surrounding Chisik Island was, as ethnographer Cornelius Osgood described, "occupied by people who lived there long ago."[14]

Besides the original inhabitants, a parade of English explorers, Russian fur traders, Orthodox priests, and American canners, geologists, and big game hunters have landed on the western shore over the past two centuries. Now, much of the mainland surrounding Tuxedni Bay is managed by Lake Clark National Park and Preserve and the Cook Inlet Regional Incorporated (CIRI), an Alaska Native regional corporation established under the Alaska Native Settlement Claims Act (ANSCA).



"Barbie and Jan with king salmon," circa 1966, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

Also calling Snug Harbor home are large colonies of seabirds on both Chisik and Duck Islands. Black-legged kittiwakes are particularly numerous with one rookery extending along the rocky cliffs for over one mile. Other common breeding seabirds are horned puffins, common murres, pigeon guillemots, and glaucous-winged gulls. Further inland, Chisik's thick vegetation provides habitat for many birds including spruce grouse, willow ptarmigan and pine grosbeaks. Mice, shrews and weasels are the only resident mammals, but the occasional brown bear has been known to visit from the nearby mainland. [15]

In 1909, Theodore Roosevelt established Chisik and Duck Islands as a refuge, primarily for the seabirds. In 1970 Congress designated the islands as wilderness, and in 1980 they became a unit of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge. Because the Fribrocks proved continuous use of almost twenty acres surrounding the cannery, in 1942 the federal government awarded the family a patent to the land. In addition to the cannery, Chisik Island has one U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service cabin for rent, but no trails are maintained. Refuge managers report use as being "light." Wilderness camping is unrestricted. Fishing is allowed but hunting is not. Small planes and boats land on Chisik, but gusty winds and treacherous waters of Cook Inlet make access risky.

For the past 84 years Snug Harbor cannery has clung to the southern edge of Chisik Island—just a youngster compared to the canneries on the Kenai Peninsula, some of which were built in the 1880s. Snug Harbor cannery, however, is historically significant because its story reflects broader events associated with the canned salmon industry. Historically, the canned salmon industry was very important to Alaska. Between 1880 and 1937 it produced more revenue than all the minerals mined in the territory in the same period.[16] But the industry shaped more than the economy, for in the canneries the seeds of modern Alaskan society were sown. Relative isolation and limited ownership turnover make Snug Harbor a perfect stage from which historians can begin to understand how the canned salmon industry helped shape Alaska's politics, cultures, urban society, and environment.

Sung Harbor: Beacon of the Forgotten Shore 1919-1980 is a National Park Service special history report that documents and interprets the historical significance of the Snug Harbor Cannery between 1919 and 1980. Organization of the report is structured both by time and theme. Part I introduces readers to the Upper Tier of cannery life, specifically those who built, owned, and managed the Snug Harbor Cannery for nearly sixty years. The first chapter, *Brave Beginnings,* is separated into three sections that coincide with the chronological waves of Cook Inlet's commercial fishing history. The first section discusses the first category or "wave" of canners who eventually consolidated to survive heavy market competition. The second segment places Snug Harbor among the second wave of operators who built smaller canneries along Cook Inlet and explains how Elmer Hemrich and George Palmer came to build the plant. The final section discusses the third wave of canners represented by the small, independent hand-pack operators who canned clams and salmon at Polly Creek.

The second chapter, *A Family of Fish Packers,* focuses on the biographical story of Eric Fribrock and his many years at Snug Harbor. The third chapter, *Driving the Pile Traps,* presents Eric's use of fish traps and discusses in more detail the role that traps played in Alaska's move toward statehood. The fourth chapter, *Snug Harbor's Second Generation,* begins with Joe Fribrock, Eric's son, who took over the Snug Harbor operation after his father retired in 1952. One major theme emerging from Joe's story is the political role the industry played along with Alaska and the federal government in the statehood debate. Additional themes include resource depletion, and the causes and consequences of industrial change.

Part II, which introduces readers to Snug Harbor's Bottom Tier, attempts to follow the advice of historian Donald Worster who suggests that "to study the West [including Alaska] one must consider the ethnic histories of the residents, migrants, and immigrants involved in the extraction of the region's great natural wealth."[17] Unlike Alaska's frontier model that interprets Alaska as a periphery to American history and basically leaves out Alaska's diverse minorities and women, a more contemporary way of understanding Alaska history views the region as a meeting point between various cultures and peoples. Alaska canneries certainly meet this criterion. Moreover, underlying such places of cultural exchange was the pursuit of natural resources. Indeed, one of Alaska's most important resources was, and still is, the Pacific salmon. By the late nineteenth century, the commercial exploitation of Alaska's massive fish runs brought Alaska Natives, Asian immigrants, Euro-Americans, as well as women and children to canneries for work.

The perspective, which argues that this bottom tier of cannery laborers are significant to Alaska history, challenges previous descriptions that lumped cannery workers together as, at best an anonymous group of laborers, or at worst, "the offal-smeared Chinamen" described by Rudyard Kipling in his *From Sea to Sea* letters.[18] Of course, neither description fits, for cannery workers were not faceless pawns of the canned-salmon industry. Cannery workers were diverse and dynamic players in the extraction of a resource almost as significant to the American West as timber, minerals, or



"The Ramparts of Chisik Island," Barbara Kistler, private collection.



"Boat in Rough Seas," Waugaman Salmon Industry Album, Accession number, 97-27-167, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska and Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

agriculture, and they consistently negotiated to empower themselves and to make their lives more tolerable within larger structural constraints. [19]

Part II offers four different perspectives of cannery life. Chapter five discusses the Dena'ina people, many of whom were assimilated into the cannery system in Cook Inlet. Chapter six looks at the charismatic Filipino cannery workers and their contribution in shaping Snug's working landscape. Chapter seven introduces readers to three men from the Matanuska Colony who represent the Euro-American laborers who transitioned from farms to fisheries during the years consumed by World War II. And, finally chapter eight looks at the role of Snug Harbor's female workers, whose sense of place transformed a cannery into a community. The intent of these final chapters is not to offer a comprehensive study of cannery workers—that would warrant a much broader study—but rather to offer snap-shot views of the cannery experience as seen through the eyes of those who worked there. In the Afterword titled *Snug Harbor: Gone but not Forgotten,* an update is provided to inform readers as to Snug Harbor's current status.

Inserted among the various chapters are essays written by people who lived and worked at Snug Harbor. The first essay, originally printed in the November 1950 issue of the *Alaska Sportsman,* is titled "Clams." It was written by Ed Shaw as told to him by clam digger, Harry Seaman. The second essay, titled "If You've Got it to Do, Get on with It," is written by cannery worker Wilma Williams, who canned fish for Eric Fribrock in the 1940s. The third essay, "The Beach Gang," is an excerpt from an article Dorothy Fribrock wrote initially printed in a collection of stories called *Once Upon a Kenai: Stories from the People.* The fourth essay depicts the first days of fishing for one-time setnetter, Rich King, who titled his essay, "The Beginning." In the fifth essay, printed originally in *A Dena'ina Legacy: K'TL'EGH'I SUKDU,* Dena'ina scholar Peter Kalifornsky retells the *Polly Creek Story.* In the sixth essay, Snug fisherman Pat Dixon takes readers through the

empty buildings of Snug, while Dorothy Fribrock describes her first trip to Snug Harbor as a young mother and cannery wife in the seventh and final essay.

Research for this report derives from a variety of sources. Much of the historical interpretation was based on historical works by Richard White, Patty Limerick, Sue Armitage, Chris Friday, Thelma Buchholdt, Richard Cooley, Orlando Miller, Stephen Haycox, and Alicja Muszynski. Also, a considerable amount of historical information came from work by anthropologists and ethnographers such as Alan Boraas, Lisa Frink, James Kari, James A. Fall, Ron Stanek, Joan Townsend, and Patricia Partnow. Peter Kalifornsky's collection of Dena'ina stories contributed greatly. Economic information was also used from studies provided by George Rogers, Steve Colt, James Crutchfield, and Giulio Pontecorvo.

Much of the first-hand information on the fishing industry came from articles in *Pacific Fisherman*, the industry's journal, and various newspapers from Washington State. Also used was an array of articles that came from Alaska newspapers and magazines. Laurel Bennett, a researcher for Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, exhaustively gathered most of these sources back in the early 1990s. She also conducted many of the interviews that supplied the background information used in this report, as well as reviewed an early draft. Frank Norris, James Fall, Alan Boraas, John Branson, Eric Ringsmuth and Jeanne Schaaf read early drafts of the manuscript and contributed greatly to the overall project. Jeanne Schaaf, Lake Clark Cultural Resources Manager, oversaw and provided support for this work, from research through final publication. Leslie Leyland Fields, who edited books such as *Out on the Deep Blue: Women Men and the Oceans they Fish* and authored *Surviving the Island of Grace: A Memoir of Alaska and*



"Uncle Flat, Snug Harbor," circa 1921, Barrett Willoughby collection, accession number, 72-116-187, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.



"View of Slope Mountain through the cannery window," Barbara Kistler, private collection.

The Water Under Fish, edited the final work. Her skills as a writer and fishermen strengthened the manuscript's content and prose. Finally, Stephen Haycox, Professor of History at the University of Alaska Anchorage, made several suggestions that, like a good map, gave the text perspective and direction.

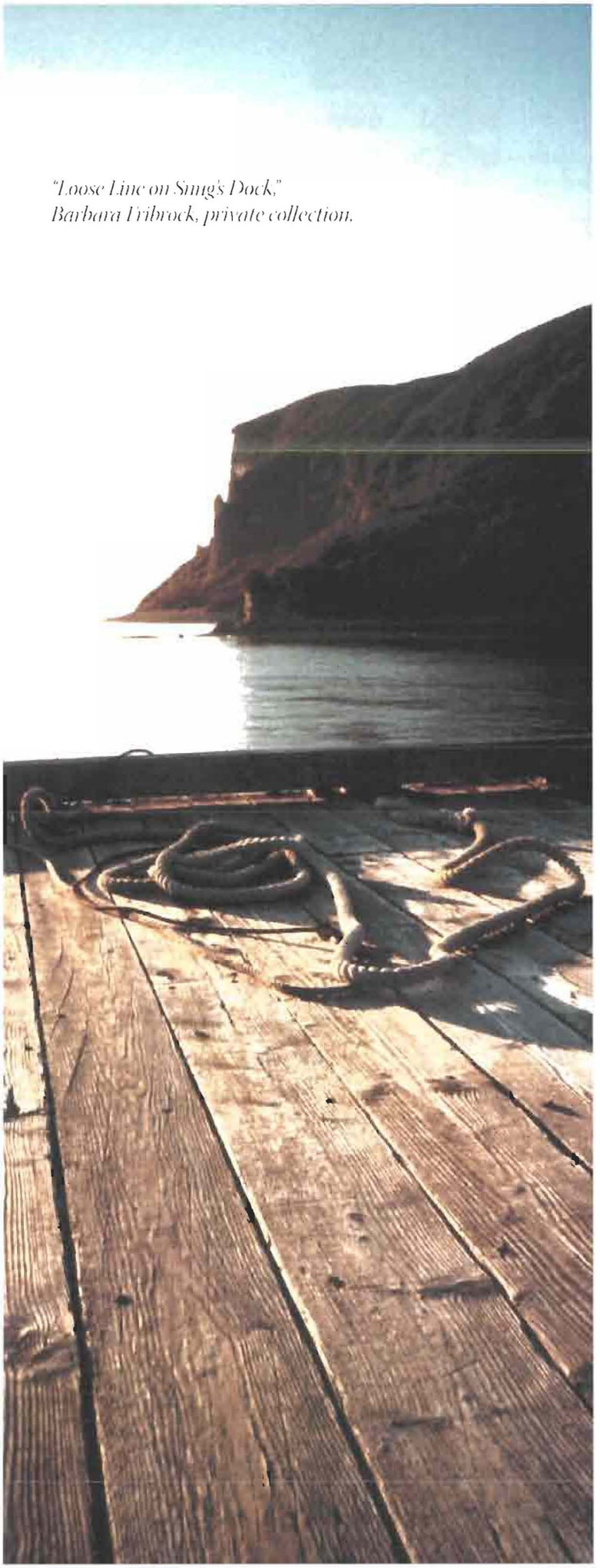
Information on George Palmer was provided by the Colony House and the Palmer city library. Barbara Kistler, Wayne Ballens, Larry Vassanalia, Ray De Priest, Wilma Williams and Alaska Department of Fish and Game area biologist Jeff Fox all graciously gave interviews. Photographs were collected from the Museum of History in Industry in Seattle, Washington, the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, and the Alaska Polar Regions Department at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. Also, Barbara Kistler kindly lent many of her family photographs of Snug Harbor, including a video tape of 16mm footage shot in the 1940s.

Dorothy Fribrock provided the most significant sources for this report. She generously gave countless interviews, donated boxes of Snug Harbor Packing Company business records, even family photo albums that she had scanned and gave to the Lake Clark Katmai Studies Center. Dorothy's own memoir of the cannery--*Sockeye Sunday: The Story of Snug Harbor and Other Fish Tales*--provided key insights about Snug's social community. The book introduced me to the cannery's colorful cast of characters including: Clem Tillion, the one-time president of the Alaska State Senate, who, during his fishing days, courted his wife Diana at the cannery. Another intriguing couple Dorothy introduced me to was Sally and Joe Munger, who watched the cannery during the winter months, and who apparently grew "real flower"--California poppies and petunias--in the cannery greenhouse. Even Henry Kroll, whom everyone called "The Mad Trapper," made it into Dorothy's collection of fish tales. *Beacon on the Forgotten Shore* is not meant to replace *Sockeye Sunday,* for it would be impossible to duplicate Dorothy's intimate stories and first-hand experience. Instead, *Beacon* endeavors to replace these personal experiences into the larger context of Cook Inlet history.

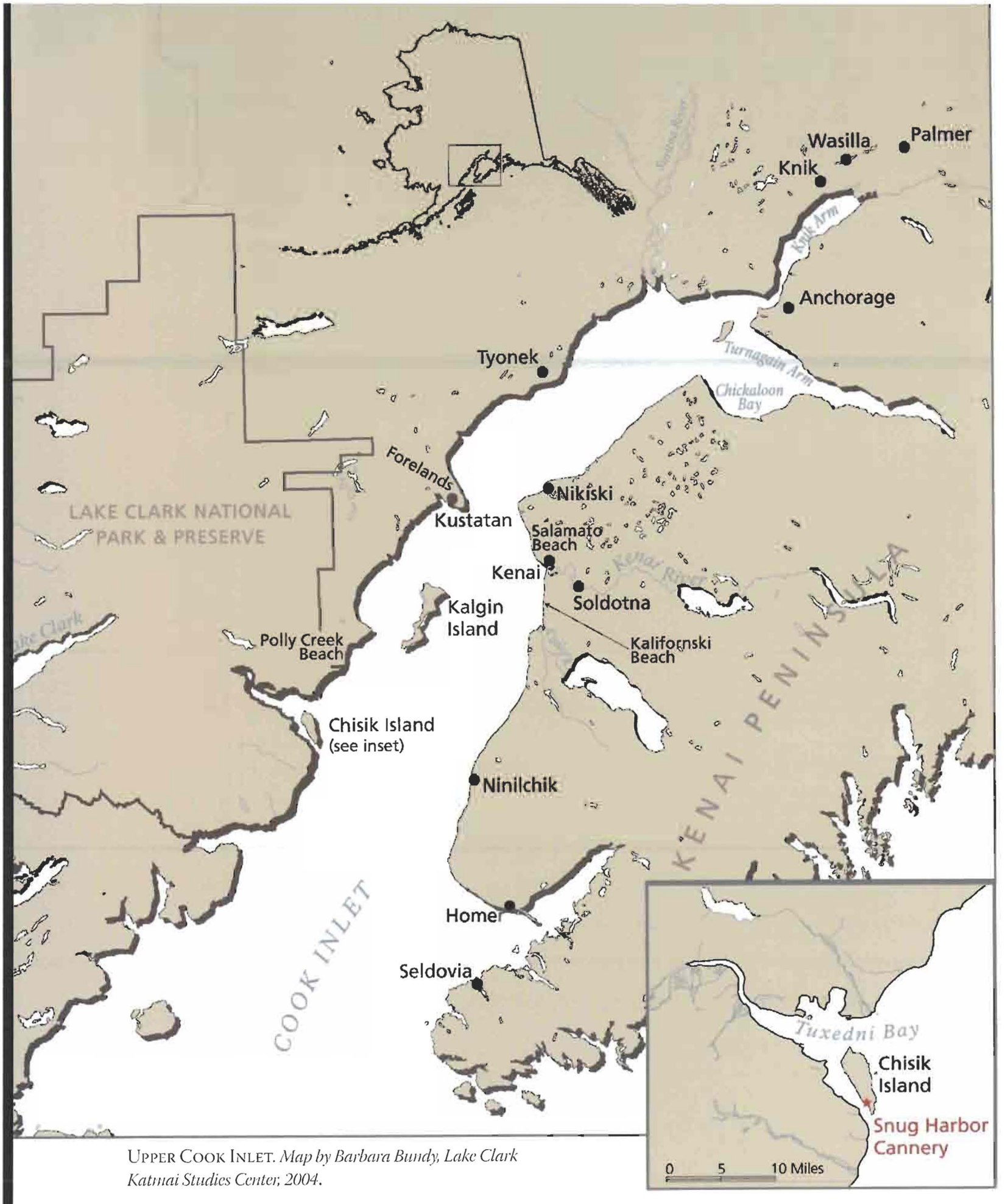
As a young mother living half her life in a small, islolated fish cannery, Dorothy's experience can be compared to women who helped pioneer the American West a century earlier. In fact, they most important aspect of Dorothy's memoir is that *Sockeye Sunday* offers a rare opportunity to vew cannery life through the eyes of a women. Among its pages are stories shaped and told through a woman's words. Dorothy includes stories based on what she thought was important—children, the environment, relationships with men, and bonds of friendship forged with other women. Finally, *Sockeye Sunday* is a love story dedicated to her late husband, Joe Fribrock, who introduced her to Alaska, and subsequently, a very different way of life.

Albert Einstein once said that "the best in man can flourish only when he loses himself in the community."[20] Such could be said of the Fribrocks. Perhaps Eric, and later Joe, operated Snug Harbor as a place of business, but instead, for the many people who worked there it became home. Cannery workers were neither nomads nor transients. They were, as Barbara Kistler suggests, "intimate strangers."[21] What this report should make clear is that the Snug Harbor Cannery was more than a workplace: it was a community. Testifying to this mixture of people are names of those who worked at Snug over the years, etched on support beams in the can shop: Henry Gasotimna carved his name in 1930. Mels Abe left his mark in '32, '33, '34, '36 and '55. Harry Ozawa in 35-36. Clearly the cannery fostered a sense of place—in every building, each nick is part of the shared experience—this is the stuff of community. It can be argued that the mix of cultures, class, and gender at canneries, especially in Cook Inlet, created a society that, in many ways, translates into today's diverse Alaskan society. Snug Harbor may have been separated from most of Alaska's population, but for those who worked there, they were not alone, and perhaps more significantly, Snug Harbor, in spite of Petroff's claims, will never be forgotten. "The Harbor lives in my memory as the best of two worlds" recalls Dorothy Fribrock:

> It is the place where the sunset glow and sunrise rays are only minutes apart, where the moon fills the mile wide channel entrance to Tuxedni in most beautiful of perfumes. The cry of the gulls and the squeal of the fish wheel announce the beginning of another canning season. The pip pop symphony of cooling cans of salmon heralds a good pack. Snug Harbor is the place where wonderful friends and especially my darling Joe and I worked our hearts out to make our dreams come true.[22]

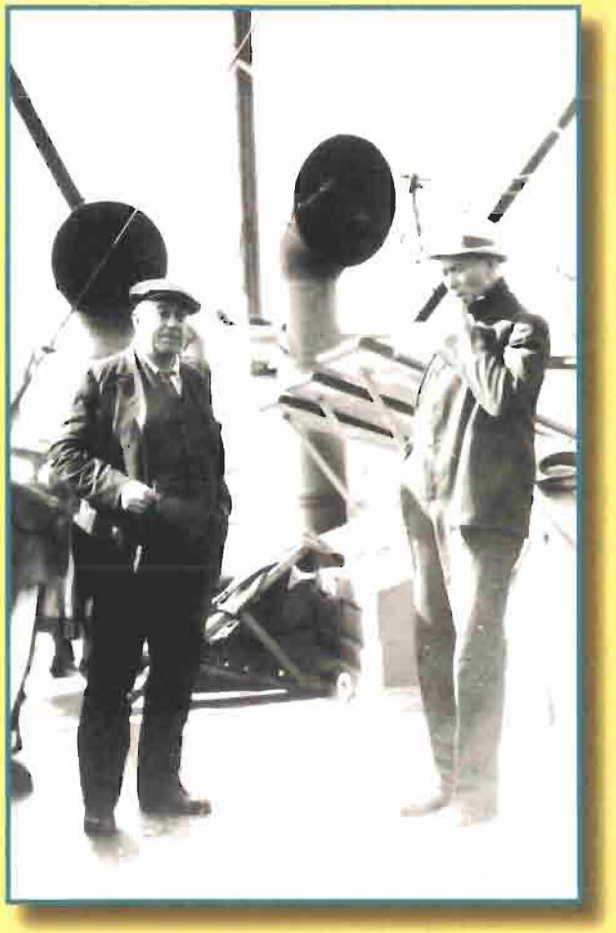


"Loose Line on Snug's Dock," Barbara Fribrock, private collection.



UPPER COOK INLET. *Map by Barbara Bundy, Lake Clark Katmai Studies Center, 2004.*

Part I: The Upper Tier



"George Palmer and Harry Day, 1921," Accession number, B98.17.932, Anchorage Museum of History and Art.



"Bark Corea ashore on Kalgin Island Reef," H.M. Wetherbee Collection, Accession number, 866-63N, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska Polar Regions Department University of Alaska Fairbanks.



"Boat on Reef," circa 1927, Waugaman Salmon Industry Album, Accession number; 97-27-168, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks

CHAPTER ONE

BRAVE BEGINNINGS

While working for the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries in 1951, Lewis G. MacDonald wrote the *Chronological History of Salmon Canneries in Central Alaska.* In the Annual Reports, MacDonald briefly describes cannery operations in central Alaska from 1882, when the Alaska Packing Company built the first cannery on Cook Inlet at Kasilof. He begins his compilation with a poignant epithet of the Alaskan canning industry:

> One hundred and forty-seven canneries have been built in Central Alaska in the last 69 years—investments in the "silver horde" by men of foresight and courage. Ninety-three canneries have been abandoned, burned or moved to different sites leaving a row of piling, pilfered buildings and rotting timbers, often sad reminders of lost hopes, standing against the dark timber of the wild Alaska coastline.[23]

Indeed, these once "sad reminders" fed the world's hunger for canned fish. They also diversified; Cook Inlet canneries canned not only salmon, but razor clams, too. Snug Harbor Cannery was one that did both. The cannery evolved from a long-established industry, but also reflected changing times. From its beginning emerged enigmatic characters, while Snug's wharf staged events that are today, considered truly "courageous."

The First Wave

Only eleven years after the United States purchased Alaska from Russia, the first two salmon canneries began operating in southeast Alaska. As the nation's interest moved away from the broken South, attention turned towards America's newest territorial acquisition. Amazing tales of "red gold" trickled from the north and suddenly the rush to establish other canneries began, and the era of commercial exploitation of the salmon resource in Alaska was on.

Once these fish entrepreneurs reached the unforgiving Alaskan shore, however, reality soon replaced rumor. Alaska's brief fishing season had a marked effect upon employment, capital needs, and the marketing system.[24] It drove up operating costs and forced canners to place a premium on accurate planning. Immediately after the end of the fishing season, canners began to plan for the next season. This meant cannery operators had to forecast the probable size of the runs and correlate a budget with the estimated pack for each of their canneries. Nearly all expenses including labor had to be funded before the season began, and if runs failed or canneries were unable to put up the pack, cannery owners sustained heavy financial losses, usually causing bankruptcy. From the beginning of the commercial era the main outfitting, employment, and financial centers for the Alaska salmon industry grew up outside of the territory, primarily in San Francisco and Seattle. Maintaining a successful operation in the North was about as easy as NASA putting a man on the moon.[25]

Still, the salmon canning industry remained appealing despite the severe challenges of distance. Transportation, labor and dependency of run size may have been something of a gamble, but the actual construction of a cannery was relatively cheap. As historian Richard Cooley describes, "Canneries were simple, inexpensive handicraft units offering an ideal activity for the enterprising individual of limited means who was willing to pioneer a new venture in a new



"The Venus, *Iced Down at Snug Harbor 1927," Waugaman Salmon Industry Album, Accession number, 97-27-41, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.*

territory."[26] When one company prospected an area and established a cannery near good fishing grounds, if the first one or two seasons proved financially successful, then other operators rushed in and established their own canneries. Thus, the early history of cannery operations is a story of over-expansion and tremendous investment in what American entrepreneurs called the new frontier. This was certainly true of canneries on Cook Inlet, for in 1889, the peak year in the establishment of canneries, salmon packers built twelve outfits of which only a few operated beyond the turn of the century. [27]

The sheer grandness of Alaska's rivers and fish led people to believe that the territory's resources were inexhaustible. With fish traps lined across entire rivers before 1899, the fish resources failed and fishing pressures began to reduce annual catches and cannery profits. The situation was further aggravated by unstable market conditions. The salmon rush caused market gluts, which resulted in lower prices. In *Politics and Conservation: The Decline of the Alaska Salmon,* Cooley observes that this pattern of exploitation "was the logical outgrowth of a free fishery in a free competitive economy." Thus, the ruthless competition that emerged before the turn of the century hinged upon the desire for both maximum cannery packs and elimination of rival concerns.[28]

During the last decade of the 19th century, a movement to unify control of production and marketing emerged. Cooperative working agreements between a limited number of individual cannery owners formed the first attempts to consolidate the fishery, and by 1891 almost all the operators in Cook Inlet were included in the agreement. Marketing pools, quota for individual plants, and complete closure of many plants characterized the working agreements. The Alaska Packing Association, an outgrowth of this early movement, was formed in 1892 and incorporated into the Alaska Packers Association (APA) in 1893. Essentially a profit-sharing organization, APA started with 31 canneries, only nine of which continued to operate. APA gave each cannery owner shares in the pool. The number of shares given to each operator was in proportion to the size of his pack of the previous year.[29] By 1900, APA controlled 70 percent of the industry, but by then, the market had stabilized and the total pack was more than two million cases, a value of nearly $10 million.[30] In the years after 1900 the salmon industry began to look much different. By this time the industry was considered the backbone of Alaska's economy.[31] With the success of APA, other important mergers soon followed that included corporate roots of companies significant to Cook Inlet such as Libby, McNeill & Libby, and Pacific American Fisheries, Inc.

New markets opened to these companies as the United States Army and Navy purchased huge quantities of canned salmon during World War I to feed troops fighting in the trenches of France. Even prisoners of war ate rations of canned fish.[32] By the 1920s Alaska salmon fisheries surpassed mining as Alaska's major industry. The Territory had become the world's principal salmon producer. It represented the largest investment of capital, the biggest annual financial yield, the greatest employment of labor, the largest single source of territorial revenue, and, as a result, became the dominant factor in Alaska's political, economic, and social life.[33] "Salmon and Alaska..." wrote Dr. Ernest Gruening in *The State of Alaska,* "...have been as closely intertwined as cotton and the South."[34]

The Second Wave

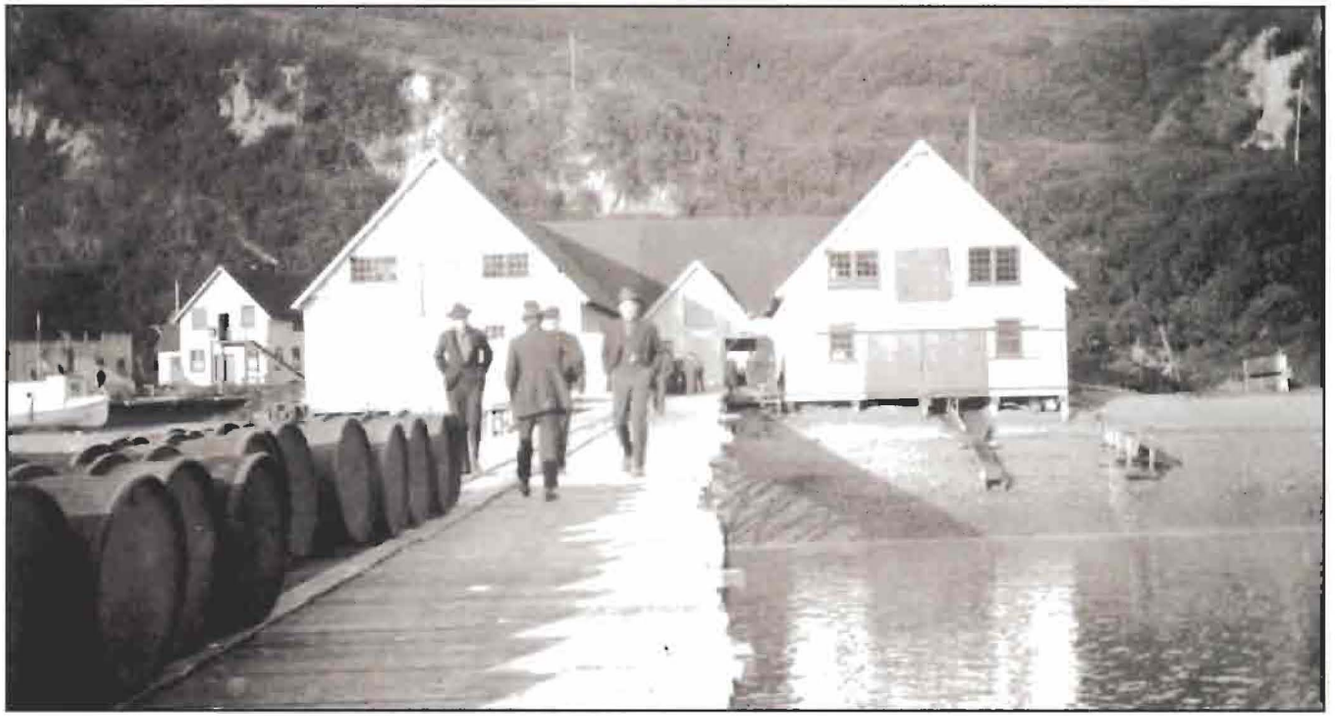
Without doubt, consolidation made the canned salmon industry in Alaska more stable, but it also meant that it was more difficult for a new generation of companies to enter the fishery. To compete, many of these newer companies looked to diversify their product. In Cook Inlet, a few canneries exploited the rich razor clam beds in hopes of expanding their markets. In 1915, the canned clam industry on the Pacific Coast expanded to Cordova, Alaska. The Lighthouse Canning and Packing Company was the first razor clam cannery to prepare an Alaskan pack, and Pioneer Packing Company soon followed.[35] Only four years later the Surf Packing Company from Aberdeen, Washington built the Snug Harbor cannery on the southwestern end of Chisik Island. Not only was Snug Harbor the first cannery built to can razor clams in Cook Inlet, but Snug Harbor led a second wave of canneries that were constructed along Cook Inlet shores.

Elmer Hemrich

One of the two historic figures connected to Snug Harbor's early days was clam canning pioneer, Elmer Hemrich. The Hemrich family's fame derived not from canning clams, but rather from brewing beer. Both Hemrich's father and uncle owned breweries throughout western Washington; in fact, his uncle was the president of Seattle Brewing and Malting Company, the company that made one of Seattle's first nationally recognized products—Rainier Beer. In 1916, the Hemrichs' brewing enterprises came to a halt when Washington State voters adopted prohibition, four years before national voters passed the Volstead Act. Seeking financial alternatives, Hemrich looked to the razor clam industry which had begun to flourish in his hometown of Aberdeen. In 1915, Hemrich and his father incorporated the Surf Packing Company, and in 1916, Elmer Hemrich traveled north to prospect Alaska's razor clam beaches.[36]



"Hemrich's Surf Packing Co. Label," circa 1919, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.



"Snug Harbor Cannery, circa 1921, Accession number, B98.17.573, Anchorage Museum of History and Art.

Hemrich began his journey in Chignik, Alaska, a small fishing village on the south end of the Alaska Peninsula.[37] While walking northward along the shoreline of Shelikof Strait, Hemrich "discovered" the prolific razor clam beach known today as Polly Creek, more than 400 miles northeast of Chignik. Reaching Knik, Hemrich convinced a trapper and merchant named George W. Palmer to invest in his Surf Packing Company. [38]

George Palmer

Famous for the Matanuska Valley town that bears his name, George W. Palmer was another legendary character connected to Snug Harbor. Most popular literature describes Palmer either as "the first white man to permanently settle in the Matanuska Valley," or it concentrates mainly on his Knik stores. Most writers ignore, or at best mention in passing, Palmer's canning venture.[39] But "razor clam canner" was only one of the many hats Palmer wore. Merchant, saloonkeeper, trapper, prospector, boat owner, Elks Lodge member, postmaster, school director, farmer, husband, and father were just a few of Palmer's other roles.

The exact date of Palmer's arrival to the Matanuska Valley is unknown, but records show that he was an agent for the Alaska Commercial Company at Old Knik, perhaps as early as 1875, and he ran the ACC store there until 1882. About that time, Don Irwin, author of *The Colorful Matanuska Valley,* wrote that Palmer began to notice how many prospectors, Indians and others from the Copper River country came down to see and buy goods. With the increase of possible customers, he constructed a store of his own, located on the Matanuska River, a short distance above where



"Snug Harbor workers," circa 1921, Accession number, B98.17.938, Anchorage Museum of History and Art.

the modern-day Anchorage-Palmer highway bridge crosses that river. In the following passage, Irwin not only describes Palmer's store, but he also offers an insight into Palmer's character:

> It is said that this store was unattended. Food and clothing were stocked in the store. Tin-lined boxes were used to protect the groceries and meat from rodents. Butcher knives, saws, paper bags, wrapping paper, twine, and scales for weighing commodities were furnished. A quantity of change was placed in a can. Prices were written on the packages and prices per pound were posted on meats and other weighable and measurable food items. This is said to have been the first, if not the only, self-help, customer operated, store in Alaska and possibly in the world. Mr. Palmer maintained this store between four and five years and always insisted that he never lost a cent, in either goods or money stolen from the store.[40]

Only three years after Palmer built his store, the Lake George break-up, combined with heavy rains, caused the water in Knik Arm to rise to a record height. The Matanuska River undercut Palmer's store, and swept the building and its contents into Cook Inlet. Broke, Palmer left Matanuska to try his luck at prospecting on the Kenai Peninsula. In 1894, Palmer made a strike in one of the tributaries of Resurrection Creek, causing a brief surge of "would be millionaires" into the area.[41] With a bit of money in his pocket, he bought the Old Knik store building and inventory from the Alaska Commercial Company and set up a new store at New Knik, on tide water at the west end of the Matanuska Valley.[42]

In 1900, New Knik was a booming economic and cultural center. Deep water fronting the town allowed for commercial boats to dock, and Alaska Natives from the surrounding Matanuska, Susitna, and Copper River basins to

trade. Not only was Knik accessible from the water, but some of the earliest mining trails radiated from the village. Knik outfitted prospectors and trappers who were coming in increasing numbers to trap and prospect the area of Willow Creek, the Susitna Basin, and the Matanuska and Knik River Basins. Knik even supplied prospectors and miners going to the Kuskokwim River area over the Iditarod Trail.[43]

During the first decades of the new century, many considered George Palmer the King of Knik. He started with a single building and constructed several more until he had fourteen in all. Passageways connected the buildings in a kind of "gigantic merchandising maze."[44] Besides his stores, Palmer owned a schooner called the *Lucy*, and used her to carry goods from San Francisco to Knik. The merchant even holds the honor of undertaking the first agricultural efforts in the Knik lowlands, decades before the establishment of the Matanuska Colony.[45]

According to historian and journalist Pat McCollom, Palmer was a long time champion of Alaska Native interests in the Cook Inlet region. Palmer's wife, Nestashia, was an Alaska Native to whom Palmer bequeathed "all the rest, residue and remainder" of his property when he died. But Palmer's activism seemed to reach beyond the bonds of marriage. In a letter to the federal government describing his gardening experience dated October 15, 1901, Palmer concluded his letter by stressing, "It will be a material help to the natives here to get them to raising gardens, as game seems to be getting



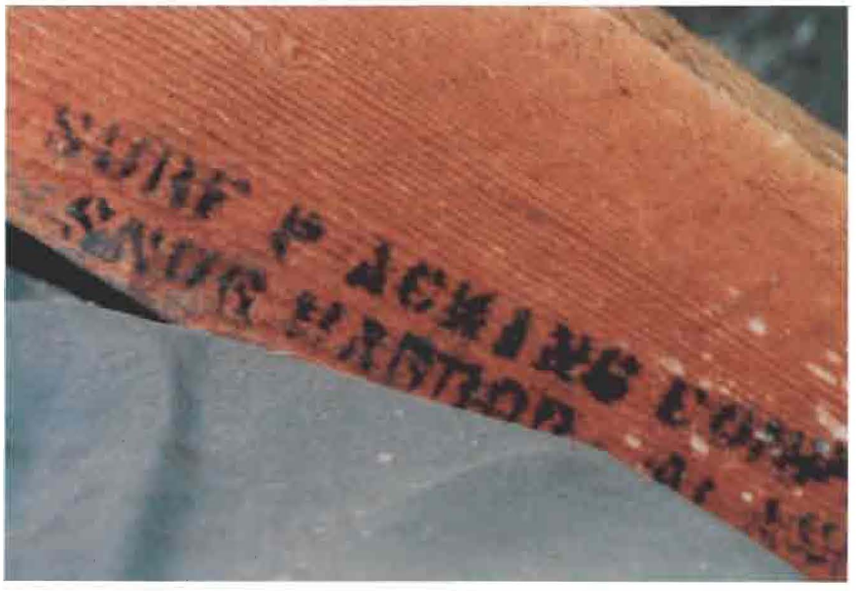
SNUG HARBOR CANNERY *"When the starting whistle blew, seagulls flocked to the feast,"* Alaska Sportsman, *August 1953.*

scarcer every year, and unless the Government gives them some assistance they will, before long, have a hard time to live."[46] This supports the story told later by Joe Fribrock that "Palmer and Chief Chickalusion attempted to organize a co-op venture to build a cannery and move part of the Tyonek [people] from their reservation to Polly Creek to catch fish and dig clams to supply the cannery."[47]

Besides his concern for Alaska Natives, pressure from the growing new town of Anchorage forced Palmer to look beyond Knik. The Alaska Railroad, which brought an economic boom to most of the region, spelled disaster to Knik. Many of Palmer's customers moved to what Anchorage boosters called "Alaska's foremost center of population."[48] Eventually, the post office closed, the commissioner left, even Palmer's mercantile competition left Knik to seek new ventures in Anchorage. To make matters worse, a May 15, 1918 fire raged through Palmer's store complex, burning his fourteen buildings to the ground.

SURF PACKING BUILDS SNUG HARBOR CANNERY

One can assume that Elmer Hemrich arrived at Knik at a perfect time to convince the merchant to invest in his cannery proposition. With his store gone, Palmer told reporters he would rebuild with the $40,000 he received in insurance money. Soon thereafter, Palmer announced that he was opening a store at Snug Harbor on Chisik Island and that "he would engage in the canning business there."[49] During the fall of 1918, Palmer sent a Mr. and Mrs. Mayo (or Mayer) of Anchorage to occupy the cannery site. That same fall, material to build a small cabin arrived.[50] After securing financial backing through the Bank of Alaska, in 1919 Hemrich and Palmer began to build the first major clam cannery in Cook Inlet on Chisik Island, just off what is today the coast of Lake Clark National Park and Preserve. [51]



"Evidence of Surf Packing Co.," courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

During the fall of 1919, Surf Packing Company shipped in building material to construct Palmer's store, a messhouse, and one cannery building. They cut pilings for the wharf from spruce timber growing at Chinitna Bay.[52] Canning equipment came from Surf Packing's plant in Aberdeen, Washington.[53] In the spring of 1920, the company added the warehouses and other "outbuildings as were deemed necessary."[54] By summer, Surf Packing



"Clam Skinners, Snug Harbor, 1927," courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

CLAMS

By Ed Shaw as told to Harry Seaman
(Excerpts reprinted from the *Alaska Sportsman*, November, 1950)

About a thousand men were trying to make a living digging razor clams on the twelve-mile stretch of the Copalis beach in Washington during the first three months of 1923, and I was one of them. Up to the end of the previous year I'd held down a job as millwright with the Carlyle-Pennel Lumber Company out on the Olympic Peninsula. Punching a clock has never been my idea of a good time, so I'd persuaded a fellow worker that the independent life of a clam digger was a superior way of earning a living.

In March we heard that our employers were looking for diggers to work the beaches near Snug Harbor (Tuxedni) on Cook Inlet. Neither my partner nor I had been to Alaska, and this looked like the best opportunity we'd ever have to visit that land of mystery and adventure.

We diggers, seventy strong, were ferried with our supplies and baggage to a section of the great sand beach north of Snug Harbor and about ten miles from the cannery. Tents with wooden floors and frames had been set up above the tide line and they were to be our homes, two men to a tent. While we had no rent to pay, we did have to pay for our own supplies and do our own cooking.

Because of the funnel-like shape of Cook Inlet, tidal actions there are similar to those in the Bay of Fundy and Bristol Channel. A normal flow of water enters the wide mouth of the inlet with the incoming tide, but as it moves up the narrowing inlet the volume of water is literally squeezed into a pile. The farther the tide moves up the inlet the higher it is piled, until at Anchorage the tidal range is as high as thirty-three feet.



At about half tide the company anchored a barge. When the tide moved out far enough for us to start digging, trucks picked up loads of boxes from the barge and scattered them along the beach where they would be handy for us. There was never any surf to speak of on our part of Cook Inlet, so we usually worked right along the edge of the water as it receded, leaving our filled boxes in a string behind us.

The trucks shuttled up and down the beach picking up loads of clams, but on the whole they weren't very efficient. They often got stuck in the wet sands. Then we'd have to push them out so they wouldn't' be caught by the tide, and to add to the confusion we would often have to pack our own clams out of the tide's reach. Actually during the first few days a truck got stuck and had to be left in the sea.

In a sense, digging is not the correct term to describe how razor clams are taken from the sand. You don't just stick your shovel into a likely-looking spot and heave. In the first place, you would likely break the shovel handle. In the second place, the razor clam is equipped with a "digger" upon which he sits, and even in packed sand he can go down fairly rapidly. If your shovel happens to loosen things up a bit for him, he moves like a flash.

A razor clam hunter's shovel is not a shovel but a clam gun. As a rule the gun is cut down from a standard shovel. The blade is about six inches across at the hilt and tapers for about fourteen inches to a rounded tip. The angle between the blade and the light thirty-inch handle is some hundred and twenty degrees.

The uninitiated might easily walk right over a large razor clam bed and never suspect there was a clam within miles. Where there is a surf the tips of their necks are sometimes visible just flush with the surface of the sand when the water is receding, but ordinarily there's nothing showing. If there are clams on the beach an experienced digger fools them into revealing their positions by the simple act of stamping his feet. In its natural position the clam's neck is generally very close to the surface, and when it feels the thud of feet nearby it pulls in its neck a bit. That causes a small indentation to appear in the sand, and that's all the clam hunter needs for a target. With one hand on the handle of his gun and the other on the hilt of the blade, he thrusts the gun into the sand a few inches from the indentation.

A razor clam is comparatively long and flat and sits on end in the sand, so the digger pushes the blade of his gun into the sand at an angle calculated to thrust the tip very close to the lower end of the clam. The gun is then given a twist to loosen the sand and make it come away with the blade when the gun is lifted straight up. As soon as the tip of the blade is clear of the surface the digger removes his hand from the hilt and reaches into the hole after the clam. Usually the entire side or edge of the clam is exposed and it's a simple matter to pick

him up without even looking. There are times, however, when the sand-clearing operation isn't all it should be and the razor heads for the depths before the digger can grip him. To reach for the clam with the bare hand when it is going down is to court trouble. The edge of the shell is just about as sharp as the name implies.

My partner and I soon decided that at $1.25 a box—about seventy pounds—the clams weren't plentiful enough for us on the beach in front of our tent community. We thought a little prospecting was in order, so one day we wandered off in the direction of Snug Harbor. As a point not far from that spot we struck it rich. The clams were there by the thousands, and all we had to do was get permission to dig on that section of beach and obtain a dory so we could pick up our own boxes to deliver them to the tender. A rocky, tree-clad island that went dry at low tide offered a good camping place, and Polly Creek, running close by, assured our water supply.

Next time the tender went to the cannery we went along to see the manager. He seemed to realize that unless the clams were plentiful or the rates to diggers raised. He was going to find himself without a beach crew shortly, so he arranged things for us to have a dory to work the new location. At the next high tide we piled tent, beds, stove, supplies, and gear into the dory and took off.

On our new location it wasn't unusual to find two or three clams in one shovel hole, and there were times when we dug trenches across the beach and simply lifted the razors out as we went along. I'm too tall to be a really good digger, but sometimes I dug twelve boxes on one tide. Some fellows I knew filled as many as sixteen boxes.

I guess we were on the beach about a week before some of the other boys followed us, and then it wasn't long before most of the diggers were on the new location. By that time the trucks were withdrawn from the beach and each two diggers had a dory. These craft were heavy affairs, so we were careful not to let them go dry on us when we might be needing them. Generally we would leave them anchored at about half tide or lower. Then when we went out to work we would let the dory go dry, and after the tide turned we'd load our boxes of clams into it. Shortly after we moved to the Polly Creek beach the company anchored a big open boat at half tide so we wouldn't have to row to the barge or wait until the tender came along.

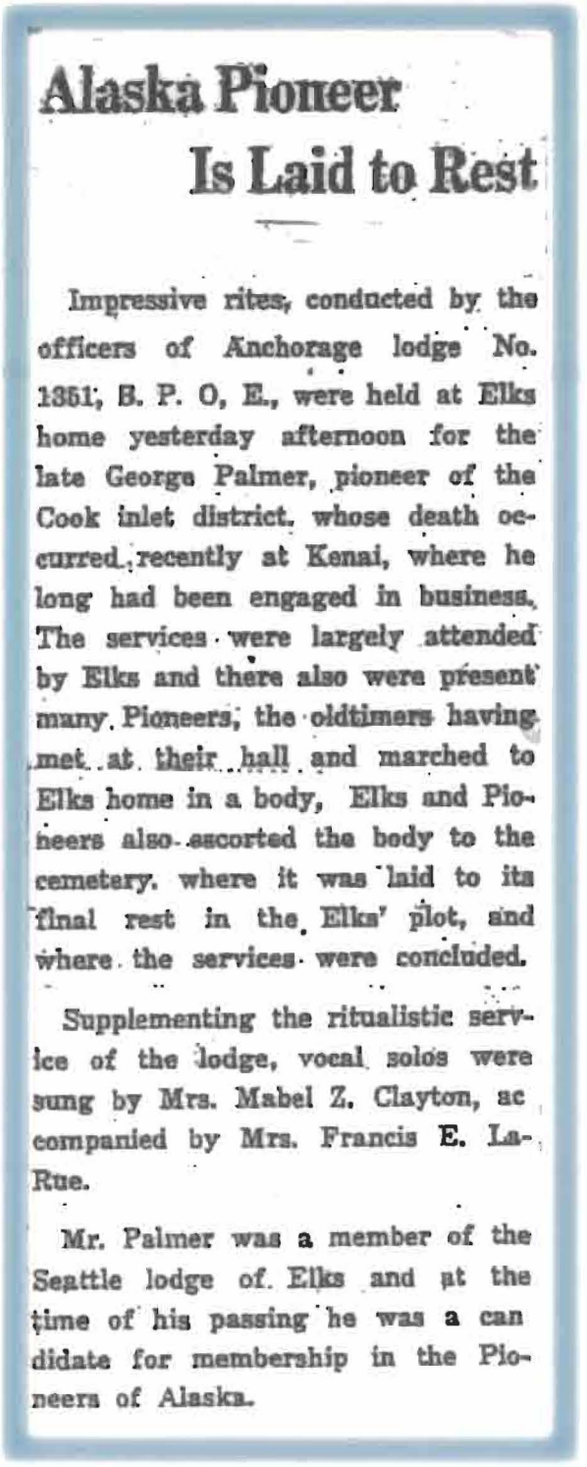
June and July were our best months on Cook Inlet as far as clam digging was concerned. During August the longer periods of darkness often interfered with our operations, so when September rolled around we were ready to hit the deck of a southbound steamer.

hired Otto Sutter as superintendent and canning commenced. While running two canning lines, Snug Harbor packed both clams and salmon that season, and continued operations until 1922.[55]

During 1920-1921 a United States Geological Survey exploratory party led by geologist Fred H. Moffit visited Snug Harbor. In his report of the expedition Moffit described the cannery and its isolation in the surrounding area:

> A cannery on Snug Harbor, at the south end of Chisik Island, is the only settlement in this part of Cook Inlet. A wharf facilitates the loading and unloading of freight, but there is no business aside from that of the cannery, and there are no accommodations for travelers except those furnished through the courtesy of the cannery officials. The cannery is closed in winter, and only the caretaker remains. Even the timbers are removed from the wharf, for the ice driving back and forth through Snug Harbor carries away the piling and makes it necessary to renew the wharf each spring.[56]

Palmer's promise to employ Alaska Natives held true. The company hired people from Tyonek, as well as Iliamna, Seldovia, Kodiak, Ninilchik, and Kenai,[57] to gather the clams. Company scows transported the clam diggers from Snug Harbor to the clam beds at the mouth of Polly Creek. The workers pitched tents on the beach and gathered clams on the flats. The company kept a scow near the clam beds to collect the clams and transport



Alaska Pioneer Is Laid to Rest

Impressive rites, conducted by the officers of Anchorage lodge No. 1351, B. P. O. E., were held at Elks home yesterday afternoon for the late George Palmer, pioneer of the Cook inlet district, whose death occurred recently at Kenai, where he long had been engaged in business. The services were largely attended by Elks and there also were present many Pioneers, the oldtimers having met at their hall and marched to Elks home in a body, Elks and Pioneers also escorted the body to the cemetery, where it was laid to its final rest in the Elks' plot, and where the services were concluded.

Supplementing the ritualistic service of the lodge, vocal solos were sung by Mrs. Mabel Z. Clayton, accompanied by Mrs. Francis E. LaRue.

Mr. Palmer was a member of the Seattle lodge of Elks and at the time of his passing he was a candidate for membership in the Pioneers of Alaska.

Notice from the Anchorage Daily Times, April, 1930

them back to the cannery, where they were generally canned within 24 hours. For their efforts, the company paid clam diggers $1.25 per 5-gallon box. When the season was over a company vessel returned the Native workers to their home villages.[58]

The canning business never fulfilled Palmer's expectations. Alaska's 1920 fishing season created a surplus of canned salmon, while a large pack in Southeast Alaska dropped prices in 1921. Instead of selling their packs at a loss, larger fish companies chose to keep the cased salmon in their warehouses until the next season. Although Surf Packing primarily processed clams, they could not afford to hold onto their salmon pack, regardless of its size. Exasperated, Palmer sold his interests to G.P. Halferty's Pioneer Canneries, Inc., the largest razor clam packer on the Pacific coast, and crossed Cook Inlet to seek a better situation on the Kenai Peninsula. With Palmer gone, Hemrich had no choice but to allow the bank to foreclose on Snug Harbor, which was then briefly acquired by George Batchellor Hall and Prescott Oaks, owners of the Polar Fisheries Company.[59]

That spring Pioneer Canneries prepared to operate a floating clam cannery just off the southern shores of Chisik Island, but Polar Fisheries owned the permit to operate the cannery's four salmon traps, two beach seines, 300 fathoms of gillnet, and maintained the exclusive right to dig clams between Harriet Point and Tuxedni Harbor.[60] Halferty, who had a permit to operate within the waters of Snug Harbor, had permission to dig clams anywhere in Cook Inlet except on Polar Fisheries' grounds. With fishing and packing operations under such restrictions, the two companies agreed to consolidate their operations into the "Polar cannery," which at that time contained one salmon and two clam lines.[61] Frank McConnaghy, a long-time Pioneer employee, became superintendent. That summer, McConnaghy's crew packed

10,634 cases of clams along with 6,228 cases of salmon. The Snug Harbor production that summer accounted for nearly 50 percent of Alaska's total production of canned clams.[62] According to National Park Service researcher Harlan Unrau, "the production of slightly over 500,000 pounds of canned clams in 1923, largely from one-and-a-half square mile of beach on the western side of the inlet between Chisik Island and Harriet Point, represented the peak of commercial exploitation of razor clams in the inlet."[63]

Still, that was not enough to support operations at Snug. After the 1923 peak, the clamming industry in Cook Inlet waned. By 1924, investigators of the Bureau of Fisheries found that diggers had over-exploited Cook Inlet clam beds, which had reached their maximum extent of commercial development.[64] Polar Fisheries went under that year, and Halferty focused on his more reliable clamming investments in Prince William Sound and Kodiak. In the end, over-harvesting, increasing regulations, and the desertion of Palmer and Hemrich caused Snug Harbor to sit idle from 1924 to 1926.[65]

After the early failure of Snug Harbor, Palmer and Hemrich went different directions. Hemrich, still determined to realize the potential of Alaska's razor clam beaches in 1923, incorporated a new company, Hemrich Packing. Alvin Hemrich, Elmer's father, retained his position as president (the position he held under Surf Packing), H. F. Korschner of New York became vice president, and Elmer Hemrich became secretary, treasurer and generanal manager.[66] With capital from East Coast investors, Hemrich built a cannery 150 miles to the south of Chisik Island. This new location was Kukak Bay.[67] Despite depleted beaches, poor weather, wrecked tenders, and a wage crisis, Hemrich managed the Kukak clam cannery off and on for nearly thirteen years with an unrelenting "can-

E. E. Hemrich Dies Suddenly At Home Here

Prominently Identified With Brewing Industry in Northwest

Elmer E. Hemrich, 46, who had been prominently identified with the brewing industry in the Northwest for the past 25 years, was suddenly stricken ill at his Steilacoom lake home Wednesday morning and died early last night in a local hospital.

Hemrich, whose father was the founder of the Hemrich Breweries in Seattle, was a former president of the Columbia Breweries here and at the time of his death was president of the Hemrich Winery in South Tacoma and president of the Surf Cannery at Kukah Bay, Alaska.

He was born at Alma, Wis., and had lived in Seattle before coming to Tacoma. The family home had been at Steilacoom lake for five years. Surviving are his wife, Nina Irene; 17-month-olldl twin daughters, Zonya Mina and Zayra Lou; two brothers, Andrew L. of Seattlel lanld llWalllteirl lA. of Tacoma, and his mother, Mrs. Allvin Hemrich of Seattle. He was a member of the Eagles and Elks in in Tacoma.

The body was taken to the Bonney-Watson mortuary in Seattle, where funeral services will be held Monday at 3 p. m.

Notice from Tacoma Daily Ledger, January, 1937.



"Snug Crew," circa 1922, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

do" spirit so definitive of the era. His dreams ended, however, when during the fall of 1936 a fire started in Kukak's light plant, and most of the cannery burned to the ground. After that terrible season, Hemrich knew his clamming days were done. Meanwhile, George Palmer, who had built a new trading store on the Kenai Peninsula, also decided to give up on Alaska.

Sadly, both of these one-time canners epitomized the courage and the disappointment that Lewis G. MacDonald's epithet of the canning industry described. For on Friday, April 11, 1930, the Anchorage Daily Times reported that "Kenai Oldtimer" (Palmer) took his own life. According to the article, Palmer suffered from terrible heart trouble and "ended his life by sending a bullet thought his heart."[68] Hemrich, too, suffered from a bad heart. Not long after fire swept through Kukak, he returned to Tacoma, Washington. That winter, Elmer Hemrich died of a heart attack. He was 46 years old.[69]

The Third Wave

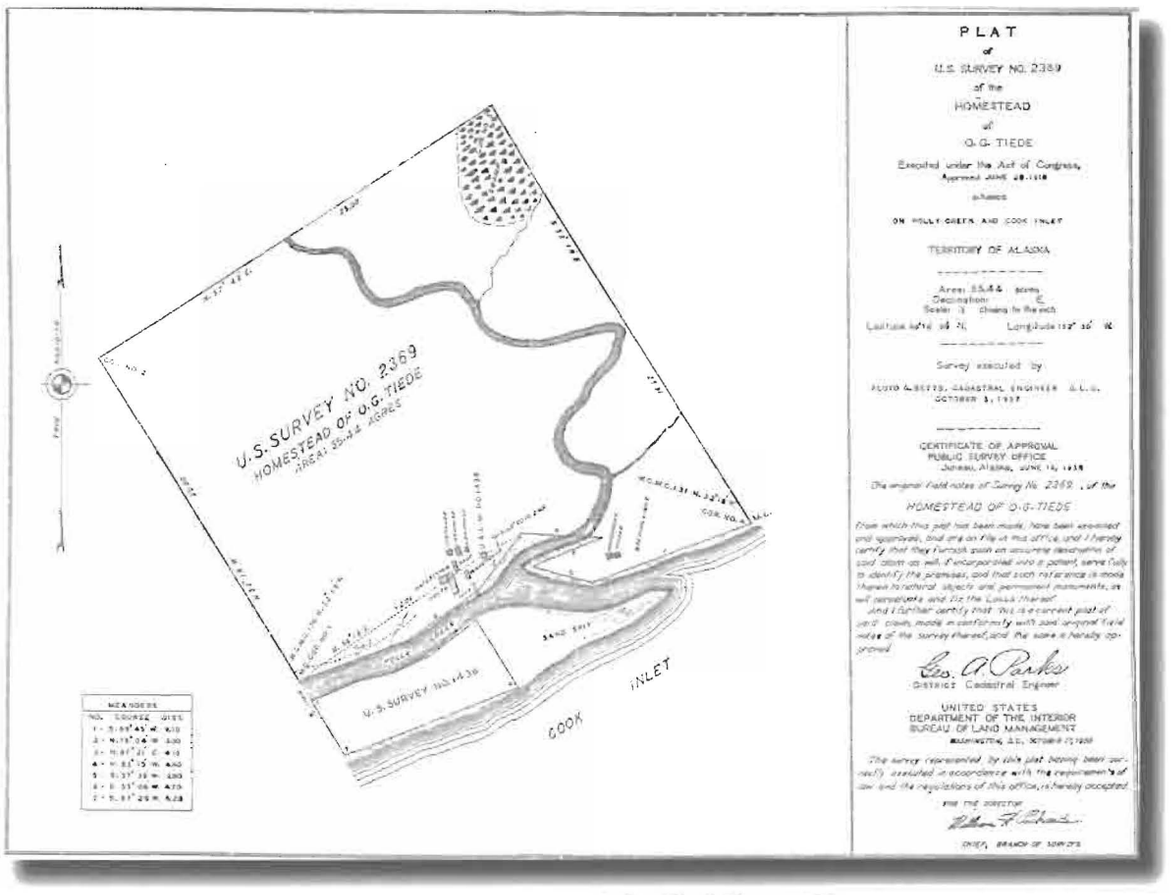
Both bears and biologists consider Polly Creek one of the best razor clam beaches in Alaska. Its plethora of razors attracted Palmer and Hemrich to Snug Harbor by 1919. So, if diggers found such high number of razor clams in beaches along the Alaska Peninsula, why did Surf Packing build its cannery on Chisik Island? The reason was simply geography. The shoreline surrounding Tuxedni Bay lacks a deep-water harbor and, consequently it forced these first clam canners to choose a site across the Tuxedni Channel on Chisik Island. Some canners, such as the North Pacific Packing Company, even transported boats and diggers from as far away as Seldovia to secure razor clams from Polly Creek. During the early part of the season (late May), this company employed as many as 100 diggers, all of whom were reported as "local residents."[70]

Although Polly Creek did not attract the larger canneries, it did draw a few small, family run, hand-pack outfits. Because these canners operated on such a small scale, they belong to a category of third wave canners, who more resembled the subsistence operations found in Russian and Native settlements than the complex, commercial operations of the first and second generations of Cook Inlet canners. What makes this third wave interesting is that this generation

of canners not only employed modern day technology to open new markets, but sweeping changes within the fishing industry itself created a unique window though which these mostly small clam canneries could operate.

One of the first small independent operators to pack clams at Polly Creek was C.B. Meyers, who in 1923 canned 1,504 cases of whole clams.[71] The West Coast Packing Company, owned and operated by the Kozlosky family, was another early commercial facility to can clams at Polly Creek. The Kozlosky's, who also managed a general-merchandise store in Anchorage, ran their cannery from 1929-1932. According to *United States Fish and Wildlife Service Annual Reports of the Cook Inlet District,* in 1932 "the West Coast Canning Company cannery located at Polly Creek packed 438 cases of razor clams before this plant was destroyed by fire on June 24."[72] The following spring *Pacific Fisherman* forecast that Cook Inlet clamming "will apparently be rather limited" as a number of small outfits along the coast had closed.[73]

In 1935, Otto G. Tiede and his wife Estelle built a small cannery on their homestead situated on the north side of Polly Creek. That year, Tiede packed 250 cases of half-pound flat cans of minced razor clams, which he sold locally.[74] *Pacific Fisherman* reported that Tiede's cannery packed 347 cases in 1937 and 235 cases in 1938, but for some unknown reason, the industry journal placed the cannery in Anchorage.[75] Also utilizing Polly Creek beaches that year was Lars Sagen, who operated a floating cannery off the Crescent River. Sagen fished later for Snug Harbor Packing Company on Chisik Island.



"O. G. Tiede's original homestead plat," October 3, 1937, Lake Clark Katmai Studies Center, Anchorage.

According to a survey of the Tiede homestead conducted in 1937, Polly Creek and Cook Inlet bordered the pioneer's 55.44 acres, located at latitude 60° 16' north and longitude 152° 30' west. A surveyor's general description of the land offers insight as to why larger cannery outfits probably dismissed Polly Creek as a possible building site:

> The terrain surrounding the cannery is quite level with a small area of swampy ground in the northeast corner. The western, inland part of the homestead is covered with medium growth or stands of scrub spruce, birch and cottonwood, with dense berry bushes and alders. In this timbered area, a grassy strip of land extends southeasterly towards Polly Creek. The creek flows in a southeasterly direction through the grassy land. Open muskeg ground covers the land between the swamp in the northeast corner and the creek.[76]

The plat of Tiede's homestead drawn in 1937, shows that the pioneer built three log houses, a shop, a warehouse and dock that extended over Polly Creek, a water tank, an "L"-shaped house, and a trail that paralleled the creek. According to resident John Swiss, one of the log houses still remains standing, and may have been Kozlosky's General Store. Along Cook Inlet stood a warehouse, another small house, and a beacon light.[77] Various reports claim that Tiede and his wife left Polly Creek in 1944 and the cannery was discontinued officially in 1947.[78]

After Tiede left the Polly Creek site, the Kester Packing Company of Seldovia replaced him. In 1947, the Kester Packing Company packed 90 cases of whole clams as well as 1,038.5 cases of salmon (214 cases of reds, 104.5 cases of kings, 70 cases of chums, and 650 cases of cohos). This was the first time a Polly Creek outfit canned salmon. In 1948 the



"Lone Clammer," circa 1923, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

company changed its name to Kester and Associates. The reorganized company discontinued clam cannery operations and, instead, Kester and Associates ran a new floating plant inside Tuxedni Channel which canned a 3,717 case pack of mostly red salmon.[79]

That year, Wilma Williams worked for Bob Kester on his floating cannery, the *Eva May.* During an interview with National Park Service researcher Laurel Bennett, Williams described the operation:

> Bob and his wife Eva had a hand-pack outfit and they had it on a power barge...They had about half a dozen rooms and a galley to eat in. The little can loft—I had my little girl with me. She just played in the can loft, and I just had this little gate that I pulled across. Bob didn't have the reformers or anything. He had cans that were made up and I just hand fed them down the chute—down below to the canning facility.[80]

At the same time that Kester operated the Polly Creek floating cannery, Bob and May Woods of Seldovia moved into Tiede's old place. In 1947 they packed 23 cases of whole clams and 20 cases of minced clams. Clam packer reports note that the Woods even produced pickled salmon. The next year the Woods incorporated under the name Point Redoubt Packing Company and in 1948 the small outfit hand-packed salmon and razor clams in 1-pound tall cans.

By the early 1940s the Pacific razor clam industry was in fast decline. But promise from a new king crab fishery caused a boom in the final years in the decade. Fishermen prized the succulent razor clam as bait to catch king crab, and luckily for the small outfit at Polly Creek, a new market suddenly opened. Canners no longer harvested clams solely for human consumption, but to bait Alaska's giant king crab. In 1949 the Copalis Fish Company, managed by Martha Eckestrand, sent 6,000 pounds of fresh razor clams to Seattle, where 348 cases were canned—900 pounds of which were sold as crab bait. The following year, Orin Diamond dug clams at Polly Creek and sold his pack to Seldvoia Fisheries, Inc. for crab bait.[81]

Also significant was that many of the operators in this new market utilized air transportation to send their product to Seattle. Employing aircraft seemed to open even more markets for Polly Creek razors. For example, Diamond tried unsuccessfully to ship his razor clams by air to Seattle, while Amos Heacock of Air Transport Associates formed a company called Airborne Perishables, Inc. which was solely engaged in flying fresh salmon from Kenai to Seattle for custom canning. In addition to their fresh salmon operation, Airborne Perishables carried on a razor clam operation at Polly Creek. In 1949, 43,524 pounds of clams were frozen in the shell and sent south. The company, however, found the business unprofitable and ceased to operate at Polly Creek. Though early attempts at air transportation failed, it is widely used today by shellfish processors to get their products to local markets.

In 1950, the new king crab market attracted larger companies to Polly Creek. Whiz-Halferty Canneries Inc. (previously Pioneer Packing Company) operated a reefer ship with a cooling system that hauled razor clams from Polly Creek to Kodiak for processing. That season they employed 89 diggers from Washington State and packed 224,160

pounds of razor clams. The company also experimented with a commercial clam dredge at Polly Creek. The dredge could not be used to dig the fragile razor, and it thus sat in the mud for years until it was floated from Polly Creek to Homer sometime in the 1980s. The following year, Whiz-Halferty processed 4,680 pounds of razors, but by 1952 the company "found the processing unprofitable due to the stressed local labor market and was [therefore] unable to keep commercial clam diggers on the job."[82]

In the fall of 1948, brothers Henry and John Swiss, along with Matt Markanen, bought the hand cannery at Polly Creek from Bob and Mary Woods for $6,500 plus $1,500 for inventory: cans, thirty-gallon salt barrels and equipment.[83] That November, Matt met his wife Mildred and returned to spend their honeymoon at Polly Creek in January 1949. That spring, with Henry busy in town, John Swiss and the Markanen's started digging and canning clams. As John Swiss recalls:

> We'd heat the clams in a steam retort in our cannery. It used a chain to move the cans. But the boiler was kind of a hot water boiler. Actually it was a clothes washer and you had to watch it real close. But we made out pretty good...We had the boiler going, all coal too, none of this oil you guys have in this modern day. We sat there and cleaned clams. All white meat, the body and the digger went in the can. They were big clams in those days, about one and a half to a can. We put a little water and salt in there. We still have 'whoppers' on this side of the inlet.[84]

Throughout the season John Swiss suffered through wind storms, and two titanium knees. He quit the clam canning business after only a year. "I canned some clams in my day," lamented Swiss, "but it was a hell of a lot of work."[85]

In 1951, John and Henry Swiss returned to fishing, while Matt and his brothers ran the cannery under the name the Redoubt Point Packing Company.[86] Four years later the Swiss brothers bought out Matt and continued to can, but as Swiss remembers, it was "very little." His interest had turned to cutting lumber from their surrounding property in the small sawmill they attached to the main cannery building. In 1956 and 1957, the *United States Fish and Wildlife Service Annual Reports* listed Swiss as a "fresh and frozen fish fishery operator."[87] By 1958 the service listed the operation as "discontinued."

Known more as a big game hunter than clam canner, John Swiss brought his family to Polly Creek to setnet during the summer. By this time, the most notable structure that remained of the cannery complex was "a rambling old cabin with a series of ramshackle additions." This structure likely dates back to 1925, when Otto and Stella Tiede homesteaded the site.[88] Henry Swiss used his Polly Creek acreage as a home rather than as place of work. Unlike his brother who lived at Polly Creek only during summer months, Henry Swiss endured the isolation brought about by high tides, strong winds, ice, and cold. He spent his winters trapping furs in the valleys of Polly Creek and Crescent River. During the summer, he too was a setnet fisherman. Henry Swiss died in 1977. John Swiss continues to own the Polly Creek complex where the remnants of the Polly Creek clam cannery remain today.[89]

The Alaska Packers Association was the last major operator to harvest Polly Creek razor clams. In 1958, it bought Halferty's Pioneer canneries and continued to harvest clams until 1963, when concerns about poisonous shellfish led the Alaska Department of Health and Welfare to prohibit commercial harvesting from Alaska beaches. In 1964, the commercial clamming industry took another hit when the Good Friday Earthquake destroyed clam beds and canneries throughout central Alaska.[90] Neither the tsunami waves nor the seismic activity damaged much of the tidal lands in Tuxedni Bay, but the core of Alaska's commercial clamming infrastructure was wiped out, and therefore, so was the canned clam industry.[91]

In 1970 the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services reopened the flats along the north shore of Tuxedni Bay as one of the three Alaskan beaches open to commercial clamming. The other two were the Cordova flats in Prince William Sound, and Swikshak Beach, north of Kukak Bay on the Alaska Peninsula. Approval by the department meant that these razors could be consumed by humans. Throughout the 1970s only a small commercial operator harvested razor clams in Polly Creek, but by the early 1980s clam production rose on the inlet. By 1981, harvesters dug 443,144 pound of razors clams and sold their catch to markets throughout Alaska and the Lower 48.[92] Without canneries actively packing razor clams in Alaska, supermarkets and restaurants made up Polly Creek's newest buyers.

Today, Polly Creek continues to be used by subsistence and commercial users. Alaska Natives from Tyonek, as well as other Cook Inlet villages, make annual excursions to take home Polly Creek razor clams. The approximately 100 sport diggers who venture out to Polly Creek to dig clams each season are mostly there to escape the crowded beaches on the east side of Cook Inlet and to seek the solitude that Polly Creek offers. These are mainly day users since the uplands are private or Native owned lands, and camping around Polly Creek is prohibited.



"Bridge to Polly Creek Cannery," 1994, Laurel Bennett, Lake Clark Katmai Studies Center, Anchorage.

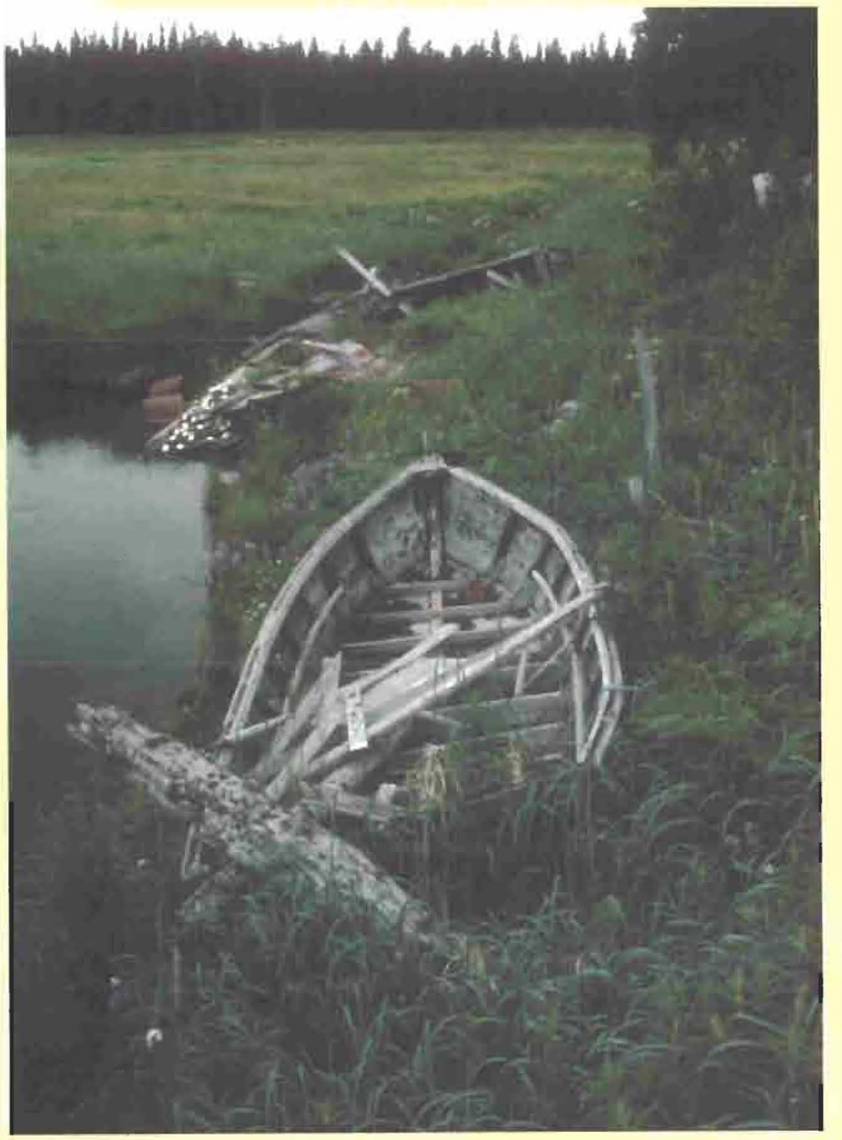
That does not mean the commercial harvest is gone. According to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), as of summer 2003, one commercial operator still digs clams from Polly Creek beaches. The Pacific Alaska Shellfish, Inc. harvests nearly 300,000 pounds of razor clams annually and, instead of tendering their catch, the company flies the clams over to Nikiski, where they are cleaned, packaged and sold on the gourmet market. Pacific Alaska Shellfish, Inc. employs twenty-five clam diggers, who, through an agreement with Cook Inlet Region Inc., (CIRI) the regional Alaska Native corporation, are allowed to set up tents and work along the adjacent corporate land. This agreement has restricted other operators from exploiting Polly Creek. The only way in which another commercial digger could operate would be to have the Native corporation agree to an extension that would allow an operator to fly diggers in and out in one day, or to run a floating operation.

Polly Creek is managed as a historically sustainable fishery. Not since the 1920s has the beach shown signs of depletion. ADF&G does maintain some restrictions, however. For example, they limit Polly Creek razors only to human consumption, that is, harvesting for sale as bait is prohibited. In addition, the agency enforces a 350,000 pound quota, a number which the recent fishery has never come close to reaching. Furthermore, management of the clam harvest is relatively simple since the fishery has several internal limits that historically restricted growth. Failure of mechanical devices to dredge up the soft shell razor, the intensive labor required to hand dig, and a small market keep numerous operators from exploiting Polly Creek.

For over a century, waves of the canning industry have lapped upon the shores of Cook Inlet. The first wave brought competitive and unbridled exploitation which led to consolidation of salmon canneries. These mergers alienated up-and-coming canneries, and forced a new generation of companies to expand their product from salmon to other seafoods, specifically razor clams. Without a corporate safety net, these new cannerymen represented a kind of courageous entrepreneurialism. Their diversification allowed a third wave of canners to make a living in Cook Inlet. These canners, however, were small hand packers, who may have devoted countless hours of hard work and perseverance to their clamming operations, but invested little capital. As time went by, the clamming companies that occupied the Polly Creek cannery were usually just one or two people who simply added canning clams to their repertoire of hunting, fishing, and trapping activities. Because Snug Harbor was the only canning facility on Cook Inlet's west side, many of these people became connected to the cannery in one way or another. Indeed, all three historical waves that washed over Cook Inlet lapped at the pilings of Snug Harbor, too, providing the isolated cannery with not only an interesting story, but one that is historically significant as well.



"Men in Dory," circa 1924, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.



"Abandoned skiff at Polly Creek," 1994, Laurel Bennett, Lake Clark Katmai Studies Center, Anchorage.



"Christening the Tuxedni," Pictured are Dorothy, Barbara, Jan, Emma, and Joe, on April 20, 1968, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.



"Emma and Joe," circa 1921, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

CHAPTER TWO

A FAMILY OF FISH PACKERS

In 1927, the industry journal *Pacific Fisherman* reported that "the cannery at Snug Harbor is being taken over by a new concern, the Snug Harbor Packing Company."[93] The article, however, deceived its readers somewhat, for the new owner of Snug Harbor, Eric Fribrock, had been involved with the cannery from its shaky beginnings. After World War II, Eric's son, Joe, would take over the business and manage Snug Harbor until his untimely death in 1979. In an age where fish companies exchanged canneries like fishermen swapped tales at the local watering hole, the Fribrocks' longevity at Snug Harbor is not only unusual, but their enduring presence provides insight into managerial concerns that fluctuated with the changing tide of the industry over time.

Eric Fribrock: Snug Harbor's First Generation

A surplus of canned salmon made 1921 a tough year for cannery owners and an even tougher year for cannery workers looking for jobs. This was especially true for a young man from Sweden who had spent the last decade working as a machinist for the railroads. The man's name was Eric Fribrock, and like so many young men and women of his generation, he eventually landed in San Francisco, where the current "rush" was not for gold, but for salmon.[94] Eric's mechanics qualifications had gotten him a job at a salmon cannery, and in 1910 he had boarded a schooner and set sail for Chignik, Alaska.

In 1912, Northwestern Fisheries in Kenai hired Eric to be its cannery foreman. Five summers later, he was made superintendent of its plant in Seldovia. By the mid-teens, floating traps brought new prosperity to southeast Alaska, so Eric moved to Petersburg in 1918 and became superintendent of the Scow Bay cannery owned by G. W. Hume. But soon the traps flooded the market with fish, the cannery closed, and Eric was unemployed.[95] When Elmer Hemrich offered Fribrock a job as superintendent of his struggling Surf Packing plant at Snug Harbor, the young canneryman accepted.[96]

In an interview conducted by his granddaughter Jan Fribrock, Eric recalled that Hemrich, who was always optimistic about work, repeatedly told him to "keep a stiff upper lip."[97] As superintendent, Eric tried to do just that. His job consisted of acquiring a ship for the company, ordering supplies, and hiring a crew. Because of his good standing with past employers, Eric was able to borrow money from G.W. Hume to charter the vessel *Narda,* while a grocery supplier extended him credit for cargo and the shipment north. In the spring he ordered his crew to prepare the cannery for the canning season, which meant they had to dig Snug Harbor out from under several feet of snow. Meanwhile, the beach gang crew had to drive the hand traps when the Cook Inlet tide was out. Across the bay, the clam crew dug razor clams, and by summer, when the salmon began to run, the mostly Chinese cannery crew canned the sockeyes.

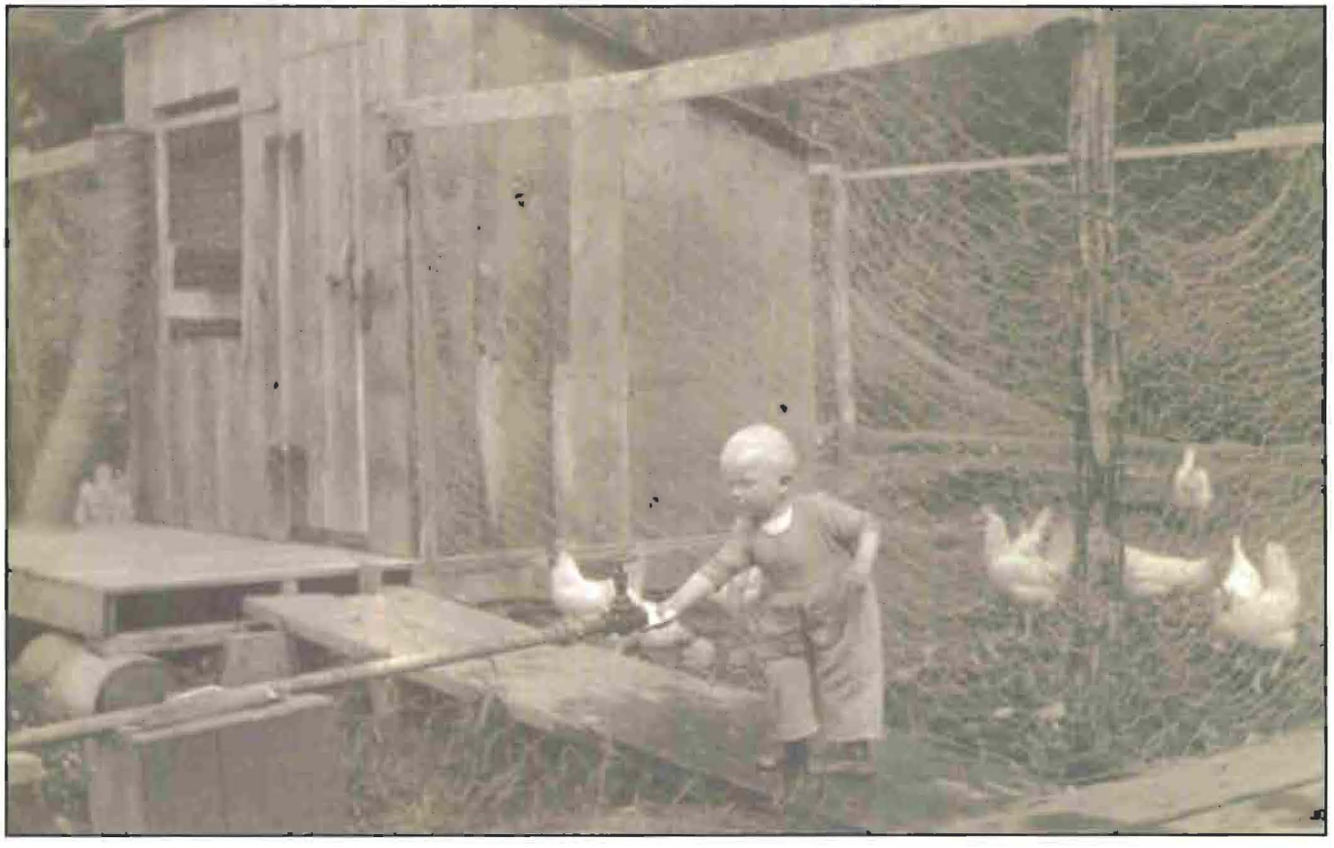


"Eric poses with a large king," courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

With the cannery up and running, Eric had begun to feel optimistic. When he crossed over to Seldovia to pick up more tin, however, he received word that Elmer Hemrich was bankrupt and there was no money left to buy tin—not even enough to pay salaries, buy food, or return the crew to Seattle. Eric knew he needed to act quickly. He and bookkeeper Vic Robertson tendered across Cook Inlet to the Kasilof River, then hiked to Kenai and hitched a ride to Anchorage with an upper inlet setnetter. There, Eric found the financial backing to buy more cans and pay for the fish and crews. Eric and Robertson returned to Snug Harbor to finish out the season. In



"Little Joe helps his dad Eric with setnet gear," circa 1922, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.



"One year old Joe Fribrock in front of chicken coop," circa 1921, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

the fall they sent their pack to Seattle where it sold. Eric had not only paid off his backers in Anchorage, but was able to repay Hemrich's original loan to the bank.[98]

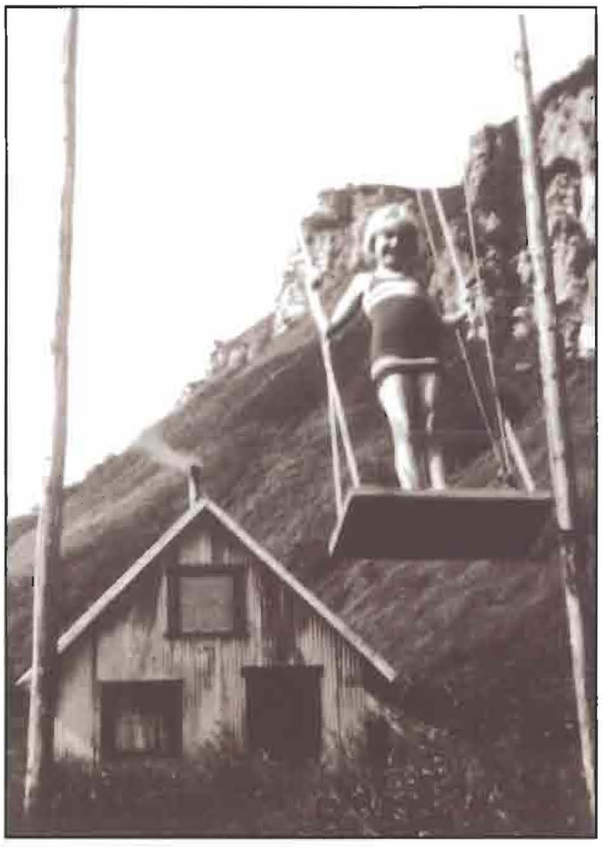
In 1922, Polar Fisheries took over Snug Harbor's mortgage. The company kept Fribrock as their superintendent because he "succeeded in making a pack at this plant last year in the face of exceptional handicaps."[99] In 1923, Polar Fisheries consolidated operations with Pioneer Canneries, Inc. That summer, Frank McConnaghy reportedly ran Halferty's floating cannery anchored in the bay while Eric ran the "Polar cannery." But by 1924, the fishing industry hit an economic slump, and Snug Harbor pulled up its dock for what many thought was the last time. For the next two years, Eric returned to his old position as superintendent at the Northwestern cannery in Kenai.[100]

In 1926, one of the most successful canners in Alaska, Al Foster Sr. of Kodiak Island, looked to expand his operations. That year Foster made an offer on Snug Harbor, intending to buy it for his son. Foster approached Eric and offered him his old superintendent position. Eric recalls telling Foster that "the only way I would be interested would be if I could be a partner in the company—my experience and know-how and your money." On May 5, 1927, Eric Fribrock became one of four mortgagers (I.M. Foster, A.S. Foster, and Luther J. Hull) of "that certain salmon and fish cannery located in the National Forest Reserve at Tuxedni Harbor, also known as Snug Harbor, Cook's Inlet."[101]

According to the original mortgage for the cannery, Snug Harbor Packing Company received all water rights, one line of salmon canning machinery, and one line of clam canning machinery. The site still supported a cannery building, boiler house, fish house, mess hall, Palmer's store, a warehouse, a China house and other dwellings when the Snug Harbor Packing Company took over. The company also gained all seine boats, dories, trap gear, net and twine, and the cannery's generator, engines, hoists, tools, cable, belting, motors, machines, retorts, coolers, shafting, pulleys, and all other machinery, appliances, and equipment. In addition, Snug Harbor Packing acquired Polar Fisheries' trap sites, as well as the company's clamming beaches, those that were "two miles on each side of Paulie Creek on the shore of said Tuxedna Harbor."[102] L.J. Hull, the company secretary treasurer, signed the mortgage. Perhaps Eric wanted to sign too, but by May 5, he was already up north, preparing to run the cannery as president of the Snug Harbor Packing Company.[103]

Fribrock Runs Snug Harbor Packing Company

According to the memoir *Sockeye Sunday: The Snug Harbor Saga and other Fish Tales,* written by Eric's daughter-in-law, Dorothy Fribrock, as a full partner in the Snug Harbor Packing Company allowed Eric was able to bring up his family from Seattle. Eric married Emma Nelson in 1917 and their son, Joe, was born in 1920. When Hemrich first hired Eric to work at Snug Harbor, according to Emma Fribrock, "There wasn't any ticket forth coming for me to join my husband so I took my little nest egg from my pre-marriage working days and bought passage on the *Admiral Evans* for me and our baby son Joey to go to Seldovia." A surprised Eric Fribrock picked up his family and tendered them over to the cannery, where apparently Emma immediately began to wallpaper the superintendent's quarters to make it their home.[104]



"Iris Fribrock," Palmer's residence is in the background, circa 1930, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

With his family at his side, Eric focused his attention on running Snug Harbor. To make the cannery more cost efficient, Eric decided to eliminate Snug's clam canning operation at Polly Creek. Even though *Pacific Fisherman* reported that the clams in Cook Inlet were well washed by the high tides, making the product remarkably free from grit, it was not "grit-free" enough. Apparently, the sand brought to the cannery by the dug clams interfered with the machinery used to can salmon.[105] Leaving clams behind, Eric decided to put his cannery's future in pile traps. His main concern now was to acquire a new tender with a 90-horse power diesel engine and a pile driver that could build Snug Harbor's traps and dock.[106]

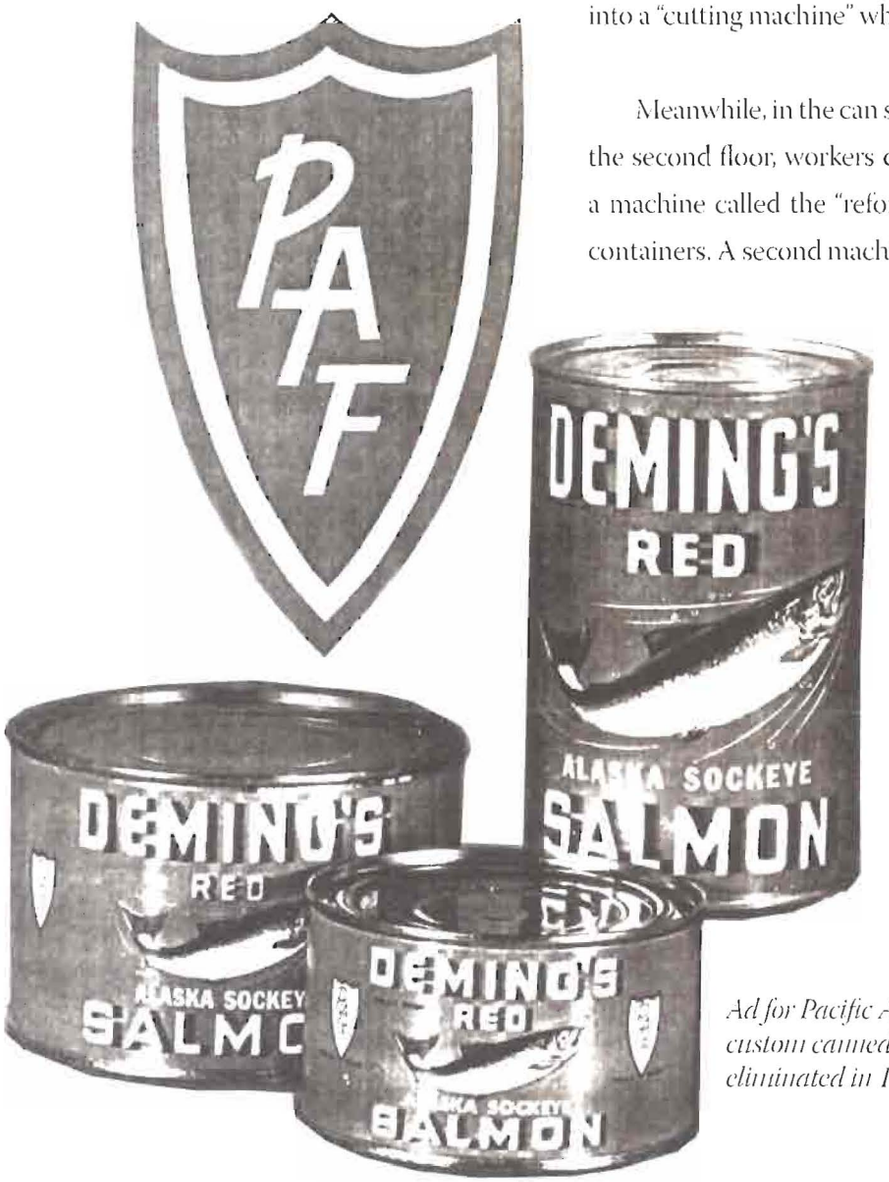
Eric came north that March with a hand-picked crew. To move more fish through the cannery he approached Pacific American Fisheries (PAF) and offered to drive their traps at Salamato and Kalifornsky, both located near Kenai, and then, custom can their fish. In return, PAF financed the beginning of Snug's season and furnished a tender for the operation. Archie Shields, president of PAF, agreed and allowed Snug to use the company tender, the *Orient,* which along with the 64-foot *Venus* and the 30-foot *Lillian J.* made up the Snug Harbor fleet.[107] By 1932 this arrangement was offered to other companies such as Farwest Fisheries, Inc.[108] Snug Harbor's custom canning contracts continued throughout World War II and until statehood, when Alaska voters abolished fish traps.

While overseeing his crews constructing fish traps and position tenders, Fribrock simultaneously focused on the cannery. Between 1929 and 1938 Fribrock added an engine room, a machine shop, a retort addition, an extension to the warehouse, and a warehouse shed. The cannery itself was a one and one-half story frame structure consisting of three, 40-foot by 40-foot wings: the fish house, the cannery, and the warehouse.[109] (At times confusing, the word "cannery" refers

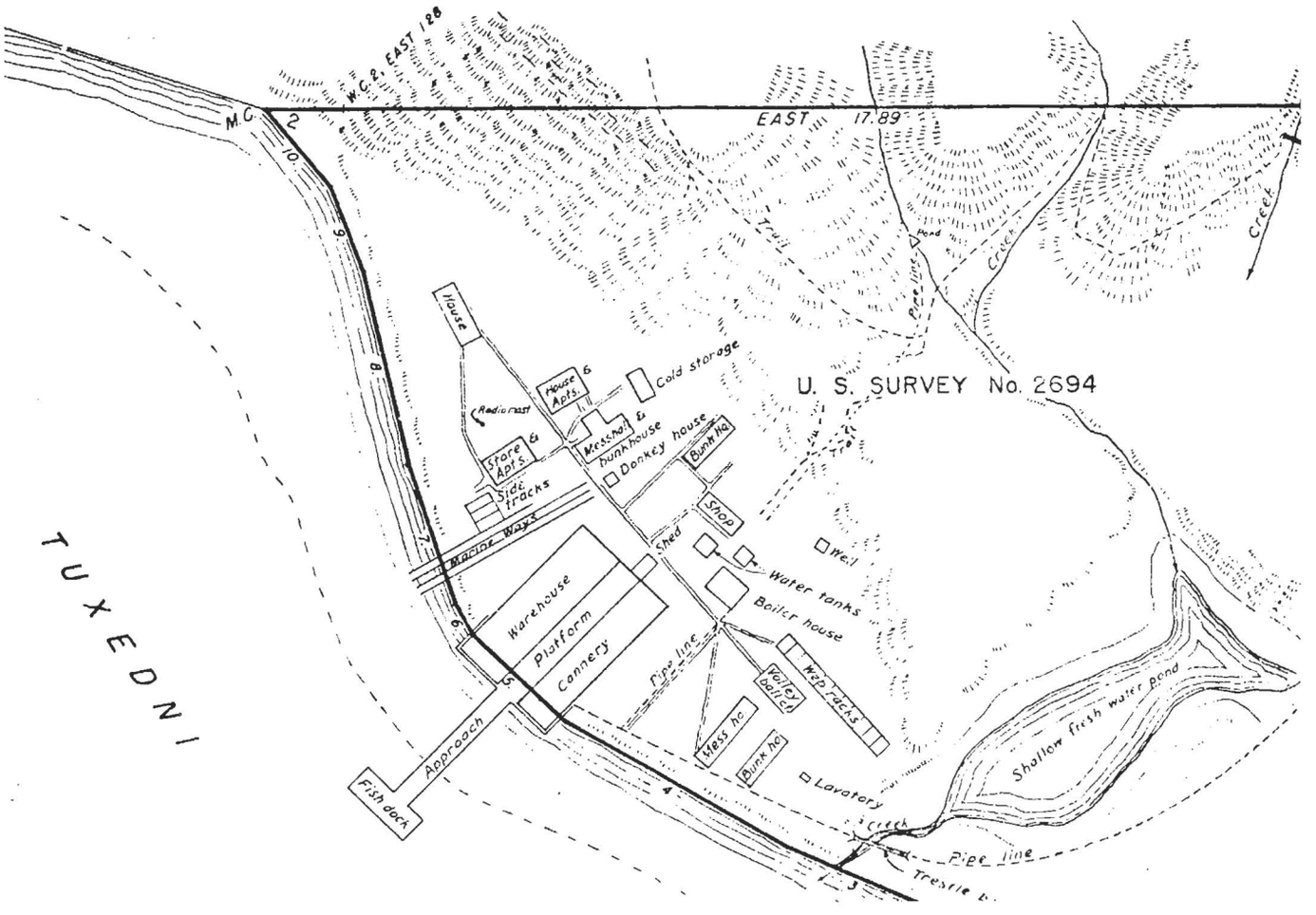
to both the entire complex of buildings and the area in the complex reserved for canning the fish.) By the early 1930s, most Alaska salmon packers had mechanized canneries. This meant that they utilized a horizontal canning process that mechanically conveyed salmon from the tenders to the cannery where both machines and people canned them.

In 1937, *Pacific Fisherman* reported that "[t]he Snug Harbor Packing Company on Cook Inlet installed a new high-speed canning line."[110] The modern canning line began with two cannery workers who separated the salmon by species and "pewed" the fish from the tender onto an elevator that transported them into the fish house. Buckets of fish were dumped to a fish bin to wait cleaning. Then, a cannery worker called the "indexor" lined each salmon into the "Iron Chink"[111] which cut the heads and tails off, and at the same time, sliced the belly and removed the entrails. Once gutted, the headless and tailless carcasses moved on a belt, past a line of human "slimers," standing at a galvanized iron round sliming table and then, down another conveyor, and into a hopper. In the cannery, a worker arranged salmon single-file into a "cutting machine" which sliced the salmon into steaks.

Meanwhile, in the can shop located above the cannery on the second floor, workers dutifully placed the flat "tins" into a machine called the "reformer" which rounded the golden containers. A second machine attached a bottom, creating an empty can. The machines sent the cans flying down a "shaft" to the cannery where they converged with the steaked salmon that were being rhythmically spewed out from the cutting machine. A rotary "filler machine" aptly filled the cans with salmon. Filled cans zipped down the line to a "patching table" where workers weighed the cans and removed



Ad for Pacific American Fisheries. Snug Harbor custom canned salmon for PAF before traps were eliminated in 1959.



Survey of the Snug Harbor Cannery, circa 1947, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock private collection.

any unsightly bones or skin. The processed cans then moved on to the "clincher," which automatically placed a lid on the tin and vacuumed-closed the seal. Spewing down a conveyor belt, quick hands placed the cans into trays, stacked them onto a hand truck, and finally cooked the filled cans in the retort.[112]

Over the years, Fribrock conducted a talented machinist crew who operated their instrument-like machines so skillfully that even with Snug Harbor's screeching noise, a trained ear could hear when a machine was out of tune. The cannery crew made sure that all gas and steam engines, water pumps, conveyors, grinders, compressors, and boilers worked and that every fitting, valve, and pipe held tight. The skilled labor crew, otherwise known as the beach gang, conducted two major projects at Snug Harbor: they constructed a freshwater dam atop a hill behind the cannery; and also, because of the ice build-up in Tuxedni Channel each winter, they rebuilt the dock each spring.

Fribrock even had the beach gang replace Palmer's trading post with a two-story general store. Built on stilts, the cannery store offered supplies to local fishermen, cannery workers, or as Dorothy Fribrock recalls, "whoever else happened

IF YOU'VE GOT IT TO DO, GET ON WITH IT

By Wilma Williams,
Snug Harbor Processor from Homer, AK

In early June of 1941, it was time to make plans for the summer. I wrote Snug Harbor Parking Co. and asked Eric Fribrock, the owner, for a job. His answer came back right away saying, "Okay." There was a $300.00 guarantee plus room, board, transportation, and overtime. I was delighted. I have never had $300.00 of my own in my whole life.

On the 20th I was up, had my duffel packed and sleeping bag rolled by 7am, although the boat wasn't due until 10am. Daddy drove me to the boat, down the bumpy, gravel road. On the Spit, horses grazed on the lush spring grass, barely raising their heads as we chugged by at a rousing 35 mph. As we drove out to the spit we could see the Orient off Yukon Island, plowing steadily toward the dock.

At the cannery a supervisor assigned the crew rooms. Mine had a window overlooking the bay, which I dearly loved. Sometimes, when I need to think of something tranquil to settle my ruffled nerves, I picture the view from that window. The blue-green waters of Tuxedni Bay bathed in sunshine, with the musical background supplied by the gulls. The steep rocky bluffs soaring to the blue sky across the bay, making the picture complete.

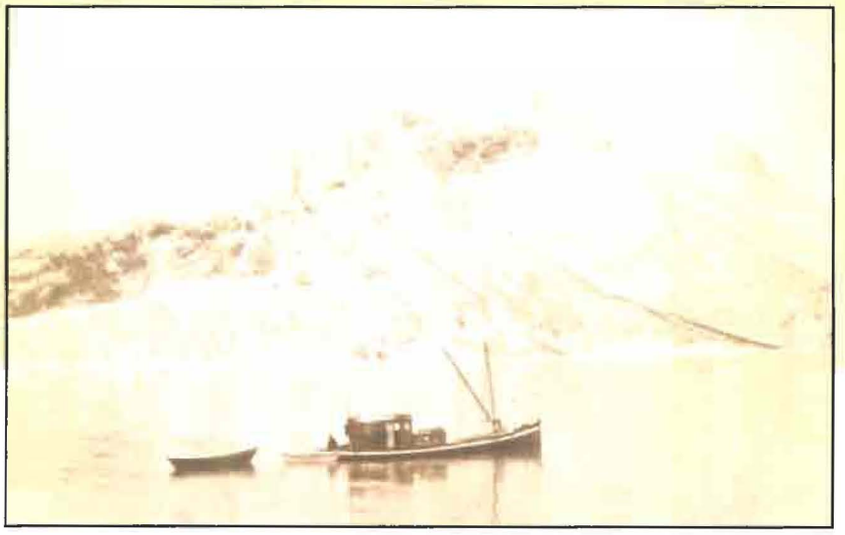
The Filipino cannery workers were generous about sharing their volleyball court. We had to have a cannery foreman go with us if we played, as young ladies didn't go unsupervised much then. In later years we were invited to dinner at the Filipino mess hall. The meal was wonderful, and served with great care.

The dinner arrangement took a little getting used to. Everyone would gather in front of the mess hall about ten minutes before the cook rang the dinner bell. When the door opened, we all trooped in and sat on the benches, stretching along tables about thirty feet long. Every ten feet there was a family size set-up of dishes, holding about what you would put on for a meal at home.

At my first cannery meal, I was amazed to see people run into the dining room, put an arm around all of the serving dishes, scoot them to their place, serve themselves quickly, wolf down their food, jump up, and leave. I had never seen that approach to food before. I was sure my Aunt Millie would have fainted dead away at the sight. After a few days of my "would you please pass..." being lost in the pandemonium, I became more aggressive. Later at home, Lydia said, "Wilma! For heavens sake, no one is going to take your food away from you!"

The cannery hired a small crew to start the season. One of these men bore a strong resemblance to Frankenstein's monster. When I first saw him in the dining room he had a terrible hangover. They put him to work wheeling the stacks of coolers in and out of the retorts. These huge pressure cookers released steam in a giant hissing cloud when the cooking cycle was complete. About the third day, the steam and noise sent this man's poor wine-soaked brain back to World War I, where he had been shell shocked. His reaction was to start fighting the war all over again. He first tried to burn down the men's bunkhouse. This got everyone's attention. They finally got him under control with handcuffs. To keep him from hurting himself or others, they locked this man in the can loft, where the cases of unfinished cans were stored, about forty feet from my working position on the reformer machine.

In spite of it all, I loved my job because it was dry and warm in the can loft and there was only about a week in mid July that we did 16 hours a day. Other times we had fun. It was a wonderful summer and I, 16 years old, went home with $387.00 in my pocket.

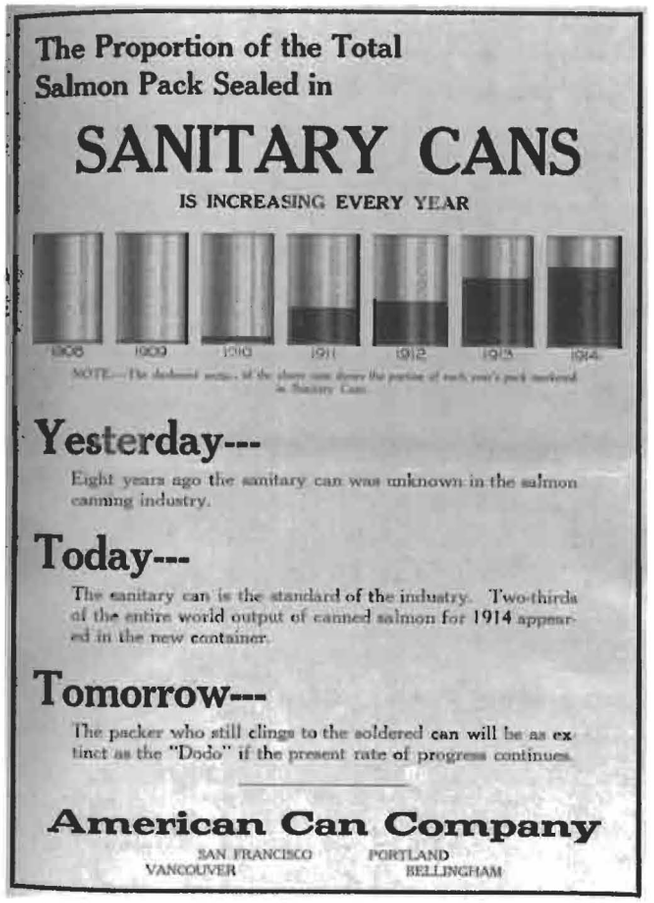


"Tender fronting Chisik Island," circa 1927, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

to pop into Snug."[113] Because Snug Harbor cannery was the only commercial operation conducting business on the west side of Cook Inlet, Dorothy Fribrock notes that cooks at the messhall prepared meals knowing that "anyone could show up to eat."[114]

Fribrock Family Becomes Sole Owner

With the nation engulfed by the Great Depression, shifts in the economy began to affect Snug Harbor's management. In 1933 Luther Hull got out of the corporation and sold his shares to A.S. Foster. In 1934, Al Foster Sr. died, and his shares were split between Eric and his son, Al Jr. In 1942, the corporation was dissolved, and a partnership was created between the Foster and Fribrock families.



Advertisement for American Can company, Pacific Fisherman, *circa 1927*

As a young man, Joe Fribrock, Eric's son, worked in the can shop, first working the reformer, then heading the can shop operation. Though Joe studied geology at college, he decided that he would follow his father's footsteps into the canning industry. With his son's decision, Eric made arrangements to buy out Foster's interests in Snug Harbor Packing.

In January 1944, Eric purchased the company's interests held by Al Jr., who had been secretary of the company since its organization and vice-president for over ten years. Snug Harbor Packing Company was now entirely owned by members of Eric Fribrock's family: part of it was held by his son, Joe, who at the time was at Yale, training as a cadet for the photographic branch of the aviation service, and part by his daughter, Iris, who attended the University of Washington.[115]

Acquiring the Snug Harbor Land Patent

Knowing his son's desire to eventually take over the family business, Eric started the application process in 1940 to obtain the land surrounding Snug Harbor. Although Snug Harbor Packing Company had owned and operated the cannery since 1927, the company did not have a patent for the land on which it sat. To obtain a land patent, Eric Fribrock had to first apply to the land office at Juneau, describe the tract to be entered, and accompany the application with sufficient scrip, which is the rights of a soldier or sailor who fought in the Civil War, to cover the estimated acreage of the claim. Then, he had to hire a U.S. Deputy Surveyor to survey Sung Harbor within 90 days after filing application.[116]

After initially applying, it usually took the government between two to ten years to rule on the patent. Land claims for canneries were administered under the Soldier's Additional Homestead Act, enacted May 14, 1898 and amended March 3, 1903. The law allowed Civil War veterans who had made a homestead entry for less than 160 acres to select enough public lands to make up the difference between the area of their homestead and 160 acres. The locator, either individual, association, or corporation, simply purchased the assigned rights from the veteran and made no direct payment of any kind, except a nominal filing fee to the government. The scrip allowed the locator as many claims as desired on open land.[117]

This became a problem for Fribrock because his homestead entry, covering 19.64 acres on Chisik Island, was not open land. When George Palmer and Elmer Hemrich first built the cannery, they probably had no idea that on February 27, 1909, president Theodore Roosevelt had created the Tuxedni Wildlife Refuge under Executive Order No. 1039. The refuge, created primarily to protect bird habitat, encompassed all of Chisik Island, including the site where Surf Packing built the Snug Harbor cannery. Even though Deputy Surveyor Harold Waller determined that "no portion of the land was occupied or claimed by any person other than the Fribrocks, nor did the land contain evidence of coal, oil, gas, or valuable minerals," Director Johnson of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service rejected Eric's application stating that the land had been withdrawn from any public claim.[118]



"Fish Bins," circa 1966, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

On December 12, 1947, Snug Harbor Packing petitioned the government that the 19.64 acres be restored because it was acquired as a Soldiers' Additional Homestead entry. Attorneys for the Fribrocks provided evidence that prior to 1909, the land surrounding the cannery was secured by veterans' preference right, and therefore, they argued the land should be placed back in public domain. Attorney Clinton H. Hartson, in a letter addressed to Commissioner of the General Land Office, stated that "the Fribrock's claim 20 acres of the 80 acre right of George E. Wheeler, under the assignment thereof by B.A. Mason who claimed the entire right under an assignment by Beulah

Tuttle, the sole heir at law." Accordingly, George E. Wheeler, who served in Company H, 19th Regiment, Maine Infantry, from August 9, 1862 to May 31, 1865, received 80 acres under the Soldier's Additional Homestead Act. Hartson's letter offered proof that linked the Fribrocks to Mason, who received 40 acres from Wheeler's original 80 acres.[119]

In support of his claim, in 1947 Eric wrote a letter to Mr. Albert M. Day, the newest director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In the letter Eric pointed out the inconsistent nature of federal land management in this particular situation:

> We have operated a salmon cannery on this site since 1919. Our present investment in the salmon cannery plant is approximately $250,000. This is a very large investment to have been placed on land which we do not own. A brief explanation seems in order as to what led up to our building our cannery on Chisik Island in the first place.
>
> There are many Government Reservations in Alaska, created by numerous Government Agencies and Bureaus, and we have found that it is practically impossible to find out from any one Government office as to what reservations are in effect. Our Senators in Congress have advised us that even they have not been able to obtain any file or inventory of all Government reservation in Alaska. It follows therefore, that when we make the statement, that we did not know in 1919 that we were building our salmon cannery on a Government reservation, this statement is reasonable.
>
> We purchased this cannery site from an old Alaska trader who gave us a quit claim deed to it and he claimed that he owned it. No Government agent at the time we built the plant, or from that time to this, has ever notified us that we were on a Government reserve. No agent of the Fish and Wildlife Service has ever advised us to apply for a Special Use Permit or notified us that we should pay rent for the land that we were using. Nor have they ever objected to the location of our cannery on Chisik Island or advised us that we were using land that had been withdrawn from entry.[120]

Eric also noted that USFW agents, even the director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, visited Snug Harbor repeatedly during the fishing season.

In 1948, an investigation by the Department of Interior determined that the Fribrocks had a "just and valid claim on the land and recommend that final certificate and patent be issued to Eric, Joe and Iris Fribrock."[121] In July 1954, the Department of the Interior granted the Fribrocks a United States patent. Dorothy Fribrock states proudly in *Sockeye Sunday* that "[the land patent] was signed by the President of the United States."[122]

It is important to note that several years of frustration over this issue gave the Fribrocks a victorious feeling when Snug Harbor Packing finally obtained the twenty acres on Chisik Island. Sentiments felt during this time are reflective of resentments fostered by ongoing conflicts pitted between the salmon industry, the federal

government, and the Territory of Alaska. Land disputes between the fishing establishment and the federal government had just begun.

Eric Fribrock's Final Years at Snug Harbor

Eric Fribrock retired from his position as president of Snug Harbor Packing in 1952, two years before receiving the land patent. In the decades before retirement, Eric became an influential player among salmon canners. During the war years a lack of labor plagued the salmon canning industry. Eric's company was one of various groups representing the industry that sought solutions. Their answer was called the Concentration Program, which *Pacific Fisherman* reported as a "basic feature of 1943 salmon canning in Alaska."[123]

Eric's contribution to the industry was confirmed by his colleagues, who unanimously elected him president of the Northwest Salmon Canners Association at the annual election held that year. As president, Eric moderated heated discussions as the Association became increasingly concerned over the impact of World War II on the fishing industry. Such concerns included the ever-changing picture of official regulation and requirements, availability of local manpower to work in and fish for Alaskan canneries, questions about the position and condition of fishing equipment taken by the armed forces, and prospects of recovering such equipment in time for the packing season.[124]

Eric's personal concern, however, was the safe return of his son, Joe, from the war. Joe came back unscathed, and to Eric's delight became engaged to Miss Dorothy Buelow, the daughter of Seattle canned salmon broker, C.F. Buelow. The industry was so enthralled with the engagement that even *Pacific Fisherman* reported the



"Pewing the Fish," courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

nuptials in its "Fishing News" section.[125] After 1952, Eric continued to visit the cannery, but instead of being boss, he simply enjoyed being a blueberry picker.[126] The brailing of salmon still excited him, but mainly Eric, always the family man, took pleasure spending time with his grandchildren and watching his son fill his shoes at Snug Harbor. "I came to Alaska 40 years ago by sailing vessel," Eric announced at his 91st birthday, "sailed out of San Francisco in March and didn't arrive in Kenai until a month later. Now after 40 years, I take the steamship to Seward, and I come by bus to Kenai. It's time to quit."[127]



Emma, Eric, and Joe on Eric's 90th birthday," January 21, 1975, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.



Joe, Eric, and granddaughter at Snug Harbor," courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.



"All hands building trap, May 1890," H.M. Wetherbee collection, Accession number, 866-19N, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

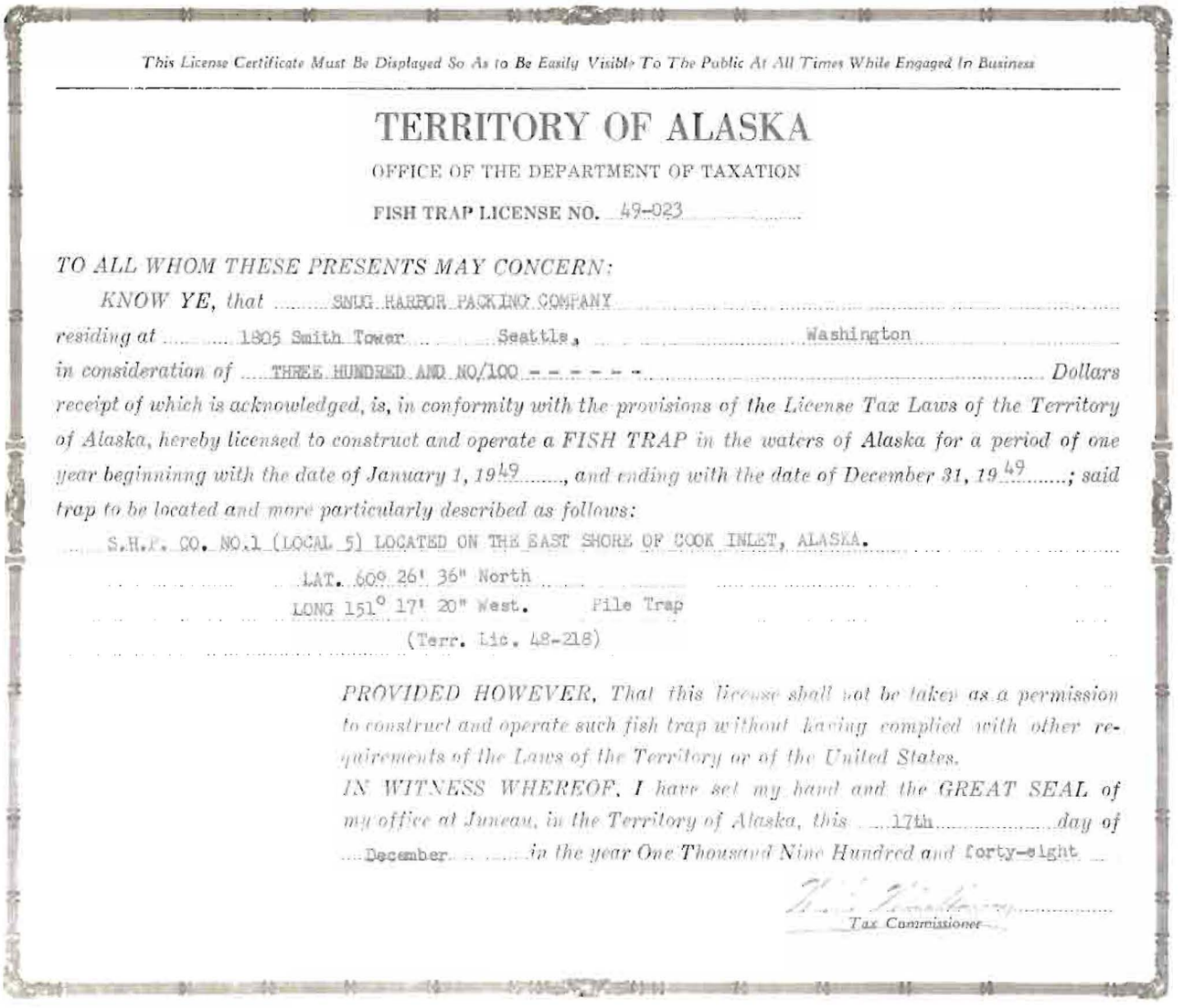
CHAPTER THREE

DRIVING THE PILE TRAPS

From 1919 to 1959 fish traps supplied Snug Harbor with the majority of its salmon. Like the many other cannery owners throughout coastal Alaska at this time, Eric Fribrock realized that he could catch huge amounts of fish in large stationary traps to supply his cannery rather than hire fishermen who used less reliable mobile gear. By 1957 there were 215 traps operating in Alaska waters—12 belonged to Snug Harbor. In its peak years, Snug Harbor fished twelve traps, four shared with Pacific American Fisheries. Seven traps fished the east side of Cook Inlet: one Snug Harbor trap at Nikiski; four PAF traps and two Snug Harbor traps at Salamato [Salamatoff] and Kalifornski [Kalifornsky] beaches. Five traps fished the west side: three Fribrock traps on Kalgin Island, one Snug Harbor trap at Point Harriet, and the Home trap on the north side of Chisik Island.[128]

The Snug Harbor Packing Company certainly was not the first group of people to drive a fish trap into the Cook Inlet mud. Athabaskan and Alutiiq people who lived in the area utilized fish traps, as well as early Russian settlers. According to H.C. Scudder, a long time employee of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the oldest commercial trap fished in Alaska was called the Zapora, which was located in the Malina River on Afognak Island. Date of construction is unknown, but by the time of the Zapora's discovery in 1897, had been in use thirty years after Russian occupation.[129]

The use of salmon traps in Alaska spread rapidly after 1890. At the turn of the century, salmon traps were becoming increasingly significant to Alaska's fishing effort. The introduction of the inexpensive floating trap in 1907 contributed



This License Certificate Must Be Displayed So As to Be Easily Visible To The Public At All Times While Engaged In Business

TERRITORY OF ALASKA

OFFICE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF TAXATION

FISH TRAP LICENSE NO. 49-023

TO ALL WHOM THESE PRESENTS MAY CONCERN:

KNOW YE, that SNUG HARBOR PACKING COMPANY

residing at 1805 Smith Tower Seattle, Washington

in consideration of THREE HUNDRED AND NO/100 - - - - - - *Dollars receipt of which is acknowledged, is, in conformity with the provisions of the License Tax Laws of the Territory of Alaska, hereby licensed to construct and operate a FISH TRAP in the waters of Alaska for a period of one year beginning with the date of January 1, 1949, and ending with the date of December 31, 1949; said trap to be located and more particularly described as follows:*

S.H.P. CO. NO.1 (LOCAL 5) LOCATED ON THE EAST SHORE OF COOK INLET, ALASKA.

LAT. 60° 26' 36" North
LONG 151° 17' 20" West. Pile Trap
(Terr. Lic. 48-218)

PROVIDED HOWEVER, That this license shall not be taken as a permission to construct and operate such fish trap without having complied with other requirements of the Laws of the Territory or of the United States.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have set my hand and the GREAT SEAL of my office at Juneau, in the Territory of Alaska, this 17th *day of* December *in the year One Thousand Nine Hundred and* forty-eight

Tax Commissioner

Trap License, 1949, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock.

to an increase in the number of traps in southeastern Alaska, but in Cook Inlet where traps were exposed to the open sea and foul weather, canners, including Eric Fribrock, preferred pile traps.

Working Snug's Fish Traps

Cook Inlet pile traps were large rectangular wooden structures approximately thirty-five to forty feet long with twelve-hundred foot leads. Constructing pile traps was expensive and complex. Fribrock needed a pile driver with a sixty foot hammer to pound sixty-five foot timbers ten feet into the mud. However, once built, operation of the pile trap was quite simple. First, the "lead," a line of piling driven ten feet apart and hung with chicken wire, literally led the migrating salmon from the shoreline into an enclosed V-shaped "heart." From the heart, salmon swam into a twenty-five-foot

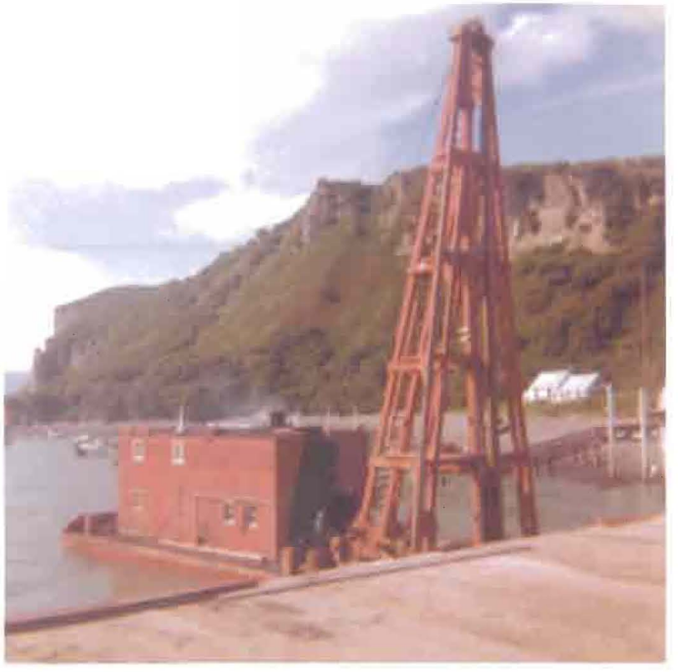
narrow, web-enclosed tunnel which led the fish into a pot where they were penned until high tide spilled them into the "spiller." Then, a "jigger" or "apron" closed, trapping the salmon. Once in the spiller, the fish remained alive until crews from one of Snug's three tenders—the *Minnie B*, the *Venus* or the *Lillian J*, "brailed" the silver horde into their holds.

Trap fishing in Cook Inlet began in mid-June and usually ended on August 8 in odd years and on August 12 in the even years to correspond to the two-year pink salmon run cycle. Regulators allowed traps to fish six days a week, closing at 6 p.m. Saturday and opening 6 a.m. Monday. When fishing ceased for a day and a half, cannery crews harvested the traps. In the resulting slack time, cannery workers received Mondays off. To every other working American, Monday was the first day of the work week, but at Snug Harbor, Monday was the day of rest and called "Sockeye Sunday" by the cannery crew.[130]

The arrival of the tenders brought what canners like Fribrock argued were "the most efficiently caught fish in the world."[131] In 1937 a representative of the Department of Commerce (the regulating agency at the time) testified on behalf of fish traps:

> It is easier to enforce the law and regulations concerning closed seasons and places of operation in the case of traps than it is in the case of seines and other portable apparatus. Traps are at definitely fixed points and cannot be moved on a few minutes' notice as can the seines and other mobile types of gear. Purse seiners roam from place to place in the many hidden bays and inlets searching for schools of fish. There is often a temptation for them to go into rivers and other closed waters to make catches of salmon. The actual driving of salmon down stream from the spawning grounds into such nets has occurred from time to time.[132]

Besides fishing traps and canning fish, another matter Fribrock had to consider was locating trap sites. In the early years the War Department, and later, the Army Corps of Engineers, issued licenses for trap sites. The only interest these two military departments had in fishing was the fish trap's position in the waterways. Their job was to make sure traps did not obstruct or interfere with navigation along the coast or up major rivers. The first federal bureau charged with regulating fishing was the United States Fisheries Bureau under the Treasury Department, which was succeeded by the Department of Commerce. In 1940 management shifted to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service under the Department of Interior.



"Pile Driver," courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.



"Trap Cabin," Snug Harbor Collection, courtesy of the Puget Sound Maritime Historical Society.

A few years before Snug Harbor was built, an article in *Pacific Fisherman* instructed canners how to locate trap sites in Alaska.[133] Under existing fish trap laws applicable to Alaska in 1915, a fish trap could be operated anywhere along the coast of Alaska, 300 yards from the mouths of any salmon stream, and along the shore of all rivers—except those emptying into Cook Inlet, where the distance was 500 yards. Also, traps had to maintain a distance of 600 yards laterally and 100 yards endwise between each other.

During Eric Fribrock's day, trap owners had no official title to the tidal flats nearest to the trap. In fact, this was a controversial issue which, to canners like Fribrock, was of high concern. A lack of title meant a lack of control over their property and supply.[134] To the salmon industry's indignation, a decision was made by the "highest courts" that title to the upland conveyed no title to the trap owners who may be in front; therefore, the canner who marked the ground first with piles and a driver asserted his right to any unoccupied trap site regardless of who fished it the previous season.[135]

Voices From The Harbor

THE BEACH GANG CREW

By Dorothy Fribrock

(Excerpts from *The Pile Driver and Fish Traps* reprinted from *Once Upon the Kenai: Stories From the People*)

When I first came to Cook Inlet in 1946, the salmon season opened about the 15th of June. Crews would arrive the latter part of April at Snug Harbor to dig working areas out of snow, restore running water and to get the driver off the ways so that the dock could be driven at Snug to receive the needed spring supplies that were lightened ashore from the Alaska steamships, the old Victoria, the Aleutian or the Alaskan.

The newly built Snug Harbor driver "Chisik" had been towed north from Bellingham in the spring of '46. Twelve men lived aboard the driver during the driving and pulling of the twelve traps of the combined Snug Harbor-Pacific American Fisheries operation. Tenders were needed to tow the driver to the trap location, but while at the trap site, the driver, by using an ingenious arrangement of lines and anchors, could snake its way around the trap site from lead to heart, to pot and spiller.

Axel Nordstedt, the strong bull of a man who was beach boss, was the driving force behind these operations. It was his special delight after the fishing began to personally work the winch that unloaded all the fish that the traps caught. John Jenson, a slight, wiry, blue-eyed Norwegian foreman of the rig, didn't sport the name of Midnight John without reason. With favorable tide and wind, Midnight John and his able crew could complete a trap and a half in less than a week. Next to the foreman, the most important man on the driver is the "hammer man." I heard tales of John Westerdahl, who was before my time. He was supposed to drive piles faster than the pole man would give him his poles.

The youngest man on the driver crew was John Kanabeck from Seldovia, a Native Alaskan whose family had tragically died in a home fire when he was 16. He was shy and a good worker. He stayed on in the beach gang after the driving days were long over. Frank McMichael, now of Tutka Bay, was another trap man who worked the driver. He and his wife, Mildred, fished beach sets at Point Harriet. Several years they wintered at the Harbor, and Frank, now mellower, pursued his hobby of painting with oils. Ben Hamburg had been cook on the rig that year. Because he was such a good cook, he was promoted a few years later to the cannery's baker with all-time, number one cook, Norwegian Ralph Havestein, who presided over Snug's messhouse and Blue Room a good fifteen years.

In the winter, the nets were hung up to dry in the web loft at Snug Harbor along with hundreds of ropes and descriptive,

For the Snug Harbor Packing Company, the job of constructing and dismantling the traps belonged to John Jensen, the "slight, wiry, blue-eyed Norwegian" who was the foreman of the pile driver.[136] By late April, Snug's Beach Gang had the driver off the ways and driving the cannery's dock. Two weeks later, the pile driver was ready for Jensen to take command. From Chisik Island, a tender towed the rig 60 miles across Cook Inlet to the trap site where Jensen and his twelve man crew built a trap in less than a week. Known by his crew as "Midnight John," Jensen drove the pile driver's hammer well beyond the setting sun. Many times crews heard the Norwegian say, "When the midnight sun stretches daylight, time was too critical to waste it sleeping."[137]

Once driven, two watchmen fished the trap. One trap watchman, Niketa Mishakoff, an Alaska Native from the Cook Inlet area, was known to fearlessly walk the length of a trap, forty feet in the air. Mishakoff and his partner lived all summer at the trap site in a small cabin, keeping an eye out for "trap pirates," but more importantly, they prepared the trap for brailing when the tender approached. As the tender neared, both men either rowed out to the trap in a dory or used a 10 horsepower outboard they called the "Kenai Cadillac." Then, one climbed onto the trap and lowered one side of the net below the water so the other man could row the boat into the trap. These allowed the man in the boat to aid the tender and lower its brail into the trap under the fish. The brail scooped the crowded fish up out of Cook Inlet and dumped their blue-green bodies into the hold of the tender.[138]

identifying wooden tags, each in the bold handwriting of Andrew Erwick, Snug Harbor's web boss. I often pictured the havoc that would result if someone removed or mixed up the tags. Andrew was a towering Norwegian with sky-blue eyes, reddish-blond hair, clean-shaven with a ruddy complexion. He spoke so softly and his accent was so thick, I had a hard time hearing him, let alone deciphering what he had said. He had tried going home to the old country to retire but had been away too long. His teenage sweetheart had married another. He returned to Tacoma where he lived and died.

Another loner was his sidekick Ragner Oles, who became his successor. When the traps were out, Ragner graduated to skipper of Snug's power barge, the Kalgin Island. He talked very little, too. He was a dependable, cautious skipper, who personally went over every inch of the stowing and lashed down the cargo before setting sail himself. One year just before sailing north, Ragner was missing until his floating body was discovered face down in the canal.

Eng Nurling was tender captain of the Orient in 1946 and the following year, the Minnie B. He hated for the sun to shine because the ____ ____ wind blew and that made it dynamite for getting traps driven—brailing the traps or pulling them. So when it was calm and overcast and gloomy we called it "Eng" weather. There was no "Vistlin in the Vheelhouse" either. His brother Jack skippered the smaller Venus. The



"Beach Boss, Axel Norstedt, at his favorite job at the controls of the dock's winch, hoisting fish," circa 1962, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

Fish Traps and the Battle for Statehood

While canners like those at Snug Harbor felt that traps represented the most important and productive type of gear used in salmon fisheries, most Alaskans were fiercely against the fish trap. In 1954 Dr. Ernest Gruening, Alaska's ex-territorial governor, wrote that "no object in the daily life of Alaska has been so much in controversy and conflict from its first installation in the early days of the salmon history to the present."[139]



"Boat with fish and more fish," accession number, 97-27-210, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Despite their superior technical efficiency, Alaska Natives, pioneers, and boat fishermen decided that the commercial fish trap was too efficient for Alaska.[140] With runs dwindling to disastrous levels, many Alaskans blamed the decline on a greedy salmon industry that "desires to get everything they can out of Alaska and give absolutely nothing in return."[141] They also

Voices From The Harbor

smallest tender in the fleet, the Lillian J (often referred to as a submarine if you were ever unlucky enough to hit the tide rips at Point Harriet in her) was captained by Phil Sutherland. His brother was engineer on the Lillian J and the cook who presided over the 3-by-6-foot galley. He told me that the way to make good pie dough was to really knead it. I think he was thinking of bread because his pie dough was really like shoe leather. They called him "Wild Bill."

Many of these driver crewmen, as well as cannery machinists and foremen, were former sailors who had sailed to Alaska from San Francisco aboard the three-masted schooners in the early days of canning in Alaska. Joe's dad was one of them.

There was trouble one year about missing piling or poles, so Eric Fribrock came by tender to Kenai to investigate. He accidentally fell overboard. In those days, I was told, he always had a cigar clenched between his teeth. When he bobbed to the surface, the cigar was still there and still lit. He was one of the lucky ones. Some unlucky devil lost his life in the muddy Kenai almost every year.

The day Alaska became a state—January 3, 1959—traps were dead. They had all been outlawed. The hand traps, the driver traps, even the floaters of Southeast. The sound of the falling hammer in the land of the Midnight Sun is no more. All that's left are memories of those hard-working Norwegians with the bright blue eyes.

I wanted to tell the story of the traps and driver as I'm one of the few left. All the dear people that sat around the Blue Room table with me that first year in 1946 are gone…my father-in-law, Eric Fribrock, our bookkeeper Fred Parry—known as Scotty, the man with the tall tale—Nick Schweitzer the cannery foreman, who was also new to Snug that year. Midnight John, Axel, Andrew, Ralph, Ben, Joe's mother Emma, and even my darling Joe. These wonderful adventures I remember. I wanted to share them with you.

blamed a federal government which they believed neglected to appropriate enough funds for sound science and strong enforcement of the Alaskan fisheries.[142]

Opponents advanced strong biological arguments—so much so that even Alaskans, who had never seen a trap, branded canners as "fish killers."[143] Environmental degredation aside social and economic reasons elicited the highest emotional responses to the trap issue. With salmon canners importing their own cannery crews from the Lower 48 and using traps to catch fish, the resident taxpayer felt that the salmon industry was putting local men and women out of work. To the Alaska Natives the trap meant the end of their traditional life. And as resident fishermen compared their empty fish holds with salmon-filled traps, they boiled with anger toward what they saw as absentee ownership of production and natural resources. They were equally angry at a federal landlord with broad resource management powers that did nothing to prevent overfishing. For nearly fifty years the trap battle raged between residents and nonresidents, between labor and capital, and between local fishermen and distant federal agencies.

Meanwhile, the Alaskan opposition, who had elevated their rhetoric to near hysterical levels, turned the trap issue into what economist George Rogers called "political currency."[144] Because most people believed that banning traps would create significant jobs, leading to population and economic growth in the infant territory, the issue of fish traps moved into the political arena by the 1950s. Regardless of party affiliation, no Alaskan could support fish traps and expect to be elected to public office. As a result, the controversy surrounding fish traps moved away from social and economic impacts and was used instead as political capital about "which politician was most strongly against fish traps and which one had done the most to bring about their demise."[145]

Trap opponents were correct about the volume of employment that abolishment created. They were also correct in feeling somewhat like a colony. Alaskan historian Stephen Haycox states that until 1940, about 75 percent of territorial



"Beach Gang," circa 1923, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

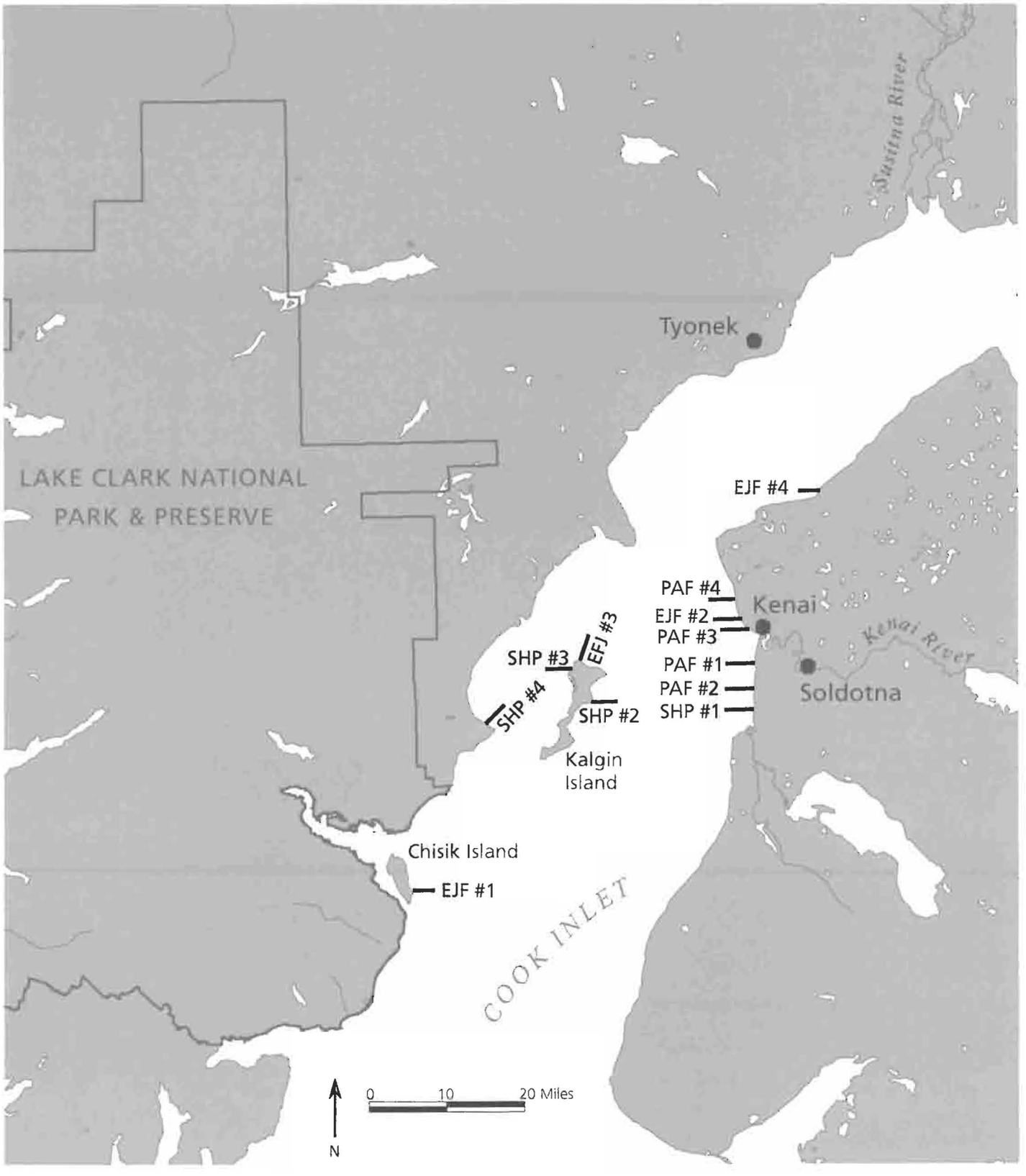
revenue came from the cents-per-case tax on the salmon industry.[146] He notes that territorial dependence on the fishery in the 1920s and 1930s was similar to Alaska's dependence on oil after 1970, but ironically, Alaska's people and politicians seemed to embrace the oil companies. Although today's historians and economists argue that the federal government was not as neglectful of Alaska, nor were traps as damaging to the economy as politicians boasted,[147] most would agree that Alaska's opposition to the hated fish trap provided the political fuel for the movement towards statehood and the transfer of fisheries management from the Department of Interior to the 49th state.

When Alaska became a state on January 3, 1959, outfits like Snug Harbor Packing Company were not completely crippled, but remained wounded. The Fribrocks, along with most canners, supported an amendment to the statehood act "that the administration and management of fish and wildlife resources of Alaska should be retained by the federal government under the existing laws." Along with the entire salmon industry, as well as most Alaskans, the Fribrocks were shocked when on April 28, 1959, Secretary of the Interior Seaton certified to Congress that Alaska was capable of managing its own resources, thus setting into motion the transfer of all fish and wildlife management from the federal to the state government.[148]



"Snug Trap on Kenai Peninsula," courtesy of Barbara Fribrock, private collection.

As a result, Fribrock was forced to employ a fleet of gillnet fishermen who, in turn, eventually embraced their home cannery. But for the Fribrocks, the loss of traps meant something more than increased costs and an unreliable fish supply. Now, as Dorothy Fribrock recalls, "Our once proud driver rests firmly on its last grid in the lagoon at Snug Harbor. Once new, extra high gins to accommodate the long piling required in Cook Inlet are now beset with dry rot. The boiler and engines have been pirated for other cannery duties. All that's left are memories of those hard-working crews."[149]



Snug Harbor's Trap sites, by Barbara Bundy, Lake Clark Katmai Studies Center, 2004





"Joe Fribrock in his office at Fishermen's Terminal in Seattle, Washington," circa 1965, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

CHAPTER FOUR

SNUG HARBOR'S SECOND GENERATION

In 1946, Joe and his new wife, Dorothy, sailed north to work at the cannery. With sister Iris married in 1952, Joe became Snug Harbor Packing Company's only manager and owner. For Joe and Dorothy, that first decade at Snug paid off. War time prices lifted and the value of canned salmon skyrocketed. Prosperous times, however, were followed by significant changes at Snug Harbor in the form of growing environmental concerns, modern technology, and the ongoing struggle between federal and state politics.

Impacts of Statehood and Trap Abolishment

Alaska achieved statehood in 1959, and between 1960 and 1980 the salmon industry changed so significantly that many canners left the business. Snug Harbor's modifications during this time were certainly no exception. After the war, they continued to custom can fish for Pacific American Fisheries, but once Alaska achieved statehood, everything changed. [150] In fact, Alaska's Constitution has a separate article on natural resources to ensure that the near-colonial control weilded by canners during the territorial days could not happen again. The only one of its kind in the United States, Alaska's Constitution mandates that fish and game shall be made available to the people but managed on "the basis of sustained yield." [151]

That was not the intended outcome in the years shortly after statehood, however. With fish traps banned, the state's mandate on equal access allowed 6,000 new fishermen to enter the fishery.[152] Combined with poor oceanic conditions,

mobile gear fishermen gobbled up fish runs as effectively as fixed gear, and by the early 1970s run conditions hit their lowest levels since the turn of the century. Long-standing companies in the inlet such as Libby, McNeill and Libby quit the salmon business and sold their canneries in Cook Inlet.

When Alaska outlawed traps, Snug Harbor Packing almost went bankrupt. To continue canning fish, Joe, like most canners, understood that the status quo could not continue. Many canners like the Fribrocks adopted changes in fishing and canning technology and sought to expand their international markets. Moreover, during a period of "trial and error" many canneries experienced severe financial setbacks while the state's new natural resource administrator, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, began to incorporate the latest technology into their management strategy. Thus, the changes Joe and Dorothy faced at Snug Harbor represented changes sweeping across Cook Inlet and the entire Alaska salmon fishery.

Clearly, one of the biggest changes caused by statehood was the switch from fixed trap gear to mobile drift gear. Hoping to stay in business, Joe took out a loan and began to build a driftnet fleet for Snug Harbor. Dorothy Fribrock notes that during the age of fish traps, "Drifting had been strictly in the experimental stages." She recalls that her father-in-law, Once, Eric Fribrock had predicted, "Drifting will never amount to anything. It's too windy in the inlet and stormy for those little boats. They couldn't handle it!"[153] But handle it they did. In 1958, the owner of a small cannery in Seldovia pioneered gillnet fishing in the inlet. Aided by a period of calm weather and good catches, the Seldovia fleet proved successful and others followed. Soon after, gillnet fleets fished out of Port Graham and Kenai.

Initially, Joe's fleet consisted of four, 26-foot, flat bottom, 4-cylinder diesel, wooden boats: Snug, Snug I, Snug II, Snug III. Snug boats carried 2,000 fish, which were caught with nets consisting of three fifty-fathom shackles. With the help of



"Mother duck, the Kalgin Island, *receives fish from 'ducklings' or independent boats," courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.*

PAF, Snug Harbor's fleet grew to nearly thirty-five boats by the mid-1960s. The fishermen and west side setnetters, who supplied the canneries with fish, were distinguished by their independence. As Joe wrote in a letter to the Small Business Administration, "We have men who produce and make money, not ones looking for a free ride," wrote Joe. "We think we are the only cannery in Alaska that can make this statement. They fish for us because they want to, not because we have a financial hold over them. It is a refreshing relationship for both the fisherman and management."[154] With fishing open five days a week in Cook Inlet, Snug Harbor caught more fish in the years between1964 and 1966 than during any time in the cannery's history. Dorothy Fribrock recalls those exciting seasons in *Sockeye Sunday:*

> Morry Porter had always fished Snug 12. I remember when he first brought his boat into Snug Harbor, so laden with fish that his keel cut deep in the water causing a white water wave to curl on either side of the boat's prow thus when viewed head on, resembled a white bone in a dog's mouth. It was oily calm water, a sunny morning. They had fished all night. He had little freeboard, a full load and even fish in his bunk. These Snug boats could hold about 2,000 fish. Most of our modest fleet slipped into the harbor this morning, loaded to the gunwale. It was a pretty sight.[155]

Though exciting, fishing Cook Inlet was dangerous for Snug's small wooden boats. As far back as 1898, Jefferson Moser of the Fish Commission's Steamer Albatross reported that "the Inlet is very difficult to fish. There are probably plenty of salmon to supply several canneries, but they are not only difficult to catch, but the fisheries and the conditions attending the serving of the canneries are extremely hazardous...Nearly every season some lives are lost in the swift currents of Cook Inlet."[156]

One of the most important technological innovations introduced to inlet fishing that made the industry significantly safer was the marine radio. The device not only allowed Joe to keep track of his fishermen, but radios also allowed fishermen to keep track of the fish. According to Dorothy Fribrock, "this invisible web of fleet communication began to pin point the hot spots of schooled salmon for Snug's gillnetters as they listened to reports of big bodies of fish or a particularly heavy drift. Those who were not on fish were often tempted to run to catch the *radio fish.*"[157] As a result, fishermen devised codes among themselves so they could tip off buddy fishermen and keep others in the dark.



"200 red salmon being hoisted over Snug's dock," courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

Joe also used radios to position tenders. These graceful workboats cruised among the fleet, attending to boats waiting to deliver their catch. Snug's first three tenders were the 30-foot *Lillian J.,*



"Snug Harbor's power scow, Chisik Island, with a new pointed aluminum bow," courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

the 60-foot *Venus,* and the *Orient.* Later, Snug Harbor Packing sold the two smaller tenders and replaced them with two 89-foot power scows, and the M/V *Tuxedni,* named for the channel fronting Snug Harbor Cannery. In 1961, Joe designed the *Chisik Island* that included cutting edge technology and became a model of tender construction for the entire fishing industry. The *Chisik* was designed to hold fish in brine tanks below deck, which allowed tenders to remain on the fishing grounds longer and still keep the fish fresher. In 1962 *Pacific Fisherman* called competitor vessels that incorporated the new refrigeration technology "Fribrock Converts."[158]

Major changes took place in cannery operation as well. In the 1960s Joe installed a new quarter pound cannery line which required about 120 cannery workers to run. In 1962, the new installation appeared to pay off, for Snug Harbor produced its largest pack with 56,000 48/1-pound cases. In 1966 the cannery fell just short of the record with 50,000 cases, each of which consisted of 48 1-pound cans. Even though the 1966 pack brought in $1.2 million, canning costs and other services exceeded $200,000. In addition, Snug Harbor Packing paid their employees $200,000 and their payment to fishermen for raw fish was over $504,000.[159]

In 1968 and1969 new standards from state and federal health departments required Snug Harbor Packing to install new stainless steel equipment, tanks, and to replace other outdated machinery. However, not all changes occurring in the cannery represented a costly change. One of the biggest changes to influence processing was triggered by the Japanese and their insatiable appetite for fish eggs. Known as *sujiko,* this by-product of Alaskan salmon virtually saved the industry by providing an international market.

By the mid-1960s, Snug Harbor, like every other cannery in Alaska, began to solicit Japanese crews to work in the egg department. Rather than grinding up the salmon eggs with the rest of the viscera and spewing them into the waters below, canners modified their butchering machinery so that the egg skeins were extracted intact. Crews then placed the eggs in round vats that contained a salt-brine solution. After treatment, the Japanese graded the skeins, while delicate hands packed the eggs into little wooden crates. Additional salt was sieved over the egg skeins as they were carefully layered in lined boxes. They were then sealed and allowed to age or ripen for a prescribed time—usually more than one week. Then the Japanese experts opened the box ends, checking to see if the eggs matured properly. Once matured, crews permanently nailed the egg boxes shut and placed them in freezer vans for shipment to Japan.

Another change to the Snug cannery was construction of a permanent dock. Prior to its construction, no activity represented the status quo at Snug Harbor more than the rebuilding of the dock each spring. The timbers that supported the wharf were no match for the winter ice floe, and so either they had to be pulled at the end of the season or they would be crushed under the pressure of the ice that piled up in Tuxedni Channel. When Joe finally decided to build a permanent steel dock, he met resistance from the crew.[160] For them the springtime ritual of rebuilding the dock was as predicable as the return of the kittiwakes—"it was just the way things were done." Joe believed that to re-drive the dock and then to pull it each fall cost the company a considerable amount of money. Also, a wharf was the apex of cannery operation—it provided efficient movement of supplies into and product out of the cannery and serviced the cannery's fleet of small fishing boats. To build a permanent dock was the one sure way he knew to avoid duplication of effort and expense. So beginning in the late 1960s, Joe's crew began to build a new steel dock—one pier a year.

Fish and Game

New markets, improved fishing technology, and an unlimited number of driftnet boats fishing Cook Inlet waters caused run declines similar to those caused by fish traps. To manage the fishery, on January 4, 1960, the first session of the state legislature established the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G). One of the biggest areas of concern for the new department was south of Kalgin Island, where the fish for the Kenai River and the upper inlet schooled. As Cook Inlet gillnetters



"The Egg House," courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

gobbled up salmon on their way up Cook Inlet, upper inlet fish nearly disappeared. The levels of escapement, which assured sufficient spawning salmon for future runs, were almost nonexistent. To conserve fish, especially those fish migrating to the Kenai River, ADF&G curtailed fishing time from five twenty-four hour days, to three full days. Later, that number decreased to two twelve-hour periods a week. According to Dorothy Fribrock, ADF&G's conservation strategy hurt Snug Harbor. With only two days of fishing, fishermen could barely supply enough fish to the one-line cannery. On the other hand, reduced fishing time forced bigger canneries on the east side of the inlet to add more boats to their fishing fleets to insure enough fish during those two, twelve-hour periods—insurance the Snug Harbor Packing Company could not afford. During the peak this meant that big canneries acquired a surplus of salmon and wasted many fish. In an attempt to limit the waste, ADF&G cut back fishing time yet again. These new regulations cut back fishing time for Snug Harbor's fleet as well. To make matters worse for Snug Harbor, in 1969 ADF&G experimented with electronic counters on the Kenai River. The counters failed to tally the fish escapement. As a result ADF&G closed Cook Inlet fishing for fourteen days during the peak of the Kenai run.

Yet, more difficulties for the cannery and the entire industry were to follow. By the 1970s salmon stocks across Alaska remained in deplorable condition. In response, state biologists severely restricted commercial catches to ensure adequate spawning escapement. This established a pattern that James A. Crutchfield and Giulio Pontecorvo call "irrational conservation." Irrational conservation is based on a behavior pattern that results from restricted fishing time. Back in 1919 this pattern was predicted by fishery agents:

> The sequence of events is always the same. Decreased production is accomplished by increase of gear. Fluctuations in the seasons become more pronounced. Good seasons still appear in which nearly maximum packs are made. But the poor seasons become more numerous. When poor seasons appear no attempt is made to compensate by fishing less closely. On the contrary, efforts are redoubled to put up the full pack. The poorer years strike constantly lower levels, until it is apparent to all that serious depletion had occurred.[161]

In other words, when ADF&G limited fishing, big canneries simply applied more pressure to the resource by fishing more boats. Furthermore, the management framework gave no incentive for conservation; in fact, it inspired greed. For a fisherman knew that if he/she did not catch all the fish, other fishermen would. Taking only enough fish needed to keep the cannery running was not encouraged. No one was protecting the common property that belonged to all Alaskans.[162]

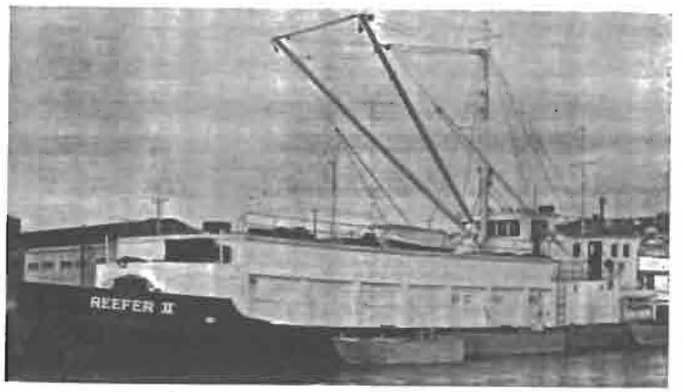
Not surprisingly, Joe Fribrock was one of the louder advocates of limited area licensing per boat. He and other Alaskans supported a radical proposal never before tried in the United States called "limited entry." The plan limited the number of fishermen in each area and gave them exclusive rights to harvest the fish. Instead of plunderers, fishermen transformed into a constituency of permit holders who ensured the fishery was properly managed and protected from overfishing. But with any commodity, fishermen bought and sold limited entry permits on the open market, and therefore, permits gained value through supply and demand. As permit prices reached nearly $400,000 in some fisheries,

many groups, such as Native fishermen, became alienated from the commercial fishery. Despite the problems, limited entry became state law in 1973, and appeared to work. Salmon stocks began to increase. From 1980 to 1996, Alaska's annual harvest topped 100 million every year but one, and in 1995 the catch reached the 200 million mark for the first time.[163] Today, the ADF&G still applies limited entry to its management of the commercial salmon fishery, although in the last decade market pressures from farmed fish have driven permit prices down dramatically.

PACIFIC FISHERMAN'S NEWS
JUNE 1962

The Year of the Power Scow—

Hull Tanks Permit King Crab Fishing; Aluminum Pioneers



Reefer II, one of the giants among Alaska power scows, is seen here outfitting at Seattle late in May for the season on Bristol Bay, where she serves the New England Fish Co., Pacific American Fisheries, Northern Reefer Co.

● This is the Year of the Power Scow, with developments along four cardinal directions, each as distinct as the points of the compass. Here they are:

1. More and more sea water refrigeration.
2. Increasingly rapid acceptance of the "Fribrock type," where the refrigerated sea water tanks are put in the hold.
3. Employment of aluminum plates for fish tanks to reduce weight, increase sanitation, and eliminate maintenance charges.
4. Successful pioneering of the Fribrock type of hull-tank power barge as a King crab fishing vessel.

● Let's take a look at the trends in each of these four directions.

More Sea Water Refrigeration

● This has become firmly established as a part of salmon canning, particularly Alaska salmon canning; and in May the Seattle waterfronts were packed with power scows being modernly equipped.

How many? The count is not complete. There'll be about eight mentioned in this story before we're done; but the list is a lot longer than those mentioned here, where we're concerned particularly with the hull-tank type.

Where the trend a few years ago was to refrigeration for holding fish at the canneries, today the strong current is to keep the fish fresh from the time they are unloaded from the fishing boat until they can be delivered to the cannery.

There's growing recognition of the fact proclaimed by technologists and quality inspectors: Don't rely on sea water refrigeration of inadequate capacity; and don't rely on it too long, regardless of capacity.

Five "Fribrock Converts"

● At least five of the new crop of refrigerated power scows are of the "Fribrock type," where the tanks are in the hold.

This arrangement was thought-out and applied in 1961 by Joe Fribrock to the *Chisik Island* of his Snug Harbor Packing Co. fleet. (*Pacific Fisherman*, June, 1961, Page 83.)

So successful did the arrangement prove, that this year he has similarly converted his *Kalgin Island* to sea water refrigeration with hull tanks. This has the advantage of contributing largely to stability, while permiting the carrying of freight or the newest-caught fish as a deckload when necessary. Like *Chisik Island*, refrigeration in the *Kalgin Island* was furnished and installed by W. E. Stone & Co., Inc., Seattle.

This same refrigeration contractor also provided the equipment for three other power scow installations, all of "Fribrock type." These were the *Pankof* and *Rudakof* of Pacific American Fisheries and the *Harry B.* of Nakat Packing Corporation.

All of these vessels specifically will be of the tanks-in-hull type; and several or all of them may be expected to enter King crabbing before the year is out—but of that more later.

Aluminum Plates for Tanks

● Tanks installed in two of the 1962



"Tender deck full of crab" circa 1970s, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

Snug Harbor and the Wilderness Act

One of the biggest challenges Joe faced as superintendent was running a salmon cannery surrounded by a federal wildlife refuge. Even though the government awarded the Fribrocks a patent for twenty acres, new national attitudes toward the environment greatly impacted the Fribrock's cannery and its fishermen. On September 3, 1964, Congress passed the Wilderness Act, which provided the authority and mandated the procedure by which National Wildlife Refuges were to be considered for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. This law directed the review of every roadless area of 5,000 contiguous acres or more and every roadless island within the National Wildlife Refuge System. This included the Tuxedni Wildlife Refuge, positioned adjacent to the Snug Harbor Cannery.

On April 25, 1967, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service held public hearings to obtain information as to the desirability of incorporating Chisik and Duck Island into the National Wilderness Preservation system. Joe Fribrock was one of the

scheduled speakers. Joe began his remarks by stating that he came to the hearing with "mixed emotions." The only thing he seemed sure about was "to keep Chisik Island or the Tuxedni Wildlife Refuge as it has been for a number of years."[164]

Joe felt uncomfortable about designating Chisik "wilderness" land for several reasons. First, he wanted to continue access to locations on Chisik that were outside of the patented area. Specifically, the cannery used a reservoir for drinking water and maintained a Caterpillar road to access the reservoir. The cannery also set up a communications antenna that required road access. Furthermore, if Chisik became a tourist destination for campers and hikers, as John Findlay, director of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had recommended, Joe Fribrock, superintendent of a cannery built of wood, worried that the increase in visitation would become a fire danger and could cause problems that might "create a holocaust."[165] But Joe was mainly concerned about how the Wilderness Act would impact his fishermen living in fish camps situated on the shores of Chisik Island.

The fishermen Joe referred to were mainly setnet fishermen, which means they fished from nets anchored to the shore. Usually, entire families worked the setnet site, as it was necessary to have someone operate the skiff, someone to pick the fish from the net, and others to prepare the catch for delivery. Some setnetters lived in makeshift shacks, while others built what could only be described as family homes, which they occupied year round. It was during the meeting that a local setnetter named William Page made John D. Findlay, Associate Regional Director, aware that families besides the Fribrocks occupied Chisik Island:

> Mr. Page: I fish in the Tuxedni Bay for Mr. Fribrock and the thing that hangs in my mind is what these people that live on the island—what is to happen to them if this is to be a game reserve or a wildlife reserve?
>
> Mr. Findlay: What do you mean living on the island? You mean on the area that is kept for the Snug Harbor Cannery?
>
> Mr. Page: No. They live on the north end of Chisik Island. They have their homes there. They fish out of there.
>
> Mr. Findlay: Do they own the property?
>
> Mr. Page: No, they can't own the property because it's already a reserve and if this were to be made into a bird wildlife reserve are these people to be removed from their homes, taken out of there, or what is to happen to them.
>
> Mr. Findlay: We would have to study this whole matter. I can't just answer your question this morning. You raise several problems in connection with the question of that type. So that I think we should study it and give you the answer separately following an investigation of the circumstances.[166]



"Building the permanent dock," courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

In 1967 Joe wrote a letter to Will Troyer, the Kenai Moose Range Refuge Manager, describing the history of the setnetters on Chisik Island. After a comprehensive rundown of about fourteen "folks and their families who use the shores of Chisik Island to one degree or other," Joe concluded his letter by stating that beyond the regulars of Chisik, there were "actually hundreds of men and women on drift gillnetters who frequent Tuxedni Channel and Chisik Island when the entire drift fleet used Snug Harbor as an anchorage in late June and for two weeks in July."[167] Clearly, by 1967, many people called Chisik Island their home.

On April 29, a few days after the hearings, Joe sent John Findlay a letter, reiterating his remarks: "Cannery managers have acted as the unofficial Refuge wardens over the years and we have resorted to having the Fisheries agents backing up our orders to our crew to leave the birds and their eggs alone." Concluding the letter, Joe wrote, "I personally feel that to properly manage this Tuxedni National Wildlife Refuge some more consideration should be given to its role in the present day development of the Cook Inlet area. This study that I recommend should occur NOW and then see what the Refuge's need really is."[168]

In 1970 Chisik and Duck Island were designated wilderness areas, and in 1980, under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Chisik and Duck Island became a subunit of the Gulf of Alaska Unit of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge. The setnetters continued to fish the waters of Chisik Island a few years after Snug Harbor closed in 1980. During that decade, however, lawsuits were filed, and in the end, Fish and Wildlife agents destroyed many of the setnetter cabins.

"We Almost Made It, Didn't We?"

For Snug Harbor, the turn around in Alaska's fishing industry came too late. The expense of remodeling the cannery with new machinery combined with the cost of continually responding to changes in state and federal management policy caused great cost to the cannery—a financial loss from which Snug Harbor Packing never fully recovered. As Barbara Kistler states, "We were out of money. Debts were called in. The fishing time screwed us up. We couldn't do it."[169] Even worse was another loss, the loss of their fishermen to cash buyers. By the late 1960s fishermen frustrated by limited fish time and quotas began to sell their fish to processors anchored out in the channel that were willing to pay fishermen three times more than canneries. Cash buyers provided neither assistance with gear nor a hot meal. All they offered was cash. Burning bridges with the canneries didn't seem to matter; cash seemed to be all a fishermen wanted or needed. This was the final blow for Joe and Dorothy. The summer of 1970 was the last time Snug Harbor canned salmon.

From 1970 to 1979 the Fribrocks operated Snug Harbor as a fish camp. They sent their loyal fishermen's salmon to Columbia Wards Fisheries (CWF) cannery in Kenai for custom canning. The store continued in a limited way, but the bunkhouses that sheltered the cannery workers remained empty. Occasionally, National Park Service personnel, working on plans for the future Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, resided in the cook's quarters. Although less people worked at the cannery, Dorothy found Snug Harbor to be home. Describing that time, she wrote, "Despite the changes, the emptiness of the warehouse, the machinery-less cannery, the spirit [of Snug Harbor] still lived on."

Then, in November 1979, like Elmer Hemrich who built Snug Harbor cannery sixty years earlier, Joe had a heart attack. He died three weeks later. Dorothy Fribrock ran Snug's operations alone that summer and then decided to sell the cannery to the Brindles, owners of Columbia Ward Fisheries and Wards Cove Fisheries, in 1980.

Although Snug Harbor sat silent as a cannery, CWF decided to make completing Joe's dock a priority. As the Beach Gang crew recalls, "Joe's ghost never left until the steel pile dock was finished."[170] It took Joe over a decade to nearly accomplish this permanent dock before he died in 1979. As Dorothy recalls, "The only unfinished section was the first temporary piling with which he had begun the project. Joe would have had the whole dock finished the summer of 1979 but soft pilings under the stem of the dock's approach between the warehouse and the cannery had to be replaced. Then we ran out of time and steel."[171] That fall, Dorothy remembers Joe looking back over his shoulder as they flew out of the Harbor one last time together. As the cannery receded from view, he turned to her and said, "We almost made it, didn't we?"

His crew finished the dock in 1983.

THE BEGINNING

By Rich King,

Snug Harbor setnetter

I knew as soon as we came around the south end of Chisik Island and into the entrance of Snug Harbor, that this was a special place. I was aboard Don Johnson's, F/V Tomanel, and we were headed for my first look at the setnet site my wife Marcia and I wanted to buy.

It was the middle of April 1976 and the west side of Cook Inlet was still buried under plenty of snow. I stood on deck marveling at the sound and smell of the thousands of seabirds dodging back and forth to their secret spots on the towering cliffs, when the deck speaker crackled. "That you Don?. ....Tomanel, Kittiwake." I looked through the wheel house door as Don picked up the microphone and answered, "Wake up old man, it's spring." As we motored up the channel and I had my first look at Snug Harbor Cannery, Don continued to talk to Dick Baldwin, the winter watchman, promising a visit complete with mail, green salad, and fresh milk. Dick, after spending a long winter alone, was anxious for any news and information and didn't want to let us go.

Tuxedni Channel was stunning. A few minutes more the Illiamna Volcano came into view, and I knew I was home. We anchored up about a quarter mile from the beach off Chisik Island and Craig, Don's oldest son, came back from the bow and said "Welcome to the Mud Farm."

Two months later, after convincing each of our parents to lend us $2,000.00 to buy into a commercial fishing business that both of us were 100% green at, we were hauling our summer's worth of supplies to the Kenai Columbia Wards dock. Our beater Ford pickup was loaded with everything we thought we needed to stay alive for four months on the west side.

As we drove out on the dock, veteran fishermen snickered as we pulled straight in, instead of backing up to the crane. Marcia gave them her best smile and we got a "I guess it's ok" look, as I got out of the truck. I turned around and a squareheaded, stocky man in black pants and rolled up sleeves says "better turn dis damn thing around if you vant her unloaded."

Nis Krogh, skipper of the Chisik Island, a tender owned by Snug Harbor Packing Company, would become our lifesaver. He seemed to take all of the nuances of hauling setnet junk in stride, as he suggested we keep our golden retriever "Harvest" off the "Chiz" until right before we left the dock. Naturally, his eyes twinkled as he and Marv Heine, the engineer, talked details while inconspicuously looking at the new setnet lady from behind.

The run from Kenai to Snug Harbor takes about seven hours if you're with the tide, and on deck Marcia and I were chicken skin from head to toe, as we entered the mouth of the Tuxedni channel. Harvest wormed his way between us sensing our excitement. We had loaded as much stuff as we could into the Green Slime, an old homemade fiberglass skiff as she set on deck of the Chisik. After dropping the hook in front of the Mud Farm, Marv came on deck, went to the hydraulic controls and said, "Let's get this hunk of junk off my deck." With two straps all the way around the skiff, he lifted her up and while I held the bow line, set her down perfectly along the port side.

I climbed over the bulwarks, jumped down in her and prepared to start an outboard motor for the first time in my life. Marcia climbed down and together we went through the steps we learned and the old Evinrude fired right up. As Marv handed down our terrified golden retriever, Nis came out of the wheel house bent over the rail and said "Fribrock wants to see you."

The Mud Farm wasn't much to look at, and there was two hundred yards of Cook Inlet mud between the waterline and the beach. Two cabins perched on pilings, clinging to a narrow stretch of beach backed up to what looked like giant cottonwood trees surrounded by an alder jungle. We headed for a point of beach about a quarter mile to the north where we could see an A-frame cabin and more importantly, no mud. We pulled up to the beach, threw the anchor out and Marcia stepped out on Chisik Island for the first time. Harvest ran with excitement, thrilled to be done with his first ever boat ride, on an absolute beautiful bluebird day.

We decided to take a load down to the Mud Farm about a quarter mile walk away and explore our new home while we waited for high tide and enough water to get the skiff close to the cabin. Harvest barked and ran to greet two people making their way from a tent camp tucked back into the woods. Tom Kempf and his better-half Suzy, greeted us like old friends, and helped us make our way down to the cabin. They filled us in with weather and fish reports, as well as telling us that Don's daughters Donna and Joyce and a few friends had arrived by plane a few days earlier.

As the girls came out of the larger of the two cabins, Marcia and I looked at each other in wonder. One sixteen, the other seventeen, dressed in cut-off jeans, halter tops and hip boots. They had been fishing the Mud Farm since they were little and wasted no time in making us feel like family. They began pouring out information about everything imaginable concerning fishing, life on the Mud Farm, boys from the drift fleet, rock and roll, and what was for dinner. They would become our fishing instructors to the best of their ability because their dad said it was to be so.

Our shack was about 10x10, three foot off the ground on the uphill side of the beach, with a set of rickety stairs that moved sideways when you got to the second step. Donna nodded at the shack as she made her way up. "Welcome to your new home," she announced, turning the knob and putting her shoulder up against the door forcing it to open with a groan. "Here's your nets and buoys, your anchors are downstairs," she called, indicating a pile of danforth anchors with rusty chains half buried in sand under the shack. With a small degree of trepidation, I stepped in to the dark shack and let my eyes adjust to what light had followed us through the door. A mountain of net, corklines, and leadlines lay in a heap. "We were in kind of a hurry when we put them in here last fall," Donna said.

They were a variety of colors decorated with crisp dried seaweed and smelling of musty cream corn. From behind me Marcia took the lead. "For right now they are in our bed. Let's get these boards off the windows and let some air in here." Sure enough, right where I thought it should be was a rusty old hammer. I stepped outside, and using an old 55 gallon barrel for a ladder, begin to tear off a smorgasboard of driftwood that had been used to cover up two old plate glass windows that had obviously come from a different era.

After straightening a few of the nails I had pulled and making the loose stairs halfway safe, we set up a chain of bodies, and followed Donna as she began untangling what seemed an impossible pile. Slowly but surely, we unloaded six 35-fathom nets and a dozen buoys. Things began to look up as the girls set about sweeping out a winter's worth of grunge, and Tom reported that the tide would soon be high enough to get the Green Slime up to the beach.

Being that I was now the "mighty fisherman," I volunteered to fetch the skiff. Tom said he would help, so we walked back to the point that was now known as "the driver set." On the way he told me that the point was called the driver because years ago the cannery used to park their pile driver below where the tent camp was set up during the winter months. He also explained to me that the setnet location belonged to Joe and Sally Munger, whom I had heard of as legendary fur trappers from Silver Salmon Creek, about ten miles south from the mouth of Snug down towards Chinitna Bay.

Getting the lower unit stuck in the mud as I entered the shallow water was the first of my challenges, however I soon became adept at using a nine foot dory oar to pole the skiff around in two foot of water. The meaning of "mud farming" was beginning to sink in as gray mud was soon all over me, Harvest, and our possessions. We managed to unload without problems and made one more load out to the tender to retrieve the balance of our belongings. All were smiles as the magic evening glow of June in Snug Harbor, Alaska welcomed us to our new home.

Marcia had done what her life as a homestead girl had taught her well. She improvised, making furniture out of Blazo boxes and plugging holes in the walls with tin foil, and she soon had our cabin (no longer a shack) cozy with a candle, a Coleman cook stove, and our nest in the corner where the great pile of nets had been moved from. She pointed out that shrew removal was going to be my job, and that the outhouse was going to need some work, but after a semi-warm meal of Stagg chili and leftover Dolly Varden that Donna had gotten from an anonymous fisherman's night net, we felt like we were "fartin in silk sheets" as my dad used to say.

The next morning was wash and shower day at the cannery and was to be our first of hundreds of trips up and down Tuxedni Channel in our dory. We followed the girls in their skiff as we headed to meet the Fribrocks, the owners of Snug Harbor Cannery. Joe and Dorothy would adopt us into a family of fishing people that in time would buy our fish, feed us, fuel us, and hold our hands during difficult times.

Donna showed us how to tie our skiff off to the running line, and as we climbed up the beach toward the front of the



cannery, we could not believe something this fantastic was happening to us. We walked up the wooden plank ramp and into the store and were greeted by the pleasant smell of coffee and vintage woodwork.

From behind the counter a seasoned lady with white hair and thick glasses looked up from her ledger at us with a grandmotherly smile and said, "You must be the Kings." Donna dropped her pack on the opposite counter and said, "Hey Irene, got any fudgesicles?" We shook hands with Mrs. Krogh, wife of the tender skipper, and she said, "Of course we do, honey." She came from behind the counter, opened the freezer and fished out a box of ice cream bars. "Joe will be with you in a minute."

I looked through a glass window in a wall at the back of the store and got my first glimpse of Joe Fribrock; a sight that will be firmly fixed in my mind forever. Joe was sitting in an antique leather office chair, leaning way back. He must have been 6'4" with wavy brown hair; splashes of gray covered the wire rim glasses over his ears. He held a large microphone in close to his mouth "KJA68…Nis, switch over to 79." He swiveled his chair, looked out the window at us, stretching the wire to what looked like an ancient black radio. "When you get up to the dock, give Lindsey the mail bag, tell Marv I want the freezer load first, then the dry goods for the galley, and to set those propane bottles to the side. They go up to the Swiss barge at Polly Creek…" A moment of silence. "Okey Doke." "Oh, and John and Justo will be down to help with that drift web, and I want Toad to take a look at the genny with Marv. How was the run? Harold almost popped a vein when I told him the fuel order. The new people are here, see you later."

He didn't wait for a reply, he set the microphone down, swiveled his chair, signaled me by looking over the top of his glasses. I nudged Marcia, who was working on her fudgesicle, "I think we're up." I kind of stepped behind her, figuring first impressions could be helpful, and we entered into the office. "Come in and shut the door." We stumbled through introductions as Joe glanced out his window at Harvest. "Make sure you keep control of your dog; this is a bird sanctuary. Welcome to Snug Harbor Packing Company. I'll be posting the fish prices as soon as the fleet starts fishing. In the meantime, Irene will set you up on the books so you can order ice cream or whatever else you need. Remember we stand by CB20 and VHF 16 and 79. Keep your fish covered with burlap, unload with Nis as soon as possible. We will try to get you setnetters unloaded before the fleet gets in, and remember to pew those fish only in the head. Open that door."

Without saying a word, Marcia put her popsicle stick in her mouth and opened the door. Then, a little too loud, "Irene, remind Dorothy to remind Linda that the Kings will be joining us in the blue room for dinner." Perhaps confused and honored that Joe would have us for dinner on our first visit, we followed Donna around the corner and got our first real good look at Snug Harbor Packing Company.

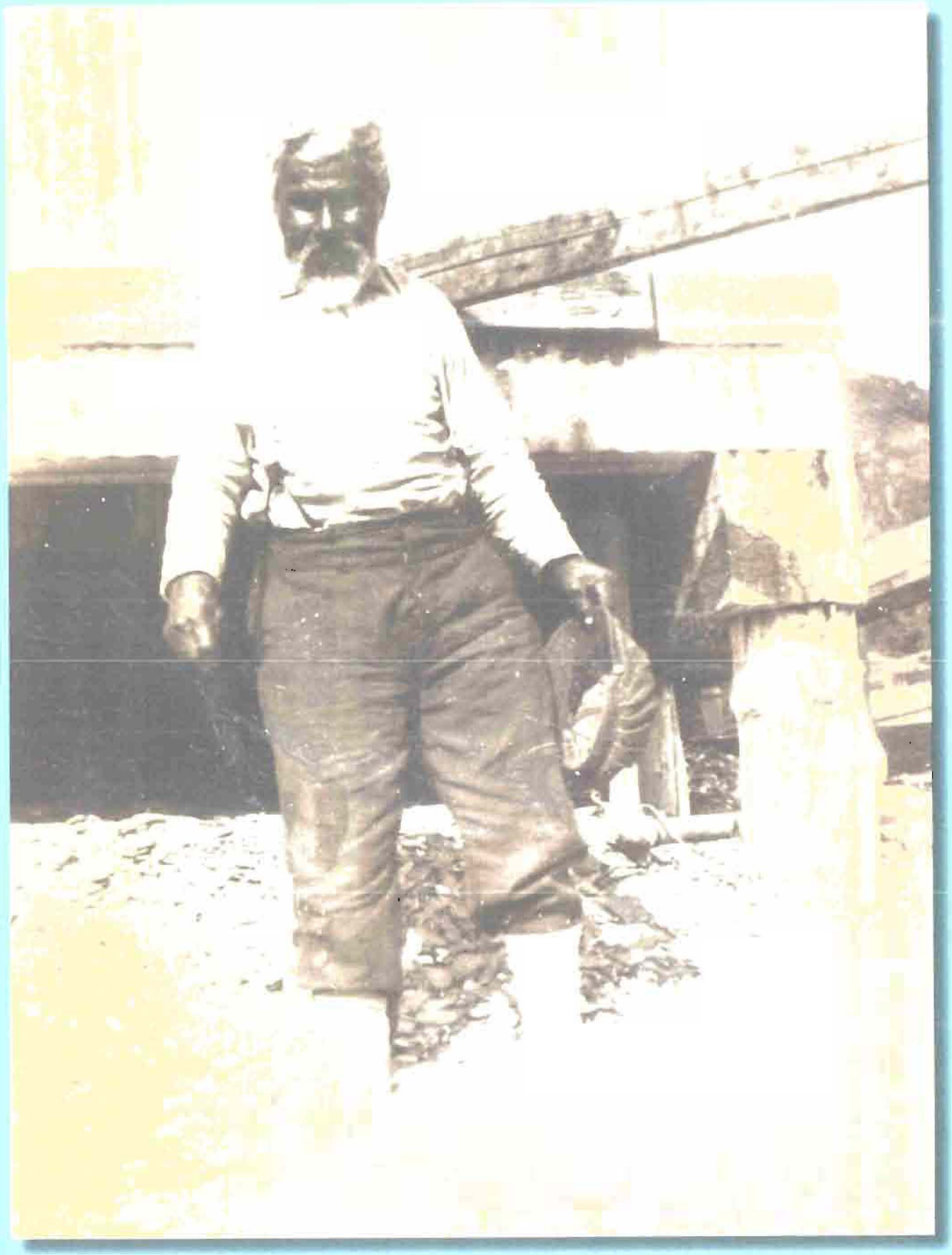


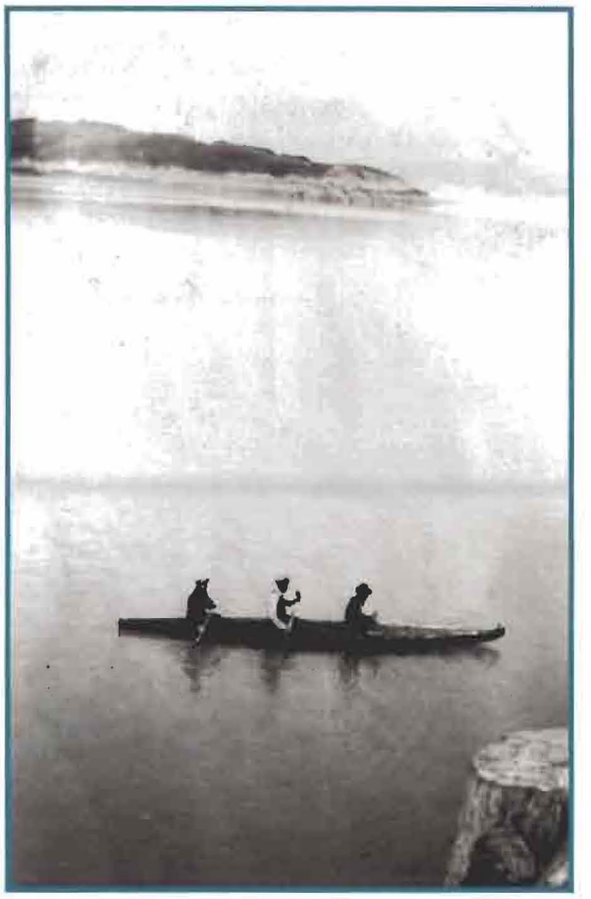
Aerial view of Snug Harbor Cannery, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

Part 2: The Bottom Tier



"Two unknown cannery workers," Snug Harbor Collection, Puget Sound Maritime Historical Society.





"Kukak 1927," Three men in a bidarka, Waugaman Salmon industry Album, Accession number 97-27-71. Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MOUNTAIN PEOPLE ON SALTWATER

The One who Dreamed at Polly Creek[172]

This is a prophecy of the coming of the white man. Such stories occurred throughout aboriginal Alaska.

At Polly Creek there was a man who slept for three days. He woke up and he said, "Things will be different."
"They go around on the land. In the water they have huge ships and they travel around in the sky.
"They talk different from us. Their buildings are large, and inside there is everything. Inside is bright. Everything is there.
"There is an immense thing with smoke and fire. And the people were in two groups. Their movements look dangerous.
"There is one building where it is noisy. And those people are acting crazy. They are sitting on some kind of animal. And it is running around carrying them.
"And salmon are loaded in this boat that makes an exploding sound."
He went to sleep and did not wake up.

Between 1919 and 1980, a handful of Alaska Natives worked at Snug Harbor cannery. In 1946 one of the cannery's trap watchmen was Nick Kalifornsky, the *Qeshqa* or chief of his Kenaitze clan on the Kenai Peninsula. In *Sockeye Sunday*, Dorothy Fribrock recalls a memory of Kalifornsky:

> Unlike some of the natives working for us, he [Kalifornsky] had cash money paid to him at the end of the season. (Others had already spent their wages the previous winter and were carried on the local store keeper's books. Now at the close of the fishing season merchants demanded their bill be paid, leaving the person once more without much cash and a prime candidate for a large charged winter bill.) In contrast Nick used his money to buy lumber, sacked coal, fuel, paint, food and gear to take home with him when he left. His purchases filled the 12-foot wooden scow being towed by the cannery tender, *Orient* as they left the Harbor enroute to Kasilof, Kalifornsky Beach where he lived. The last view I had of Nick, he was seated outside on top of his newly acquired goods wearing new coveralls and jacket, his arms folded across his chest.[173]

Without a doubt, Dorothy respected Kalifornsky. In the passage she paints a portrait of a successful Native man who works hard, appreciates western goods, understands the meaning of a dollar, and, is seemingly quite content dressed in western clothing. This is an important passage, not only because it shows the magnitude of cultural change introduced to Alaska Natives by the cannery system, but it reveals that those Dena'ina who assimilated into a capitalist system were considered by the canners to be "successful."

In 1996, anthropologist Alan Boraas curated a photo exhibit that illustrated how canneries in the Cook Inlet region changed Dena'ina culture. As the exhibit showed, by the time Alaska Natives like Kalifornsky began to work at second wave canneries like Snug Harbor, they had almost completely assimilated into a capitalist American system. As Boraas suggests, "Canneries transformed this entire area and represented the industrial revolution of the North."[174]

Boraas stresses that over time, the Dena'ina became overwhelmed by the economic expansion of the canned salmon industry. "Fish processing outfits from the West Coast," argues Boraas, "transformed the Dena'ina from a community of clans that lived off the land into the American image of individual independence and materialism, from subsistence living to wage labor." He goes on to suggest that canneries gave Native laborers easy credit, which allowed them to buy such luxury items as guns, but then required them to work during the salmon season when they traditionally gathered food for their own use. "By the end of the season," notes Boraas, "Native families would have less food and no money, so they'd use more company credit and indentured themselves for another summer."[175]

The displacement of Native centers and traditional modes of control in Alaska by salmon canneries has, on a broad scale, differed little from the interaction between indigenous peoples and Euro-Americans in the contiguous United States or elsewhere in the world. The history of Native-White relations has been seen, as historian Richard White describes, as "Natives as rocks and Euro-Americans as the sea, and the history being a constant storm."[176] Through interaction, the sea slowly erodes away some rocks, while others endure. But as White points out, it is important to remember the meeting of sea and continent, like the meeting of Whites and Natives, creates as well as destroys.[177]

Cook Inlet was a kind of cultural meeting place where Alaska Natives and Europeans interacted and accommodated change. To understand why the Cook Inlet Dena'ina, like Kalifornsky, apparently assimilated so rapidly and completely into the cannery system, it is necessary to understand how, for decades, Kalifornsky's ancestors responded to, and helped shape a system of trade with earlier invaders of Cook Inlet. It is this trade system that the canners adopted and imposed upon a people already weakened by disease, resource depletion, and cultural displacement. In other words, the assimilation process was neither quick nor entirely complete.

THE DENA'INA

Before the Russians came to Cook Inlet, the Dena'ina were, as the linguist James Kari describes, "mountain people on saltwater."[178] According to Kari, the Dena'ina are the only Northern Athabascan people with territory on salt water, and, as Kari notes, "no other Northern Athabaskan people had such an abundance of land and water foods."[179] As an expert of the Dena'ina language, Kari traces dialects like a trapper tracks prints. He suggests that during pre-contact times, the Dena'ina migrated from west of the Alaska Range in the upper Stony River area and perhaps also the South Fork of the Kuskokwim River and first entered the Cook Inlet basin through Rainy Pass or Ptarmigan Pass. There, they established several clusters of villages in the Upper Inlet area.[180]

Traditional Dena'ina were a very pragmatic people. Even after they moved to the coast, they continued to migrate between hunting grounds, thus becoming semi-permanent sedentary peoples.[181] Those bands that lived along Cook Inlet incorporated tools used by Alutiiq peoples, such as the skin boat or *bidarka,* which made them unique among Athabaskans, for they exploited resources from both maritime and interior environments. Fittingly, the most important resource exploited by the Dena'ina, the salmon, moved between ocean and riverine environs, too.

The range of abundant salmon–along the coast from southeast Alaska to as far north as the Bering Sea–was a significant environmental factor that impacted the lives and cultural development of most Alaska Natives.[182] To



"Native clamming crew," circa 1924, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

determine the relative importance of the salmon fishery to indigenous peoples prior to European entry, Gordon Hews estimated the annual consumption of salmon for the Native groups in each of Alaska's major geographical regions in the mid 1950s. The figures show that approximately 76,000 Native people resided within the "salmon area" he defined, and they consumed an annual total of nearly 33.5 million pounds of salmon each year, or an average of 437 pounds per person per year. In central Alaska where the Dena'ina of Cook Inlet lived, 12,500 people on average, ate over 400 pounds of fish a year.[183]

The seasonal rounds for all Dena'ina groups circulated around salmon fishing in the spring and summer from camps near the villages.[184] According to anthropologist James A. Fall, access to salmon fishing locations was controlled through kinship groups and traditional leaders, who regulated competition among clans and tended to limit and stabilize the catches from any particular stream.[185] At Tyonek, Dena'ina fishermen built *tanik'edi,* "fishing docks," directly into the inlet. They were used during high tides as migrating salmon swam along the shore toward the mouths of streams. Elders recall five such platforms were used communally at Tyonek in the 19th century.[186]

Voices From The Harbor

THE POLLY CREEK STORY

(Orginally published in A Dena'ina Legacy)
By Peter Kalifornsky

They set up a factory at Snug Harbor to can clams. Different people came to Polly Creek. Some came from Iliamna, others from Seldovia, Kodiak, Ninilchik, Tyonek, or Kenai. There were no houses there. They all pitched tents. They just stayed in them.

When the tide went out, they all went out on the flats. They gathered clams. They kept a scow anchored for them. There they bought the clams from them. They paid $1.25 for one gas box full of clams. Some people were good at clam digging. My uncle Chickalusion, with whom I stayed, was the best digger. On a good day he would gather twenty boxes.

They came back ashore when the tide came in. A boat would come to the scow and take it and leave another in its place. Then the people came back ashore. They played the stick gambling game, cards, quoits, and a game where they pushed and pulled on a pole. They played different kinds of games. And they would wrestle. Some of them would hunt in the woods for black bear, porcupine, and beaver. Some would hunt beluga or seal.

I would fire up the steambath for the old men. And they would all take a steambath. I put rocks on the fire for other people. When evening came, the old men would gather and tell stories. "Come," they said to me. And I would listen to them. Before the year 1921, I heard those songs and stories there.

I don't know the names of all the people who were there, because they addressed each other as they were related.

When fall came, the company boat took them all back to wherever their home villages were.



"Snug Harbor Token" courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

Native attitudes toward the resource itself helped to prevent run depletion. Salmon played an important part in mythology and ceremonial activities, and many of Alaska Native peoples developed beliefs that were combined with rituals practices that assured the return of a portion of the salmon to the spawning grounds each year.[187]



"Digging for clams at Polly Creek," circa 1924, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

The Dena'ina lived by a code of ethics and morality in their relationship to salmon, which also extended beyond fish to other fauna, flora, the climate, and topographical features. This code was a kind of contract with nature. It demanded respectful treatment of all facets of the world Dena'ina occupied. Hunters and gatherers strove not to modify the environments in which they lived, but rather to maintain a state of balance or harmony with the overall universe of which they were a part. In return, nature rewarded the Dena'ina with retuning salmon, abundant animals, and good berry crops. The Dena'ina maintained this symbiotic relationship with their environment with apparent success—a success that has continued to sustain the physical, spiritual, and social well-being of individual Dena'ina and their societies through time and space.[188]

Besides salmon, the Dena'ina supplemented their diet with a variety of foods that were gathered seasonally. In the following passage, Peter Kalifornsky describes the Dena'ina seasonal economy at Kustatan:

> When they stayed at Kustatan, they made oil from beluga, seal, and other things. Then they went after clams. They cooked the clams. Then they put them in a beluga stomach and poured in oil to preserve it for winter. When they opened it up, they washed the clams in hot water. They cooked clam soup whenever they wanted to make it...There were no moose over there [the west side of Cook Inlet]. They would go by boat to Kenai and kill moose. They dried that too, and they brought it back over. It was for winter. And then, in the places where they put up fish, they would go after ground squirrels. That, too, they cooked and they put it away, packed in oil, for winter.[189]

Because to rest meant to starve, Dena'ina traditional villages bustled constantly with activity. From the rivers and sea, men returned to the village with fish and furs, where women processed and stored the catch for use during the long winter. Some resources were used for trade in a complex network that tied different Dena'ina groups to each other. For instances, those Dena'ina groups living along the inlet traded rich salmon, hooligan, and marine mammal products for meat and furs with more inland groups.[190] The Dena'ina knew or understood the Tyonek area as "the mother of earth" for

its marine resources, and the Susitna drainage as "the father of the earth" for its resources of meat and fur.[191] Such trade connections created a sense of Dena'ina unity, which was linked together by resources found on land and in the sea.

Controlling inter-village trade was the *qeshqa*, the "rich man." In most Dena'ina communities, the *qeshqa* headed a group of kin—men of the same or related matrilineal clan, their wives and young children—who lived together in one or several multi-family dwellings. *Qeshqa* were individuals of high rank, who acquired wealth as good hunters, fishermen, trappers, and traders. Each *qeshqa* was the manager of the economic activities of a group of follower-kin.[192] He organized cooperative hunting and fishing groups, stimulated production, and directed the processing and preservation of food. In the late 1970s an elder from Tyonek explained to James Fall how a *qeshqa* operated in the 19th century: *"Baytnidahen* was the boss at *Tanltunt.* In summer he told his *ukilaqa* [helper] to put a fish trap across the lake outlet. When they got enough fish, he told them to pull the trap out and let the fish go up to the creek. They put up lots of fish. They used that place real good. That's why there was lots of people staying there."[193]

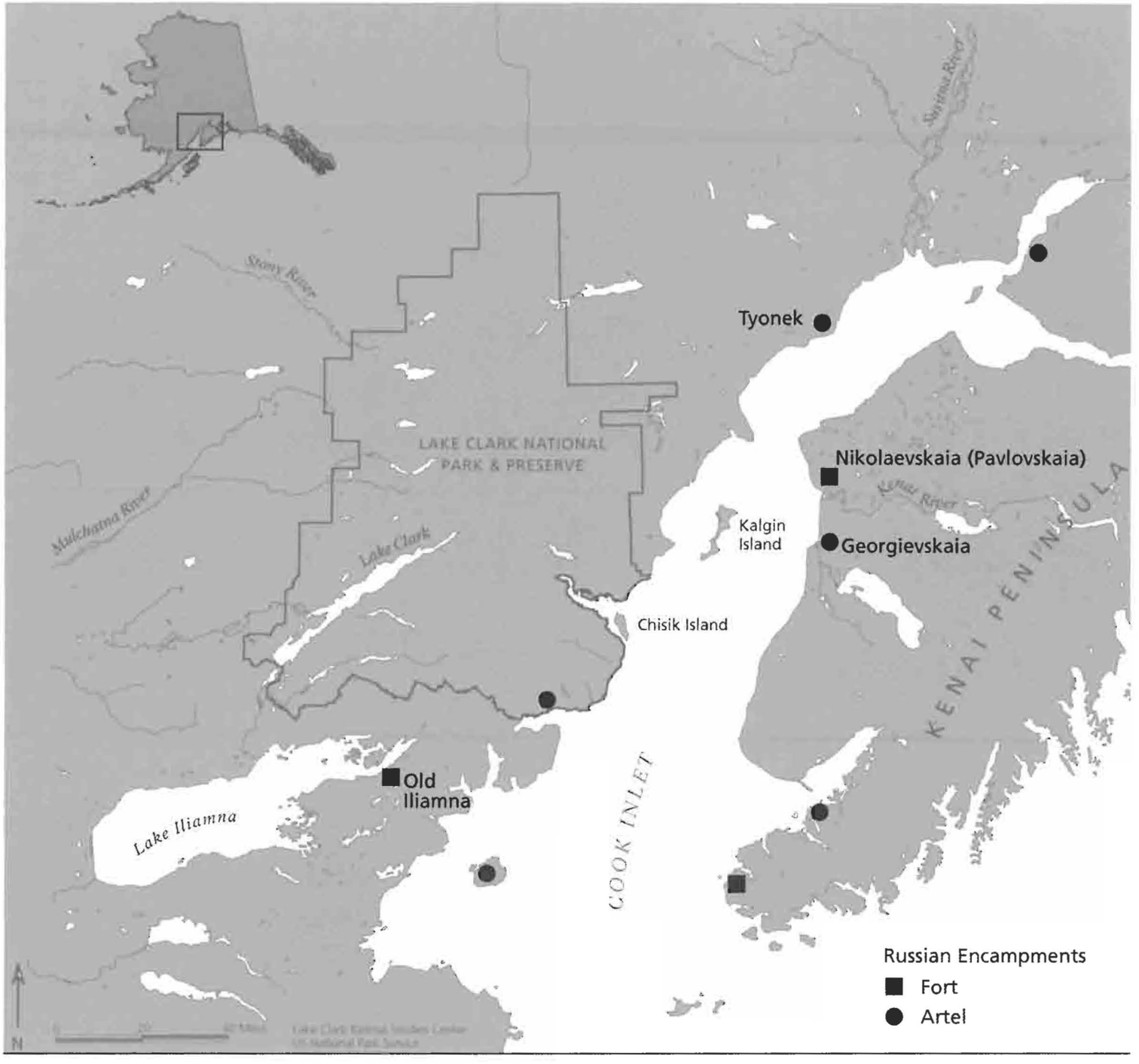
Once the *qeshqa* received the hunting and fishing products of his followers, he regularly redistributed provisions back to the village through fests and potlatches. Villagers considered this redistribution behavior as generous, and the more the *qeshqa's* reputation grew as a provider, his group of followers gradually increased.[194] Highly skilled *qeshqa* were alleged to possess spiritual powers. Contact with this power was believed to grant special success in economic, religious, or political pursuits.[195] Thus, the *qeshqa* controlled and administered Dena'ina material and spiritual relationships with the natural resources of Cook Inlet.

The arrival of Russian, and later, American traders to Cook Inlet offered new opportunities for the *qeshqa* to enhance their prestige and power. Throughout the contact period and well into the 20th century, the *qeshqa* served as middlemen between their followers, other native groups, and the Euro-American traders. It was only when severe population loss, the depletion of natural resources, and the changing regional economy undermined traditional sources of power in the subsistence economy and the kinship system that the *qeshqa* lost their position as middlemen.[196] By the 1920s, when Snug Harbor began to process clams and fish on Chisik Island, only Nick Kalifornsky and a handful of other *qeshqa* had survived.

The Russians

The Dena'ina of Cook Inlet had long since established a network of traditional trade relations with native peoples from other regions. In 1778, when Englishmen Captain James Cook first explored the "Great River" that would later bear his name, he encountered the inhabitants of the inlet several times. Not surprisingly, in his journal Cook noted the presence of European trade items and concluded that the Cook Inlet Natives were trading indirectly with the Russians.[197] When the Russians traders began to appear in 1784 from their more permanent base on Kodiak Island, it is important to note they did not commence the fur trade, but rather, the Russians only intensified a system that had existed in Cook Inlet for centuries.

Historians contend that the Russians may have been the first Europeans to make contact with Alaska Natives, but they were not the first to enter Alaska's coastal trade, for Russian "trade" would be conducted back home, not in Alaska. They argue that Russians came to hunt and to take—not to exchange.[198] Moreover, these first Russians, the *promyshlenniki,* came to Cook Inlet for one resource in particular. Regardless of the rich abundance of fish, timber, and minerals, the



Russian Encampments *Map by Barbara Bundy, Lake Clark Katmai Studies Center, 2004*

Russians wanted pelts, especially the fine sea otter furs highly sought by their neighbors, the Chinese. Because the *promyshlenniki* never mastered the skills needed to hunt from the native sea kayaks, or *baidarki,* they enslaved a fleet of Aleut and Alutiiq hunters to hunt sea mammals. Over two centuries of Siberian and Aleutian conquest, this system became preferred over a system of exchange because Russia's limited manufacturing produced little quality trade items. Serfdom was an institution the Russians knew and understood.[199]

When the Russians first began to exploit Cook Inlet fur resources, they did so under the auspices of several private companies. The Shelikov Company was the first and most active of these companies which operated in southwestern Alaska. It began to conduct business in Cook Inlet from its base on Kodiak Island in 1784. That year, Czarina Catherine II rejected Grigorii Shelikov's request for an imperial charter that would have monopolized his company's interests in Russian America.[200] This opened the door to unrestrained competition in Cook Inlet, particularly from Shelikov's main competitor, the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company.

Navigator Stepan Zaikov and the crew of the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company vessel, *Sv. Pavel,* were the first Russian sailors to navigate the northern end of Cook Inlet. In 1787, the company established an artel on the Kenai River, which was managed by a Russian seaman named Piotr Kolomin. Company members named the site Fort Nikolaevskaia or Redoubt of St. Nikolai, where the modern city of Kenai now resides.[201] The discovery of Fort Nikolaevskaia initiated the exploration of mainland Alaska by Europeans and began a rivalry between Shelikhov's and Lebedev's companies for control of Cook Inlet's fur-hunting grounds, as well as its inhabitants.[202]

During the period from 1787 to 1798, Lebedev's employees explored new lands, established several fortified settlements and fur-trading artels, and expanded Russia's colonial possessions in the Cook Inlet region.[203] Besides the Nikolaevskaia settlement at Kenai, the Russians established artels on the Kasilof River, along the Knik Arm, on North Foreland near Tyonek, at the mouth of Chinitna Bay, on Augustine Island, and at Seldovia in Kachemak Bay.



Lime Village, Bobby, Nick and Paul, Alexie, Seraphim with stars used in community celebration of Christmas by Russian Orthodox, 1943. Lake Clark Katmai Studies Center, Assession LACL-00090, H-70.

While scattered throughout the inlet, Lebedev's men worked to control the Dena'ina people, whom they called the Kenaitzy. Initially, they tried to subject the Kenai Peninsula Dena'ina to a system of control similar to that instituted among the Alutiiq people of southwest Alaska. Russians took hostages, usually children of leading families, who were taught the Russian language and way of life while in captivity.[204] Relations between Russians and Dena'ina during this time were uneasy and at times hostile. According to both Native and Russian accounts, one thousand Dena'ina warriors from Trading Bay launched an attack against the Russians on Kodiak in 1786. The victor of the battle depends on which story one reads.[205] Only a few years later, in 1794, George Vancouver visited Fort Nikolaevskaia and observed Natives living in structures alongside Lebedev's employees. Apparently surprised, Vancouver recalled that a few buildings were used for teaching "Indian children the Russian language" and "Orthodoxy."[206]

Vancouver's account of peaceful living arrangements was misleading, for the historical records show that the actions of Lebedev's employees were usually barbaric, not only to the Dena'ina, but to their fellow Russians as well. According to Kolomin, in August 1791 the Lebedev-Lastochkin vessel, *Sv. Georgii*, arrived at the Nikolaevskaia artel under the command of Grigorii Konovalov. Not only was Konovalov's party hostile to the original artel employees by capturing Russian hunters and indigenous workers, but they also "terrorized neighboring Kenaitzy by seizing their food supplies and furs, and destroying their baidarki."[207]

For the next few years, brutality, murder, and robbery were common. Konovalov and his men reduced the few remaining local Dena'ina to serfs. Rumors spread among English, Spanish, and American traders that described Russian posts as virtual harems.[208] In 1883, Captain J. Adrian Jacobsen described the known history of an abandoned Cook Inlet village:

> Soonroodna was a large village even before [the early 1790s] when the Russians came. Shortly after they had built Fort Kenai, they sailed one day in many boats to Soonroodna and abducted from here ... all of the young girls and women, whom they took to the Fort and in this way procured wives. The natives, who saw that they were powerless against the Russians, abandoned their home in angry sorrow and scattered themselves around Kodiak Island, to settle there anew among the Eskimo inhabitants.[209]

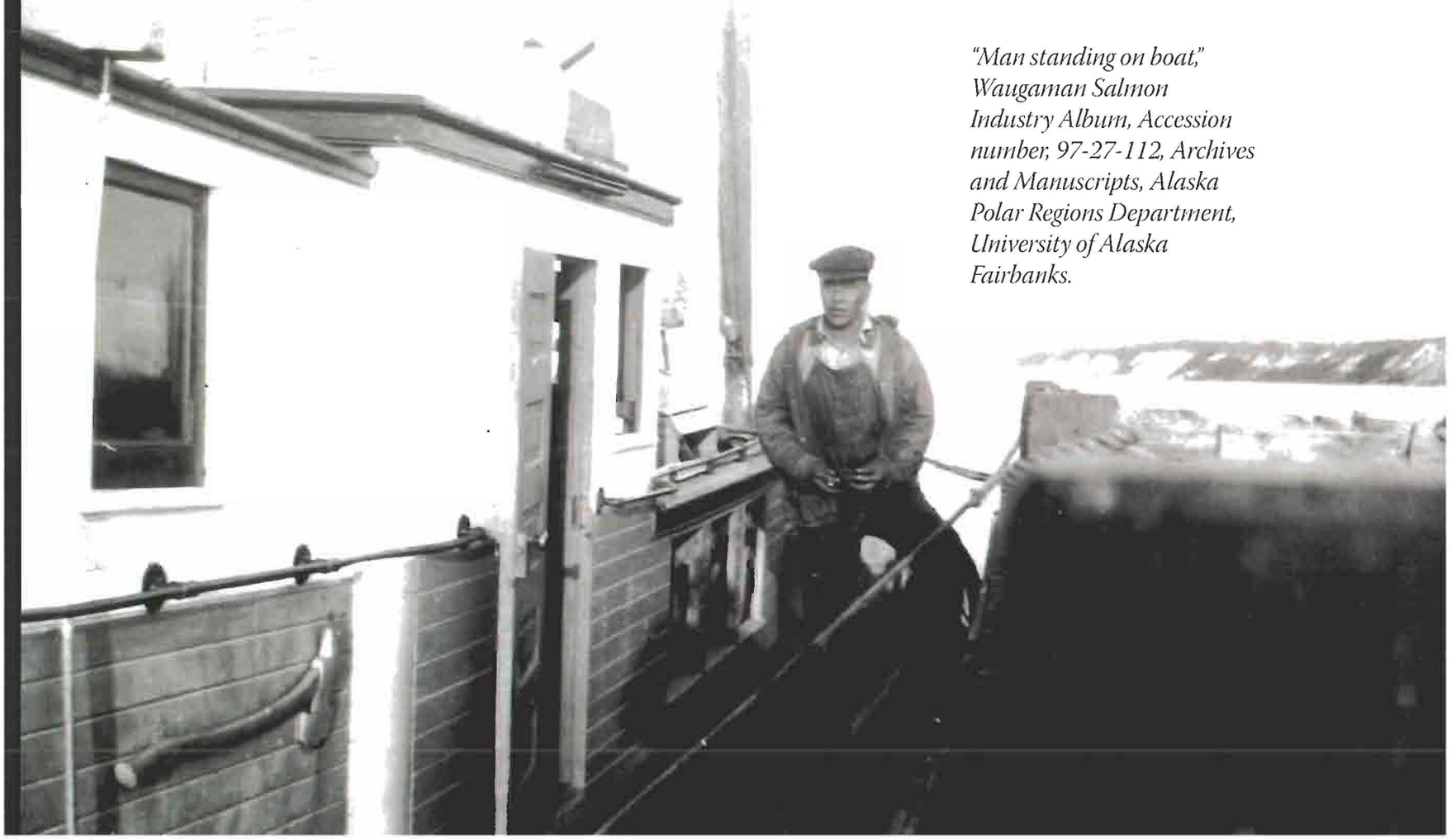
In 1786 an English trader who sailed into Cook Inlet noticed many deserted houses, confirming the atrocious relations that existed between the Dena'ina and the Russians at the time. But as brutal as the Russians could be, they did not eliminate nor enslave the Dena'ina. The Dena'ina fought back so furiously that "the Russians slept with their guns." During the winter of 1791, conflict continued between Russians and Dena'ina, reducing the Kenai artel to twenty-seven people. Evstratii Delarov reported that "in Alaska the Kenaitzy had killed ten of Shelikhov's employees and four hunters of Lebedev's Company" in protest over exploitation of their subsistence areas.[210]

Conditions deteriorated further as competition between Shelikhov and the Lebedev companies grew fierce. According to Shelikov's manager, Alexander Baranov, oppression of the Dena'ina "reached such an intolerable level that

angered Kenaitzy destroyed two artels, at Ilyamna [Iliamna] and Tuiunak [possibly Tyonek], and twenty-one Russians and up to one hundred Natives who worked for the company were killed."[211] To end the string of abuses once and for all, the Dena'ina launched a two-front battle, attacking the Russians first at Tyonek, and then at Nikolaevskaia in 1797. In what is now known as the Battle of Kenai, the Dena'ina successfully drove out the Lebedev Company, which left Alaska in the spring of 1798.[212] By the end of the year, the contest between the two companies came to a swift conclusion. Although Shelikhov had since died, his enterprise was renamed the Russian-American Company, and it operated as the imperial representative in Russia's American colony in 1799.

According to the decree of Russian Czar Paul I, the newly formed Russian American Company (RAC) received monopoly rights on fur hunting in Alaska, pushing Lebedev-Lastochkin out of Cook Inlet and Russian America.[213] Because of the Russian American Company's twenty year charter that allowed the company to act as the government, it more or less ended the hostility toward the Dena'ina, which had been inflicted primarily by Konovalov's men of the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company. The second charter required the RAC to hire native workers, rather than force them to hunt for fur-bearing animals.[214] With the new imperial laws, the Dena'ina hunters became incorporated willingly into the Russian fur trade.

By the turn of the century then, the Cook Inlet Dena'ina were active players in the fur trade, which enhanced their own, traditional, socio-economic trade system. With increasing wealth, the Russians were able to provide better trade



"Man standing on boat," Waugaman Salmon Industry Album, Accession number, 97-27-112, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

goods to their American colony. The Dena'ina, who had always been a pragmatic and enterprising people, desired western goods and actively sought them. Some of the new goods introduced even began to replace the indigenous ones, and efforts to obtain materials with which to trade to the Russians became a major economic motivation for many of the Dena'ina people. Significantly, the Dena'ina never viewed themselves as conquered peoples working for the Russians. Rather, they saw their role as middlemen working to improve their own situation.[215]

When Vancouver visited the Russian settlement on North Foreland near the modern village of Tyonek, the Englishman noted that nineteen Russian hunters "seemed to live upon the most intimate terms of friendship with Indians of all descriptions, who appeared to be perfectly satisfied in being subjected to Russian authority."[216] Russian hunters appeared before Vancouver wearing aboriginal clothing and differed from Indians "only by the want of paint on their faces, and by not wearing any of the Indian ornaments."[217] Most historians note that Vancouver overstated this observation, yet he was correct in detecting a kind of accommodation accepted by both sides, for Russians and Dena'ina had moved toward a common ground.

No doubt Russian dominance existed, but positive relations facilitated assimilation of the Russian lifestyle so that the Dena'ina could more easily be incorporated as hunters and interpreters.[218] The Russians greatly depended on the Dena'ina for commercial hunting, food supplies, and companionship. Historian James Gibson even argues that the Russians needed the Dena'ina far more than the Dena'ina needed the Russians. For the most part, Russian men adopted Dena'ina customs and learned to incorporate Native ways. [219] Most historians agree that Russian occupation of Alaska would have been impossible without Native support, for the Russians were undermanned and overextended.

Unlike their Alutiiq neighbors, the Dena'ina formed a more independent relationship with the Russian newcomers. The RAC classified Native groups into categories based on their dependence on the company for supplies. Because the Dena'ina resisted domination, the Russians considered most Cook Inlet Dena'ina a "semi-dependent" people, rather than as subjects or "dependents."[220] For those Dena'ina living at Kenai where Russian presence was most intense, they were subjected to some levels of control. Most Dena'ina, especially those living on the west side of Cook Inlet, had only sporadic contact with Russians. From the beginning of the 19th century, most Dena'ina served as middlemen between the Russians and interior Native groups, thus providing new levels of power and prestige to the *qeshqa.* As the Russian fur trade funneled increasing wealth into the Cook Inlet area, Dena'ina *qeshqa* began to offer potlatches to validate marriage, to establish an individual as an important man, and to assist the poor. [221]

Although the *qeshqa* were able to maintain important positions in village society, the Dena'ina's position generally in the Russian fur trade began to slide for several reasons. The first was environmental change. As more Dena'ina chose to hunt and trap for the Russians, fur-bearing animals became less available. Lack of animals prolonged the time it took to hunt. This took away time for subsistence hunting and fishing. Without food for the winter, Dena'ina found it necessary to trade for goods on credit. According to ethnographer Joan Townsend, "As time went on, the people became ensnared



Fort St. Nicholas (Nikolaevsk Redoubt) in modern-day Kenai, established in 1791, was located near the Dena'ina village of Shukituk. On a clear day, Russian traders could easily view Chisik Island from the site. The Holy Assumption of the Virgin Mary Russian Orthodox Church was founded in 1847 and built in 1894, and is one of the oldest standing Orthodox churches in Alaska. The structure is a National Historic Landmark and a testament to the enduring presence of Russian America in Cook Inlet. Photo by Katherine Johnson, May, 2005.

in their obligations to the trading companies."[222] This altered everything from family dynamics to settlement patterns. Most importantly, as animals became a commodity, the Dena'ina's symbiotic relationship to nature began to change, too.

Disease caused further disruption during the period of Russian-Dena'ina interaction. Between 1835 and 1840, a smallpox epidemic swept through Cook Inlet killing as many as one-third of the population. Those that lived remained scarred, blind, or otherwise disabled. Beyond the physical harm, smallpox left demoralizing losses of a different kind—the disruption to family groups, communities and religious faith.[223] The shamans' spiritual and herbal healing methods had little effect on "white man's" diseases. This weakened state of the Dena'ina spirituality opened the door for the Russian Orthodox Church.[224] In 1845, the Kenai mission was established and missionary work increased considerably. Priests tried to visit each village in their parish at least once every two years, primarily to perform baptisms and marriages.[225]

By the mid nineteenth century, the Russians faced problems of their own. The Crimean War was draining the Russian treasury, international treaties changed political boundaries, and new hunting areas opened in Eurasia.[226] The combination led Russia to decide that her American colony was too expensive, and thus, sold Alaska to the United States in 1867. Alaska Native peoples, who had occupied the territory for centuries, were not consulted. As historian Stephen Haycox points out, "Driven by the mercantilist paradigm and their ethnocentric convictions, the Russians, and with them the Americans, ignored the question of the Native people's sovereignty, or at least did not address it effectively."[227]

Meanwhile, trade, disease, and religion had disrupted indigenous culture dramatically, leaving people suspended between two cultures. Nevertheless, as Pat Partnow eloquently states, "When the Russians arrived in Alaska in 1741, they were met by a people who had a highly developed society and complex understanding of how they fit in the universe."[228] It is important to remember that the Dena'ina were not a conquered people, but chose to become active participants in the fur trade. Although it took only a generation for significant changes to occur in that culture, in the midst of the ensuing social and economic upheaval, the Dena'ina managed to hold on to much of the old ways.

The Americans

For many years the sale of Alaska hardly affected the Cook Inlet Dena'ina. Language, economy, and social life continued much as they had during Russian days. It was only as the fur trade declined that an American influence became obvious.[229] In 1867, Hutchinson, Kohl and Company, a San Francisco business that was later to become the Alaska Commercial Company, bought the Russia America Company trading posts in Cook Inlet. Soon a second company, Western Fur Trading Company, set up trading posts in Cook Inlet. Accordingly, the two companies both vied for Dena'ina trade. Both companies permitted extensive credit on luxury goods as well as hunting and trapping supplies to the Dena'ina. Because of the competition, fur prices rose, and the Dena'ina hunters enjoyed a period of considerable prosperity. One historian notes that prices paid in Cook Inlet were often on par with those paid in San Francisco.[230]

Within a few years the Alaska Commercial Company bought out the competition. Fur prices plummeted, and the company not only cut off credit to the Dena'ina, but tried to collect some of the outstanding debts. Meanwhile, gold strikes throughout the region shifted the Alaska Commercial Company's economic focus from fur traders to miners, who began to trickle into the area. This economic shift, combined with depleted animal stocks, left the Dena'ina destitute. Dena'ina oral histories from this time illustrate their desperation:

> One time during a long winter all the animals disappeared. The people were starving. In the spring they went for clams. They all went down to the tide flats. And my grandfather and Nikanorga told the people, "Be careful, don't eat these clams. They look bad," they told them...But the people were hungry and they didn't listen to them. And they ate those clams, and when the tide rose, they began falling down. And they all died.[231]

Just as the economic situation looked bleakest, a new industry came to the Kenai Peninsula. In the late 19th century, salmon canneries opened in Cook Inlet. At first, the canned salmon industry impacted the Dena'ina indirectly through

the hundreds of newcomers it brought up seasonally to the area. But more altering, before 1906, canneries set up large fish traps in the rivers, including the Kenai, and greatly reduced the supply of salmon to people trying to survive upriver. In 1897, a Russian missionary summarized these trends:

> The quantity of fish grows smaller each year. And no wonder. Each cannery annually ships out 30,000 to 40,000 cases of fish. During the summer all the fishing grounds are jammed with American fishermen and of course the poor Indian is forced to keep away in order to avoid unpleasant meeting with the representatives of the American Civilization.[232]

In 1907, the federal government banned traps crossing rivers so that the Dena'ina could continue to base their subsistence on salmon, but still commercial fisheries had long-term effects on the Dena'ina subsistence economy.[233]

These changes were not so obvious at first, for few Dena'ina worked for canneries. Fish traps caught most of the salmon Cook Inlet canneries needed, thus, canneries had little need for fishermen. The handful of fishermen who did work for canneries were primarily Scandinavian. Inside the cannery, canners hired Chinese workers to can the fish mainly because, unlike the Dena'ina, the Chinese were imported and therefore attached to the cannery, making them, in the canner's opinion, more reliable workers.

By the early 1900s, the Dena'ina, in the midst of an economic, cultural, and ecological crisis, faced an even worse disaster. In 1918 cannery ships from the Lower 48 brought to Cook Inlet the Spanish influenza pandemic, which by this time had circled the globe killing millions of people. It was during this time of massive cultural and social upheaval that Knik trader George Palmer recognized the severity of the situation and wrote the federal government asking them to assist the regional native people (see chapter 1).[234] That year, Palmer and Elmer Hemrich agreed to build Snug Harbor Cannery—a clam cannery that would supply jobs to Palmer's friend, Chief Theodore Chickalusion and his people of Tyonek.[235]

Traditionally, the Dena'ina near Tyonek, the *Tubughue* or "Beach People," sought the west side's prolific razor clams *(qiz'in)*. They obtained the clams in the spring, either by traveling south to Redoubt Bay or Tuxedni Bay or through trade with the Dena'ina of the lower Cook Inlet.[236] Clamming trips, as continued up through contemporary times, took place with the lengthening daylight hours of spring, and occasionally, well into the waning days of late summer. Clamming parties were organized by "clamming leaders," individuals who possessed exceptional knowledge and expertise in this activity. Leaders decided among themselves when to leave for the clam beds and who would accompany them.[237] Occasionally, parties attempted to harvest seal or belugas while en-route to the clamming beds. On returning to the village, clams were divided and distributed to various households, where the clams were cooked or fried, preserved for winter, or as they were most preferred, eaten raw.[238]

By 1920, Polly Creek had become an important commercial clamming area where Native workers were employed to harvest clams for the Surf Packing Company. During that summer's clamming season a young boy named Peter

Kalifornsky went to live with his uncle, Chief Theodore Chickalusion, at Polly Creek, north of Tuxedni Bay. According to Peter's memoir, *A Dena'ina Legacy, K'TL'EGH'I SUKDU,* those days had a profound impact on the boy. It was at Polly Creek where he heard the traditional stories, or *sukdu,* recited in a festive setting.[239]

In 1927, Eric Fribrock took over Snug Harbor cannery and discontinued the razor clam operation. To compensate, Dena'ina people began to cut trap poles for the cannery, which netted them everywhere from forty cents a pole to up to a dollar. According to Peter Kalifornsky, sometime in the 1930s, Dena'ina began to work for the Libby Cannery in Kenai, and later, Kalifornsky and his friend, Alex Wilson, even fished king salmon for Libby. "I helped the owners of small hand traps," recalls Kalifornsky, "and I would go back to work in the cannery and do other kinds of work, like being a blacksmith's helper."[240] Dena'ina life still included subsistence hunting, fishing, gathering, but those activities became seriously disrupted by activities associated with commercial fish canneries.

Over the years, Eric, and later Joe, hired Native cannery workers who worked for the Beach Gang crew. Alfred Bayou, one of Snug Harbor's oldest continuing employees, maintained one of the most important cannery positions. As the salmon cook, Bayou was responsible for running the retorts, which demanded specific knowledge of a complicated cooking process. If one mistake was made, several thousand pounds of salmon could be lost.

Cleaning and canning fish, however, was not the preferred activity of men, since it was perceived to be women's work.[241] Furthermore, these jobs were hard to come by, because the Fribrocks hired a Chinese cannery crew, then a Japanese crew, and later, Filipino workers to clean fish. Most coastal Dena'ina ended up working for the larger canneries on the east side of Cook Inlet or in Bristol Bay.[242] By the 1930s, particularly in Bristol Bay, canneries hired Dena'ina to fish from company-owned boats and with company-owned gear. The involvement of the Dena'ina in commercial fishing intensified during World War II. In 1942 workers from Asia were restricted from working in the canneries. This provided an opportunity for Dena'ina women to enter the commercial fisheries as processors.[243] After statehood, Snug



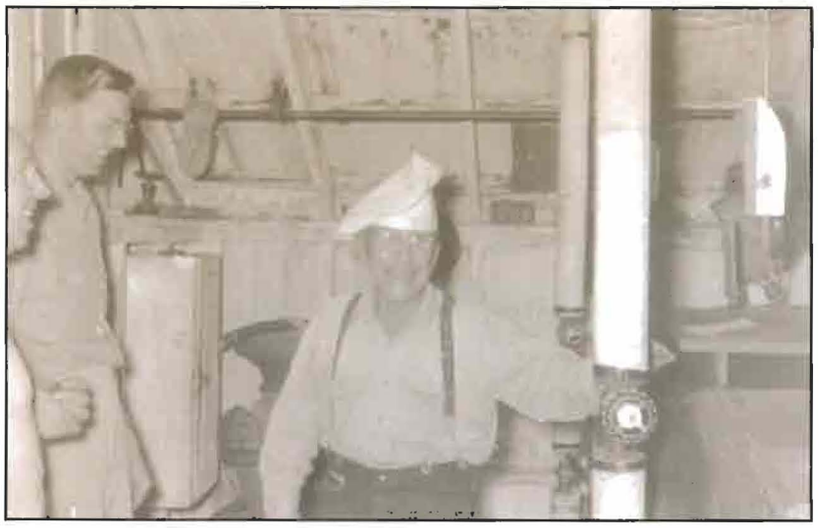
"Alfred Bayou of Seldovia," circa 1966, Snug's oldest continuous employee," courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

Harbor hired Dena'ina women who came from Ninilchik, while other Native women came from as far away as Prince William Sound.[241]

After 1940, Dena'ina men began to fish commercially and participated more fully in a cash economy. But they were not alone. The abolishment of traps in 1960 not only opened up new fishing jobs to Native fishermen, but it attracted an array of new, Euro-American fishermen to Cook Inlet, infusing the area with a cosmopolitan atmosphere. By the 1960s, both Native and non-Native fishermen gillnetted for Cook Inlet salmon canneries near Kalgin Island, Chinitna Bay, and West Foreland.

In her study of the Cook Inlet Dena'ina, Joan Townsend notes that "it is interesting that traces of the same paternalistic credit system used by the Russians can be seen in the commercial fishing."[245] For example, a good hunter received credit, equipment, and aid in time of need from the trader in exchange for exclusive rights to his fur catch. Likewise, a good fisherman who had proved his ability got a fish company to back him, enabling him to buy a large power fishing boat so that he could catch more fish. The company, in turn, withheld a portion of the man's pay from which he purchased food supplies for the rest of the year. In exchange for this credit and assistance, the fisherman agreed to sell all of his catch to that particular cannery until he paid for his boat. This system led to a vicious cycle that kept most fishermen in debt to the cannery.

Even after statehood and the elimination of fish traps fishermen remained strapped. An unlimited number of fishermen, many of whom were in debt to the cannery, fished harder to cover their bills. This led to the inevitable depletion of the salmon resource. In response to the collapse of many major runs, Alaska implemented the limited entry system in 1973, which required fishermen to obtain a permit to fish Cook Inlet. With a limited entry, a ranking system was developed by the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission which rated fishermen according to levels of past participation in and economic dependency on the fishery. The commission issued permits by this point system to fishermen until all the available permits had been granted. Subsequently, the permit could be bought or sold on the open market.



"Joe Fribrock with Alfred Bayou," Courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

One outcome of the limited entry process was the disenfranchisement of many Alaska Natives from commercial salmon fishing. Between 1975 and 1985 permits held by rural Alaskans, particularly Native Alaskans, declined

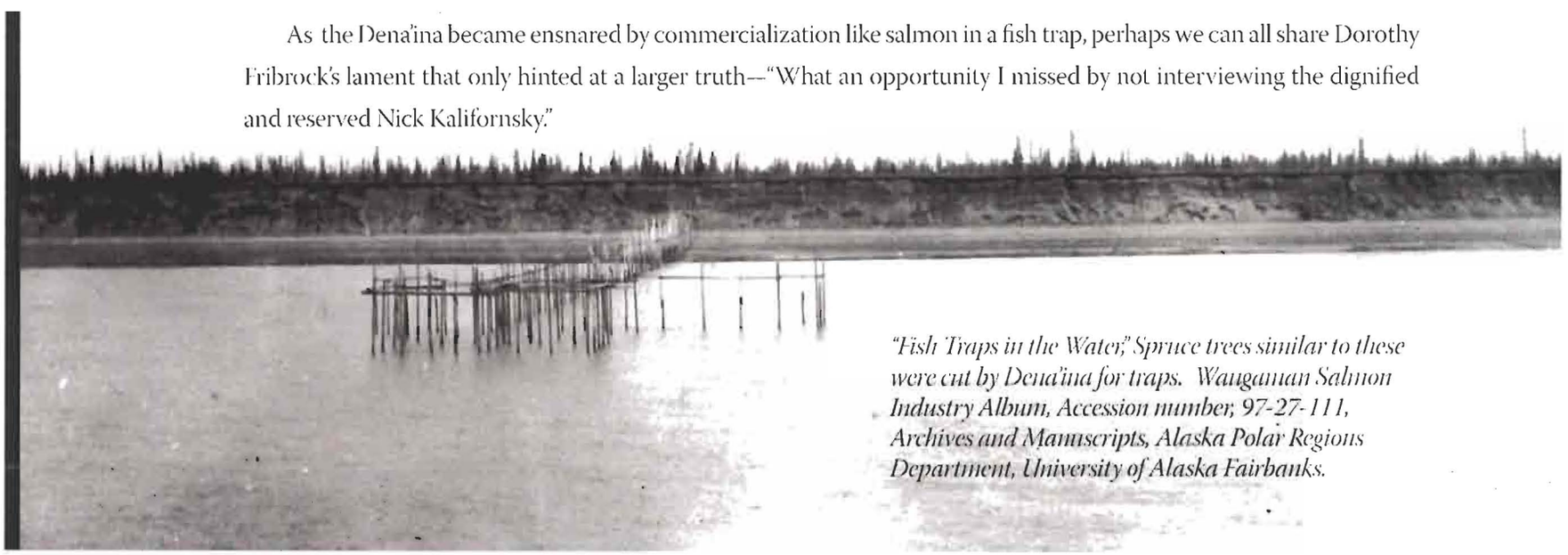
sharply, whereas the total number of permits held by urban Alaskans and non-residents increased.[246] Not only did the application process require fluency in English, but the criteria were complex and designed on a western market economic model.[247] The commission reported that the reason for declining participation of rural Alaska fishermen was a "consequence of the initial criteria for entry into the fishery," which resulted in a higher percentage of permits issued to "marginal fishermen" in rural areas. According to the report, as permit values rose, the incentive for "marginal fishermen" to drop out and sell their permit increased, which, the report explained, is why the transfer trend continued over time.[248]

To look at it another way, such permit losses may be related to the fishermen's inability to understand and plan for federal taxes, high investment in fishing boats and associated gear, family emergencies, and family disputes.[249] Or perhaps "marginal fishermen" fished only for what they needed and were not prepared to fish commercially. Nevertheless, the decline in Native-held permits from cross-cultural differences or misunderstandings, forced many Dena'ina to give up an occupation which they had participated in for centuries. After limited entry was imposed, the Dena'ina, as with many Alaska Natives, had limited choices. As with Nick Kalifornsky at Snug Harbor, success, and ultimately surival, meant the incorporation of American cultural norms.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, Dena'ina culture in Cook Inlet was significantly changed by salmon canneries. Still, the Dena'ina culture had already been altered by interactions with first, other Alaska Natives, then the Russians, and later, the American traders. Most significantly, the Dena'ina people were all too aware of the cultural transition and responded to change the best they could, and even, at times, prospered from it.

When Peter Kalifornsky was at Polly Creek digging clams for the Snug Harbor cannery in 1921, an elderly Dena'ina man named Old Man Karp performed a ritual "cleaning" Peter of the magical hunting songs he had been taught as a child. Theodore Chickalusion and Old Man Karp believed the power of the songs interfered with Peter's "new life" in Western culture. They felt Peter would suffer if he was continually forced to confront the spiritual dichotomy represented by conflicting demands of the "old ways" and the "new ways."[250]

As the Dena'ina became ensnared by commercialization like salmon in a fish trap, perhaps we can all share Dorothy Fribrock's lament that only hinted at a larger truth--"What an opportunity I missed by not interviewing the dignified and reserved Nick Kalifornsky."



"Fish Traps in the Water," Spruce trees similar to these were cut by Dena'ina for traps. Waugaman Salmon Industry Album, Accession number, 97-27-111, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.



"A tug-of war was part of our impromptu Fourth of July celebration." The Alaska Sportsman, *August 1953.*



"Canned fish weighted and patched before lid and salt added," courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CHARISMATIC CANNERY WORKER

In 1946, Dorothy's first year at Snug Harbor, a crew of Filipinos worked in the fishhouse. These employees traditionally labored in every aspect of fish processing—pitching fish from the boat to the fishing house, gutting and cleaning fish, packing empty cans with fish, checking and adjusting the amount of fish in the cans, placing the lids on cans before sealing them shut, and arranging cans on iron holders for cooking.[251] At the time, the young Mrs. Fribrock wasn't sure how to react to these young, vibrant Filipino men. The one she knew best was Justo, the second in command of the Filipino contingent. At the time, she seemed surprised to see Justo interact with other crew members who worked at Snug Harbor. According to Dorothy, "Justo ventured to the white mess house; in fact he ended up living in the fishermen's bunk house after traps were out."[252]

Unlike Justo, the rest of the Filipino crew usually socialized in their own bunkhouse and ate in a separate messhouse from the Blue Room, where Dorothy, her family, and the rest of upper tier ate. As with all Alaskan

salmon canneries, canners at Snug Harbor instituted ethnic segregation. This meant that different groups such as Filipinos and Alaska Natives ate and slept separately from each other, as well as from other Euro-American workers. Historically, canners maintained that the reason for segregation was to keep the different ethic groups from fighting with each other. They also argued that work schedules dictated housing decisions. Management separated crews to avoid one from returning from a late shift and waking the crew members getting ready to come on the clock. Because Snug Harbor was smaller than most canneries in Cook Inlet, lines of separation were more subtle, so much so that people on either side of the line rarely considered the significance of these lines. It was "just the way things were done," explained Barbara Kistler. "There was about 30 Filipinos, and they had their own mess." She also added "They had the best doughnuts."[253]

The Fribrocks had high regard for the Filipino workers and their talent for fish filleting. In *Sockeye Sunday,* Dorothy remarks frequently that the Filipino crew was instrumental to Snug Harbor's canning operation. For example, Dorothy recalls that Justo carved the huge king salmon, which were too big for the butchering machine, "with such grace and dispatch; he was fascinating to watch."[254] Dorothy speculates that the cannery "apartheid system" gradually changed at Snug Harbor because, "there really wasn't a need to be separate."[255] Dorothy reasoned that with the abolishment of traps, the increased contact between management and fishermen, and daily interaction among workers "shooting the breeze," the old system gradually wore down. Dorothy notes that when the second generation of Filipinos began to accompany their fathers and uncles to Snug Harbor, they "chipped way at the separateness."[256]

But as significant at the Filipinos had been to the Fribrock's canning operation, some of the old system remained. A paternal relationship between management and workers seemingly influenced Snug's social structure. In one of Dorothy's most revealing stories she describes a day when her mother-in-law, Emma, requested the windows washed:

> After the end of World War II, Joe's mother once again returned to the cannery the year after I began to go north with Joe. She requested of Joe, "I would like one Filipino to come to wash the windows on the outside of our quarters. Not all of them, just one or two." The next day, the whole crew of 30 arrived with buckets and rags, proceeding to clean the windows. All the time they worked, a soft murmur of voices and laughter could be heard, much like happy children at play.[257]

Dorothy obviously liked the Filipino workers, but there is no doubt that a dividing line existed between management and laborers at Snug Harbor. From this story it might be construed that Snug's upper tier viewed the Filipinos as workers who aimed only to please. But to only look at this situation through the eyes of Snug's upper crust undermines the Filipino perspective.

In fact, it can be argued that the Filipino workers enforced the lines of division as much as management. The fact that the Filipinos came to wash the windows in a group is consistent within their cultural norms; whether it be playing pool or organizing unions, Filipino men seldom acted independently.[258] Moreover, under the protection of the group, the individual becomes more anonymous. Anonymity could be seen as a form of empowerment that allowed Filipino workers to maneuver more advantageously within the cannery system. Filipino workers were neither coolies nor children



"Sliming table," Each fish is hand-washed and blood from the backbone is removed after the fish pass through the "Iron Chink" machine that decapitates heads and removes fish guts. Courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

but active participants in the shaping of their work environment. To only view the Filipino experience in the canneries as one of exploitation undermines the central role these charismatic workers played in the industry's development.

Filipinos Enter the Cannery System

Justo and the rest of the Filipino crew at Snug Harbor belonged to a larger group of ethnic immigrants who had been pushed and pulled around the world by the combination of expanding capitalism and changing international politics. This corps of global workers did not become mere commodities of an international trade in labor, however. According to Chris Friday, chair of the History Department at Western Washington University and author of *Organizing Asian American Labor: the Pacific Coast Canned-Salmon Industry 1870-1942,* these were people who "creatively coped with structural limitations by maneuvering within them and playing against constraints in an effort to bring their environments into closer conformity with their purposes."[259] In other words, Justo and the crew were playing within the constraints of Snug Harbor's social structures, and in doing so, they partook in the shaping of those structures.

The Filipino entrance into the canning industry actually came at the end of a long line of Asian immigrants who have always formed the predominant body of workers in salmon canneries. Beginning in 1870 when a single Columbia River plant "hired thirteen Chinese," Asian immigrants entered the labor market with incredible rapidity.[260] By 1900, exclusionary legislation prevented Chinese immigration to the United States. The Chinese were eventually replaced by Japanese workers, who likewise suffered from American exclusionary laws. In 1898, under the Treaty of Paris that ended the Spanish-American War, Spain ceded the Philippines to the United States. Filipinos, as American nationals, could freely migrate to the United States. Within a few decades, the Filipinos replaced the Japanese immigrants at the canneries.[261]

According to the earliest recorded accounts, the first Filipinos to reach Alaska's shores did not come to can fish, but rather came as merchant seamen to participate in the fur trade. On June 17, 1788, the Dena'ina of Cook Inlet encountered

a man who reportedly came from Zamboanga, Philippines, aboard the vessel *Iphigenia Nubiana.* William Douglas, captain of that ship, identified this Filipino in his journal, and in doing so revealed that the "Manila man" not only spoke four different languages, but acted as a middle man between the explorers and the Dena'ina people, thus implying that he was an important member of the crew:

> My servant, who was a Manila man, and spoke the language very well, was not permitted to come near me, for fear of discovering some of the [Spanish] proceedings..." The Filipino spoke his native language, Spanish, a native American language, and, presumably, English. He was also heard "bargaining with the natives for some fish they had in their boats..."[262]

Less than a century later, American whaling ships brought Filipinos to the Alaskan Arctic. These Filipinos initiated contact with the Inupiat Eskimos. Although Filipino whaling crew members may have over-wintered near Point Hope, Alaska, there is no record of a resident Filipino Alaskan community until the early 1900s when Filipino cannery workers, known by the Filipino idiom "Alaskeros," began to live permanently in Alaska.[263]

In the years before World War I, Filipinos who migrated to the United States and its territories most often went to Hawaii. By the 1920s, migration from the Philippines took place in larger numbers as transportation routes to the West Coast became more direct. Furthering Filipino migration was the steady commercialization of agriculture in the Philippines that created a large group of wage laborers among the peasantry. Most Filipinos, however, migrated to the American mainland because they had been influenced by American teachers in the islands. They came as workers but had higher education in mind as the ultimate purpose of their relocation.[264] To pay for school, these predominately single men looked for seasonal work in many places along the West Coast, but they found the greatest number of available jobs in salmon canneries in Alaska. In Filipino social circles, these young men were the Alaskeros.

According to Friday, by 1921 nearly a thousand Filipinos worked in Alaskan canneries, where they outnumbered Chinese by nearly a hundred and Japanese by more than three hundred. Filipinos had competed with other "new" ethnics, including nearly 1400 Mexicans and Mexican Americans, for those positions. The Mexican presence in Alaska peaked in 1923 and then waned as Japanese and Filipinos began to push them out of the canneries. As Friday notes, "So many Filipinos found work in the industry that in 1925 the *Juneau Gateway* aptly remarked: 'Very seldom will you meet a Filipino along the Pacific Coast who had never been to Alaska.'" By 1928, the Alaskeros numbered 3,916, compared to 1,065 Chinese, 1,445 Japanese, and 1,269 Mexicans.[265] Although they were mainly



"Sliming table" Courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

seasonal workers, these are still significant numbers if one considers that most Russians to occupy Alaska at one time between 1741 and 1867 was 800.

Justo and Snug Harbor's Filipino foreman, Fred Agpaua, were two of the many Alaskeros who came to work in Alaska canneries. They, too, believed that upward mobility came through education, as both men came to America to attend school.[266] Considered the *pensionados* (scholars) by their fellow countrymen, these young students found seasonal work in canneries to pay for their education. Yet canneries meant more than a means to attend college; to these young Filipino men, Alaska was a romantic adventure, a proving ground for men such as Justo and Agpaua. Familial and friendship networks probably connected Justo and Agpaua to the "right people." All they had to do to find cannery jobs was to head down to the San Francisco or Seattle waterfronts.

Once on the docks, Justo and Agpaua would have encountered a labor contractor—a Chinese or Japanese middleman who hired crews for the cannery owners. During the winter months before the cannery ships sailed north, these Chinese and Japanese contractors maintained significant influence over the lives of the Alaskeros. There is a good chance that a young Justo and Agpaua became dependent upon advances doled out by the contractors for "a job in prospect," and accumulated considerable debt before the canning season began.[267] And because canners paid the contractors upfront for a crew, a corrupt contractor could steal their earned wages and leave town before the cannery ships returned in the fall.

Increasing competition among rival Asian workers caused much of the corruption. In the first few decades of the twentieth century, the entrance of the Filipino Alaskeros into the cannery labor force made relationships among workers more difficult than they had been in the largely Chinese crews of the nineteenth century. In the complex cannery social environment, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino workers struggled with one another for control of the portion of the industry in which they worked.[268] Because of the oligarchy of Chinese and Japanese contractors, Filipino workers, the "new group on the block," were at a disadvantage. Most aspirant Filipinos rose only to the position of foremen.[269] Cannery owners and Chinese and Japanese contractors believed that Filipinos worked best under "bosses" from the islands. Contractors and canners delegated the responsibilities of recruitment and management to the Filipino boss, who in turn, received relatively high compensation and special treatment.

Becoming a cannery foreman meant much to the Filipino migrant. A number of *pensionados* who initially came to Alaska to earn college degrees, instead, remained in the cannery circuit with hopes of becoming crew boss.[270] Once in a position of power, some Filipino foremen took advantage of their countrymen. According to Friday, cannery foremen took bribes for jobs, bankrolled gambling tables on the ships and at the canneries, and resorted to a "drive system," which pushed crews to work at a fast pace to keep up with the automated canning lines.[271]

These various hardships caused by the contract system altered the Alaskeros' perspective of Alaska. No longer were they youthful, adventurous and romantic, but hardened workers locked in competition with mechanical hands.

Even worse for the Alaskeros was the economic blow caused by the Great Depression. Between 1929 and 1933, wages for unskilled cannery positions occupied primarily by Filipino workers dropped by 40 percent.[272] The Depression also shattered the dream of a college education. Between 1920 and 1925, 15 percent of the total Filipino population in the continental United States attended school, and by 1935, three hundred students remained. It is unknown if the Great Depression affected Justo and Agpaua in this manner, but the upward mobility they hoped might come to them through cannery work disappeared in the Depression.[273]

Agpaua probably became Snug Harbor's Filipino crew boss after 1933, when Filipino migrants organized the Cannery Workers' and Farm Laborers' Union Local 18257. Although the union underwent several changes and endured many challenges, the union eventually broke the corrupt contract labor system, which decreased the foreman's power to swindle his crew. By the mid-1930s canners hired directly from the union, which negotiated for better wages and working conditions. Great community pride within the Alaskeros fraternity held the union together, in spite of the murder of two union leaders.[274]

VOICES FROM THE HARBOR

UNTITLED POEM

By Trinidad Rojo,

Filipino union leader in the late 1930s.

The Contract System
Suffering without end
We sustain in Alaska
Salmon and blubber every day
Because the Chinese contractor is a miser
We lay down under a pile of blankets
And we sleep curling
And still it is cold
And when 5 o'clock rings
We rise groggily, for we could hardly move our legs
We are still chewing our breakfast
The bugle sound furious and fast
And we rush to the cannery pronto
And we work as hard as a water buffalo
I go to the restroom often to while away the time
Why, oh why
Did I come to the Land of the Midnight Sun
I used to dress and eat well in my beloved Philippines
Without working, without sweating

In 1937, Local 18257 came into conflict with the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The Local pulled out of the AFL and joined the United Cannery Agricultural Packinghouse and Allied Workers of America-CIP (UCAPAWA). Local 18257 thus became Local 7. By World War II, with most Chinese workers effectively denied entry into the cannery market, and then with the wartime interment of Japanese, even the internationally allied labor unions increasingly served the interests of the Filipino majority.[275] No longer does Local 7 represent the canning community, but as historian Crystal Fresco notes, "the Filipino labor union, with unity and perseverance, made their mark on the Northwest labor movement."[276]

By the time Dorothy met Justo and Agpaua, the contract system was gone, and they and their crew were represented by the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, Local #37 that negotiated with the Alaska Salmon Industry, Inc. for preseason contracts



"Canned fish is boxed and sealed for shipment south," courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

that determined wages, overtime, lay time, and other special provisions. In the 1967 contract, for example, a hand butcher received $442.94 per month. It also defined the difference between Class A jobs and Class B jobs. For instance, a fish inspector was considered a Class A position where a patcher (which was primarily a woman's job) was categorized as a Class B position.[277]

According to the 1967 labor contract, Snug Harbor Packing Company furnished cannery workers with suitable living quarters at the cannery, including a bunk, bedspring, mattress, pillow, sufficient blankets, pillow slip, sheets, mattress cover, two hand towels, one bath towel and laundry soap. Employees also received necessary clothing for work such as oil skin aprons, boots, sleeve guards, and gloves. There was a general agreement that restricted gambling, liquor, and smoking. Also, Snug Harbor Packing Company furnished workers with a phonograph, "together with forty-eight assorted records in good condition in the Spanish, English and Filipino languages."[278]

A record player was not only an unusual request, but it represented just how important music was to the Filipino crew. Filipino migrants had a strong fondness for dances and music. They even brought their own musical instrument and took great pride in their "orchestras," which played at cannery dances and Fourth of July celebrations.[279] When they could not bring instruments, one cannery worker noted, "The Filipinos could make an instrument out of anything—a saw, old tins, even a bathtub." Wilma Williams remembers the Filipino musicians playing "As Time Goes By" on the beach during the autumn of 1941 as her boat pulled away from the cannery for her home, across the Inlet in Homer.[280] Other workers at the plant may have been intimidated by the dashing moves of Filipino workers as they danced with Native American and occasionally Euro-American women workers. As Dorothy Fribrock observed, "The Filipino men were very attentive to the ladies, and more than one lonely gal succumbed."[281]

The relationship between Filipino men and female cannery workers is unique within the cannery social milieu. More than Chinese or Japanese workers had done, Filipinos married Native American, African Americans, and European American women.[282] There are several reasons why Filipino men were so outgoing. First, in the early part of the century, considerably more men lived in the Philippines than women. Some Filipinos believed that they could become a part of American society through marrying Euro-American women, a faith based on images of the United States supplied by American educators. Because Filipino migrants spoke English, it made it easier for them to communicate with women. Also, the increase of women cannery workers after World War II afforded Filipinos more opportunities to meet women than had been available to the Chinese or Japanese earlier in the century. Furthermore, with few exceptions, the Filipino community welcomed women of color as new members.[283] This cosmopolitan perspective, Friday argues, helped Filipinos in their relations with others in the United States, which clearly helped them succeed.

Despite all the social interaction that occurred in canneries, Filipinos were officially segregated from other groups, and at too many Alaskan canneries, Filipinos felt like second class workers.[284] They held the undesirable jobs, slept in the worst bunkhouses, and endured derogatory remarks from the Euro-American crews. In 1982, after Snug Harbor closed, cannery workers from Kenai and other canneries brought a class action suit against the plant's owners, Wards Cove Packing Co., alleging employment discrimination on the basis of race. After spending years in the Court of Appeals, the case finally concluded in December, 2001. As much as the court disapproved of employment practices or the society that existed at the canneries, the plaintiffs could not prove that these practices violated Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin. Thus, the judge dismissed the complaint. [285]

At Snug Harbor, Justo, Fred Agpaua, and the rest of the Filipino crew seemed content with the cannery environment and appeared to be sincerely fond of the Fribrocks. They played volleyball, worked hard, and organized many social gatherings among the various crews. According to Dorothy, Justo assumed the guardianship of the greenhouse and watched over her daughter's raspberry plants "with deep devotion." He was always assisting everyone from the beach gang to the messhall cooks. Even after retirement, Justo frequently called Dorothy to inquire about Jan, Barbi, and recent Alaska news.[286] Indeed, Snug Harbor's social system limited the Filipinos' upward mobility, but it is important to remember that they played a central role in crafting the industry's patterns of work, labor recruitment, and management. As Chris Friday stresses, "their struggle is an integral part of the history of the American West's industrial and social transformation at regional, national, and global levels."[287]

But like most ordinary people, Snug's employees remember the Filipino contribution, not as a separate, sweeping span of history, but rather, as a personal, shared experience. Wilma Williams remembers that when she was a sixteen-year-old cannery worker at Snug Harbor a young man of Japanese-Filipino descent wrote her a letter. "It was so beautiful, the handwriting was perfect. I never knew his real name, but we called him, Tommy. I suppose Tommy admired me." That summer, Tommy visited family in Japan and was conscripted into the Japanese air force. He was killed later that

year during the war. "I wish I had kept the letter," laments Williams, "but when you're young you don't think of such things."[288]

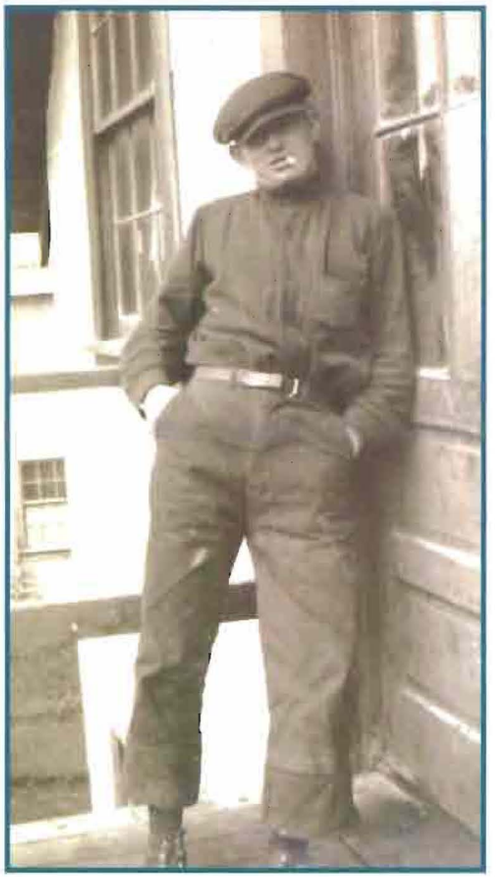
In spite of separate bunkhouses, messhalls, even separate foremen, one thing American and Filipinos shared equally was the Fourth of July, for the these cannery workers came from a nation of islands that happened to celebrate the same day of independence as the United States. All Snug Harbor's employees celebrated the two holidays as one. "Even before it became the Philippine national holiday too," recalls Dorothy Fribrock, "the Filipinos would prepare for the festivities all through June, drying fish and getting things ready for the big event. There were games in the afternoon of the Fourth, followed by dancing in the evening, with sun dried fish for all and many other foods.[289]

Dorothy, Wilma, Justo, Fred Agpaua and others at the Harbor understood the Fourth of July was a special day all over America, "but at the canneries in Alaska," recalls Dorothy, "it was THE holiday."[290] And, seemingly appropriate, a tug-of-war was part of the impromptu Fourth of July celebration. As cannery worker Ethel Kavanaugh, a usual participant in the tug-of-war contest noted, "Each, in his way, felt the day's significance, and our work seemed lighter."[291]



"An improvised orchestra provided music for the Fourth of July celebration," The Alaska Sportsman, *August 1953.*





"A young cannery worker," circa 1924, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FARMS, FISH, AND THE FRONTIER

"Alaska is calling for people. Her outstretched arms are filled with generous offerings to those who would come and free her from the isolation she has suffered for unnumbered centuries." --Anchorage Daily Times, *January 16, 1934*

Throughout most of Snug Harbor's operating years, Asian immigrants, Alaska Natives, and a spattering of local, non-Native workers were hired to clean and can the salmon for the cannery. These local non-Native workers built neither fish traps nor boats—those jobs were reserved for the beach gang and carpenter crews. Nor did they operate machines, for qualified machinists oversaw most cannery equipment. In the 1920s, many local hires dug razor clams for the Snug Harbor cannery from the beaches of Polly Creek. And, a handful of male workers were recruited to work inside the processing area, where they did most of the manual labor such as painting boat hauls, lifting boxes, and pushing retort trays.

To work these marginal positions, beginning in the late-1930s, Fribrock hired laborers from the Matanuska Valley, a glacially carved basin located at the northern end of the Knik Arm of Cook Inlet. To call these laborers men, however, was to stretch the truth. Rather, these workers were boys, barely beyond their teen years. In fact, they knew nothing of fish or fishing, for the Matanuska men came from farming families with roots far from oceans and rivers. Because this group is virtually invisible in the historical record, it is difficult to compare their experience to more significant aspects of Alaska's fishing industry, such as commercialization, cultural assimilation, and the battle for statehood.

But these seemingly insignificant workers were important. The men of Matanuska provide insight into how the cannery experience in Alaska was linked to events occurring nationally. By viewing cannery life through their eyes, we also gain a more complete perspective of Snug Harbor's working life and social reality. Perhaps the Matanuska boys had little impact on the industry, but the industry had great impact on them, for the cannery offered them fair pay, freedom, and even a bit of fun.

The Colony

Wayne Ballens, Larry Vassanalia, and Ray DePriest were one-time workers at Snug Harbor whom Fribrock recruited from the Matanuska Colony, near modern-day Palmer. They came to Alaska in 1935 with their families to farm the fertile valley. Nearly all these families had recently migrated to America from Scandinavia. Eric Fribrock, himself, represented an earlier flow of Scandinavian immigrants to the United States. But when he was 16 America was a different place. The opening of the West offered new immigrants opportunity. Advancements in technology had helped America realize the potential of natural resources. By the early twentieth century, extractive industry had transformed the frontier into a land of businessmen, who as historian Morgan Sherwood notes, preferred "to carry a brief case, instead of a long rifle."[292] The stock exchange had replaced the wilderness as the new frontier of opportunity. Alaska, with its industrialized salmon canneries and absentee capitalists, became associated more with big business than a pioneering spirit.



"Colony Kids," Larry Vassanalia, Wayne Ballens, and Ray DePriest (standing). Katherine Johnson, Lake Clark Katmai Studies Center, Anchorage 2003.

The Great Depression changed everything. In 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt offered 203 families from the Great Lakes region the chance to start fresh in the Matanuska Valley. The Matanuska Colony was part of Roosevelt's New Deal plan to help Americans recover from the Depression. Like other New Deal resettlement projects, the Matanuska Colony was intended to alleviate chronic unemployment in urban areas and aid Midwestern farmers struck hard by the Dust Bowl. According to Orlando Miller, author of *The Frontier in Alaska and the Matanuska Colony,* "an idealization of rural life, and a nostalgia for the vanished frontier and the opportunity associated with it" also contributed to the organization of the colony in Alaska.[293]

Such sentiments, common since the times of Thomas Jefferson, explain the emergence of a back-to-the land movement in the period following an era of rapid development of public lands. Several years of depression, which some at the time believed was caused by over industrialization, renewed popular interest in rural life and created a self-conscious nostalgia for it. As Miller suggests, old patterns of life in isolated areas offered reassuring evidence that America remained unchanged by the economic crisis.[294] Returning to a world of rural idealism, the farmer replaced the business tycoon as the icon of durability and self-reliance in the minds of Americans. As the Depression deepened, agrarian advocates argued that a place in the country, a patch of land, a few chickens, and a vegetable garden offered at least security and even some advantages over city life.[295]

One of those advocates was Franklin D. Roosevelt, who shared the sentimental American attachment to farming. Alarmed by urban unemployment, Roosevelt sought solution in the countryside: "How happy is the family today located



"Snug cannery workers," circa 1924, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

on a farm...and able to say as they go to bed at night, 'We at least have no fear of starvation. We may not be getting very rich, but at least we are able to go on with our lives without suffering and without drastic change.'"[296]

Roosevelt, however, used the frontier image to drive policy. To defend against critics of his massive public works projects, the president argued that the New Deal was not merely a welfare program, but, in fact, appealed to the American frontier heritage of pioneering individualism and self-reliance. On September 23, 1932, at the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco, Roosevelt, then a presidential candidate, reasoned that in previous depressions "...at the very worst there was always the possibility of climbing into a covered wagon and moving west where the untilled prairies afforded a haven for men to whom the East did not provide a place." But in the 1930s, little open land existed, and therefore Roosevelt explained that "Our task now is not discovery or exploitation of natural resources, or necessarily producing more goods. It is the soberer, less dramatic business of administering resources and plants already in hand...the day of enlightened administration has come."[297]



"Swimmers," circa 1942, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

In 1933, Congress established the Rural Rehabilitation Administration, a division of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, to move the unemployed back to abandoned farmland where they could raise some of their own food and perhaps begin to earn a living.[298] When advisor Harry Hopkins suggested they bring the program to Alaska, apparently the president had just three questions: whether the territory could support a larger population, whether the proposed colony had any military importance, and whether relief families would find the Alaska winter endurable. Program administrators told the president that Alaska could eventually support a larger population at a higher standard of living than all the Scandinavian countries combined! They suggested that increased agricultural production in Alaska might play an important part in supplying the troops that could eventually be stationed there. As

for the northern winters, administrators would select Scandinavian settlers from Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, where the people understood hardships and where temperatures fell below those in the Matanuska Valley.[299] Convinced, the president authorized the army transport *St. Mihiel* to set sail with the first colonists on April 23, 1935.[300]

Joining the colonists was an entourage of journalists, who followed every step of the process, celebrating the new settlers, who "were carrying out America's tradition of pioneering on the last frontier."[301] Unfortunately, notions of frontier opportunity failed to live up to expectations in Matanuska. Problems existed from the beginning. It can be argued that the federal government badly managed the colony, while decisions to include farmers with little knowledge of commercial farming also contributed to the colony's lack of success.[302] For many settlers the optimism created by the press, back-to-the land-advocates, and Roosevelt did not last long. Within a year, only about 100 families remained in the valley.

Still, some families held on. With wars building across Atlantic and Pacific shores, the United States military undertook the remilitarization of Alaska in 1940. Suddenly jobs to construct army bases and build roads opened up. This allowed farmers to supplement their laborious and unpredictable farm work with dependable high wages. But as important as the military was as a stabilizing force in Upper Cook Inlet, it overshadowed another source of income for the colonists—the Cook Inlet salmon canneries.

The Cannery

Larry Vassanalia, whose parents from Cloquet, Minnesota were original Matanuska settlers, worked at Snug Harbor cannery in 1940. "After the crops were all in [planted], my folks let me go to earn a few bucks for school."[303] At sixteen years old, Larry, and "about 10-12 young fellows" were the first colonists from the valley to work for Snug Harbor. Other canneries in places like Kenai, and Uganik on Kodiak Island, also recruited from Matanuska, but they required that workers be at least eighteen. So Larry and many of his school chums left their family farms to work for fish processors at Snug Harbor.

Wayne Ballens and Ray DePriest worked for Snug Harbor in 1947 and 1948. Like Larry, Wayne and Ray decided to work for the cannery when they were still in high school. They remember that after classes finished in the spring, Snug Harbor's tender picked them up in Anchorage and hauled them down the inlet to the cannery. Their first chore of the season was to remove the six to eight foot snow drifts that still lingered from winter. Once the cannery was accessible, a barge dropped off fifty tons of coal on the beach, which the boys shoveled into a wheelbarrow and hauled up to the cannery. Springtime meant getting the cannery ready for fish. Some springs Fribrock had the boys work on the freshwater dam, built on the hill behind the cannery, while other springs, they painted every inch of the cannery, including the roofs and the smokestack.[304]

By the first of July, cannery workers filtered into the cannery as quickly as salmon into Snug Harbor's fish traps. The Filipino crew arrived first aboard an Alaska Steamship vessel originating from Seattle. Then, when the main fish run started, Fribrock brought over women and native workers from Homer, Ninilchik, and Seldovia. Machinist crews would then fire up the big boilers with coal, which generated energy to operate three full canning lines.

When the canning began, Larry worked in the can shop where he operated the can reformer machine. It was so loud, "you could hear it within six miles." It didn't bother Larry that the cannery never gave him ear protection, "we were half asleep anyway," noted Lany, "working sometimes 48 hours straight." In 1940, he and other boys had to work long hours, because, "you worked as long as there was fish to can." At the peak of the season Larry recalls working 16, 18, even 24 hours. But they were young, and "there was not much they could do to really wear us down."

When Wayne and Ray worked at Snug Harbor during the late 1940s seasons, they worked loading and unloading retorts. "Working in those retorts was hot and it was sweaty, you worked there and the sweat would pour off [as you moved] in and out of those retorts." At a frantic pace, freshly canned salmon spewed off the canning line and into a metal retort tray. A retort tray was approximately 4 feet x 4 feet and 6 inches deep. Each one held about 160 cans. Working as a team, Wayne and Ray moved the retort trays between the three canning lines with a transfer cart, catching the canned

Voices From The Harbor

ON CHISIK ISLAND, ALASKA

By Pat Dixon,

Snug Harbor fisherman

The first time I visited Snug Harbor, on the west side of Cook Inlet, away from roads, airports, and civilization, I realized this was the Alaska I had traveled so far to see. I came visiting on a commercial fishing boat between periods to land at this remote island cannery just when it was passing from a vital part of an active drift net fishery into an abandoned fish camp. Once self-sustaining, complete with bunkhouses, mess hall and machine shop, the working operation was over by the time I arrived. The owner had died just a few years previous, and the facility was quickly slipping into the disrepair years of neglect would bring. That summer was the mess hall's last, but the store and fuel dock would continue on for decades, operated by our home plant back in Kenai.

I walked the worn boardwalks, planks bleached white from years in the sun and weather, weaving their way between buildings, elevated above shoulder-high fireweed and dense patches of willow and blackberry. I found the store, where the ice-cream bars were delicacies and cigarettes cost a fortune. I picked up a basketball near the entrance to the warehouse, only to find it flat, and feeling somewhat deflated myself by the abandoned nature of my surroundings, wandered inside. My eyes adjusted to the dim light as my boots echoed softly on the wood floor beneath my feet: a warm, hollow sound. I picked my way through strewn manila line and electrical cords into an enormous warehouse where rusted hand tools still leaned against rough-hewn walls. A row of engines stood silently, stacked on palettes and wrapped in plastic. Nets wrapped in torn and ragged burlap bags were piled high in dark, forgotten corners. Sheets of fiberglass roofing were stacked neatly in rows, waiting for some job planned, now never to come. Dusty yellow shafts of light illuminated it all, streaming in through glass windows wrinkled with age.

The warehouse was on pilings, and somewhere beneath my feet I could hear the small waves of the incoming tide roll beach pebbles to and fro. Mesmerized, I drifted up the thick stairs to the web loft, where I found wooden floors worn smooth and bare with years of dragging nets and line across them to racks for mending or hooks for hanging. Outboard motors hung in a row on pine racks under a ceiling of latticed wooden beams. These immense beams supported the roof of the whole huge structure. They were dark and dry, with rough grooves in their sides. Upon them, I noticed, were drawings and lettering in what first looked

salmon as they spilled off the belt. The transfer cart moved on tracks similar to that of a railroad cart. Once full, the retort trays were stacked onto rollers built into the cannery floor. When the layered trays reached six high, Wayne and Ray slid the pile along the rollers and into the retort. When full—about seven deep—hot steam from the retort pressure-cooked the salmon. With temperatures well over 100 degrees, the boys opened the hot retort door and pulled out the cooked salmon, sending it to the cooling warehouse for shipment south.

The colony kids remember their boss, Eric Fribrock, as "friendly, but all business." Wayne remembers one summer:

> They [the traps] were supposed to be closed from I think it was midnight Saturday to midnight Sunday, and there'd be old Fribrock, he'd be up and down that dock, and a southeastern started blowing... Man, he really went up and down to drive the fish in. So they [the tenders, *Minnie B* and the *Venus*] are trapping on Kalgin Island and on a Sunday afternoon. When the *Minnie B* pulled up with 180,000 fish, Fribrock sent the *Dena* after her, and got another 80,000 fish out of that one 2-hour opening!

The boys never had direct contact with Fribrock. They worked for his cannery foreman, Howard Mayhill. In the morning, Mayhill stood down at the bottom of the bunkhouse stairs with his pocket watch, and when it hit the hour, he'd say, "Alright boys" and they knew it was time to get moving.

like paint, but upon closer inspection was chalk. Over the years, countless cannery workers and fishermen had crawled high among them to write their names. To be sure, they had also drawn other designs, but the most important thing was obviously to leave one's name upon the rafters. And after their names they put the dates of the summers they spent working at the cannery: seasons passed, from as recently as last year to well before I was born. Filipino names, Japanese, Norwegian, Native. Some with only one date after them, others with repeated, sequential numbers, testifying to summer after summer spent working fish.

The gear locker doors below the beams displayed more names. Names crossed out, one after another, in a legacy of the owners of the locker's contents, until only one was left uncrossed: "Hansen," "Pugh," "Hoyt," "Thompson." Behind the mute locked wire mesh waited stores of gear: buoys, line, nets, props. I found a piece of chalk on the floor near one locker door and bent down and picked it up. I looked up, and for a moment considered writing my name among the rafters there. But I was only a green deckhand at the start of his first season, and I thought I hadn't yet earned the privilege. So I put the chalk down.

Ten years later, after ten seasons fishing as a crew and skipper, after finally learning ropes I hadn't even realized were there to learn, and discovering that I knew how to catch fish, fix boats and survive rough weather, I went back again, this time looking for the chalk.

And ten years after that, I returned for the last time, with my eleven-year-old son. Together we climbed the old stairs to the loft. I showed him where I had put my name near the windows, and the years that were next to it. There some more to add. It was his third season with me, and neither of us knew it was to be our last. I asked him if he wanted to put his name up there, next to mine. Together we found half a piece of chalk on a table filled with old mending twine and needles. As I had done alone so many years ago, we climbed steep stairs to the walkway through the center of the latticed rafters. We laid down and stretched, one at a time, to reach the beam that waited for us. I added my years to the space beyond my name, then handed him the chalk. "Hang on a minute," I said. I went down the stairs again, and as he wrote his name below mine and his years fishing after it, I took his photograph. The picture is dim and blurred, but he is there forever, more in my mind's eye than on the film, writing his name upon the beams of our history, our past, our lives.

"We never had safety meeting or nothing...just the people themselves telling us what to do—be careful of this, be careful of that." Ray remembers that one of those people telling him how to do things was the old beach gang boss, who taught him how to tie a boat with a bowline. "We were all farmers," explained Ray. "We'd tie up one of them barges with that big old 2 or 3 inch rope, [with a] regular knot, and that tide would pull it, and they'd have to cut it [the rope] to get it untied."

Throughout his many years as superintendent, Fribrock learned that the best workers were content workers, so he hired Ralph Havestein, a chef from the Seven Gables restaurant in Seattle, to keep the boys content in the cookhouse. "Every Sunday he'd have these Boston cream pies, and then the cream puffs with chocolate top." Not only did the boys receive three square meals, but during the peak the cannery had a 9:30 p.m. mug-up that consisted of sandwiches and cookies, and a midnight meal that fed the hungriest growing boy. "We just about ate the cookhouse out of eggs," recalls Ray, "you really ate like a horse."

Back home in Matanuska, other than their fathers and the neighbors who worked on the farm, the boys knew few strangers. But, as Larry points out, "at the cannery, you got outside of the group and went with all older fellers, and they're from Homer, they're from Seldovia, or Ninilchik or even the Philippines." As Ray pointedly confirms, for kids working for their parents on isolated farms, "we were learning how to work for other people and how to get along with other people."

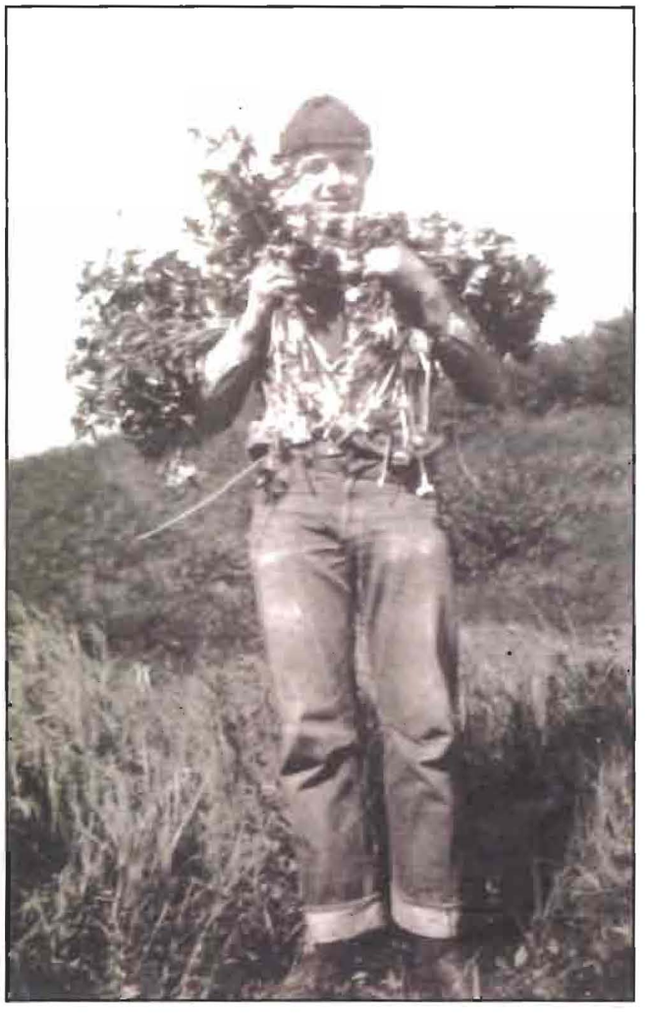
Beside cannery work, the boys found a variety of activities to occupy their interests. They hiked the hills of Chisik Island, gathering blueberries and salmonberries. They played poker, basketball, even boated over to the mainland to gather clams. One of Ray's fondest memories illustrates how much inland farmers had to learn about coastal living:

> When the fish weren't there we, like Wayne said, took the skiff, went over on the mainland, chased seals and bear, and—like a bunch of dumb farmers—we didn't think about the tide. We'd pulled the boat up on the beach and while we were out running around the tide went out, so there we were with this great big dory we could hardly move. They [the cannery] sent another couple of guys over in another dory to see what the hell happened to us.

To the young men from Matanuska, Snug Harbor offered abundant activities. But what perked the interests of these boys the most were, of course, girls. Not surprisingly, much of their energies went into trying to get the girls to become interested in them. Swimming was one way they tried to attract female attention. First, they'd jump off the barge into Cook Inlet's running tide. Then, when that didn't work, they dived off the 60-foot pile driver!

One slow day, Ray and Wayne spent the afternoon painting the hauls of the cannery's barges with red skull paint. According to Wayne, being young and bored, "we decided to paint the toilet seats in the women's bunkhouse with that red paint, too." As the men recalled with a chuckle, "those boats were not the only bottoms painted red that day."

As much as Larry, Ray, and Wayne enjoyed the cannery, their hearts remained with the colony. After 67 years in Alaska, they all still reside in Palmer and farming remains central to their lives. Still, their brief experience with fish made a lasting impression on these farmers. "I got home with $120 in my pocket," recalls Larry, "[I] bought my clothes that fall and I still had a dollar or two left, come the next March. I guess that's why we can't remember how much we got paid [per hour], I had too much fun!"



"Gathering wild flowers," circa 1924, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

Cannery life was not just fun and games. When asked how their farming experience helped out at the cannery, Ray simply replied, "We knew how to work." Ironically, working at the cannery allowed these boys to help out their families, become more financially and socially independent, and in some ways, it made them better farmers. As Ray points out, "[We received a] good experience, good work ethic, a new line of thought as far as what you're capable of doing rather than what you've been doing. I think it offered an opportunity that you carry on the rest of your life."

Some say the colony experiment in Matanuska failed. Alaska farms never found markets, its population remains a fraction to that of Scandinavia, and perhaps more importantly, Alaska's ability to inspire the dream that "free land" would serve American interests has all but diminished. Yet, the Matanuska dream was one that could never come true, and it was naive to believe otherwise. Throughout the history of the American West, farmers rarely became self-reliant pioneers. They have always depended on an industrial infrastructure, an infrastructure that Alaska lacked then, and in fact, some believe, lack still.[305]

What is historically significant about Larry, Ray, and Wayne experience is that their decision to seek work beyond the farm illustrates activities more realistic of people living in frontier regions. From Plymouth to Matanuska, colonists have always made adjustments to their situations. Some depended on Native Americans to show them which foods to eat, others needed canals and railroads to get their products to markets. And, in the case of the Matanuska colonists, they used fish to keep farming.

By examining the boys' experience more closely, we begin to better understand Alaska as a "frontier" and the role that the canneries played in its development. Today historians understand the West as culturally diverse—a collision of tradition and progress. Underlying such cultural exchange was the rapid development of natural resources. The same can be said for Alaska's salmon canneries. They were both industrial and social landscapes. Indeed, the Matanuska colonists failed to live up to a myth, but in reality, they succeeded in following the trails of pioneers of the past—they did what they could to survive.

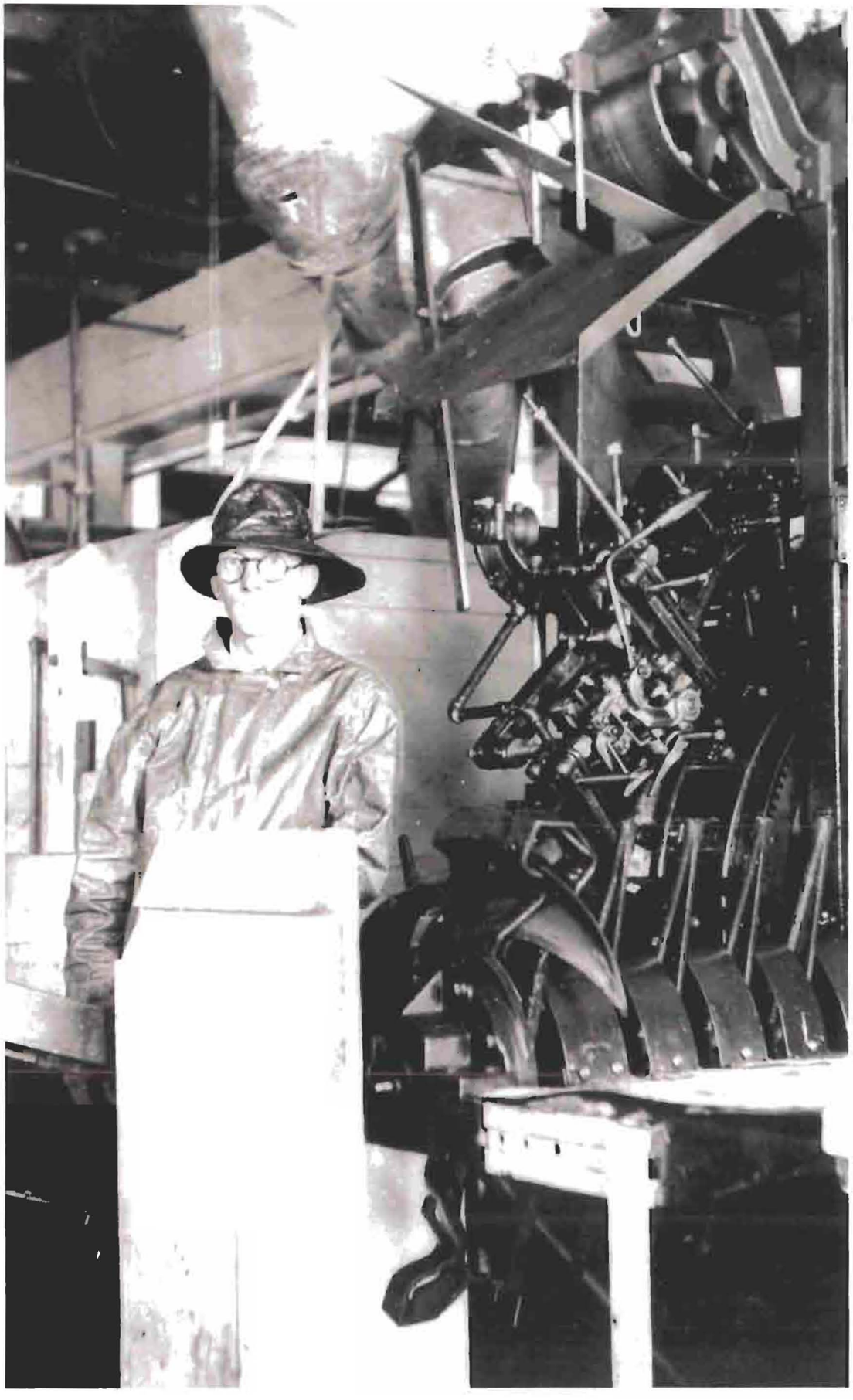
The connections between two ancient industries, farming and fishing, remind us that the frontier was not about independence and self-reliance, but about people helping each other. Larry remembers cannery life as primarily social: "Oh, you lived through it together." Progress allowed the farmer to move farther west, away from urban centers, which made him socially isolated, not necessarily economically independent. After living most of his life among fishers and farmers, Wayne wonders if the impersonal quality of progress is truly what Alaska needs:

> "When I started out I had two cows, and I milked them by hand...and then I advanced to the parlor, where I could milk into a jar that was sucked into a tank. Just last year on my trip to the States, why I visited a 3000 cow dairy and they were milking 500 cows an hour, 24 hours a day. It's just progress, same way in the [fish] canning industry. At times I wish we could go back...And, other times, I don't."

Thus, the experience of these farmers-turned-fish-canners reminds us that from the colony to the canneries of Cook Inlet, it was community, not "rugged individualism" that characterized, at least for them, America's Last Frontier.



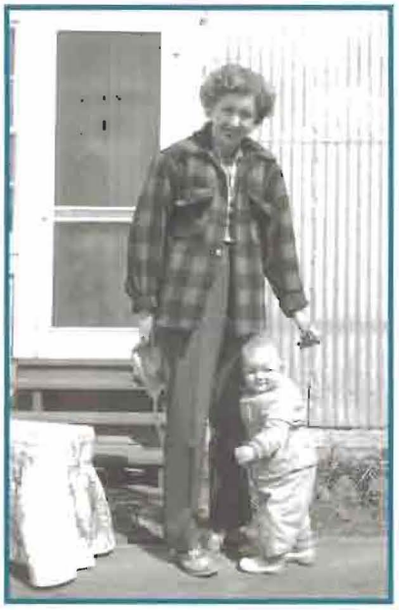
"Ralph Havestein adding finishing touches to rhubarb pies," circa 1966, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.



"Machinist," circa 1924, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.







"Dorothy and baby Jan," circa 1952, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

CHAPTER EIGHT

TRANSFORMING A CANNERY INTO A COMMUNITY

In the magnificent northern landscape, a cast of heroic characters engages in dramatic combat, sometimes with nature, sometimes with each other. Occupationally, these heroes are diverse: they are miners, fishermen, explorers, fur traders, trappers, politicians, and canners, but they share one distinguishing characteristic—they are all men. By reading the "Alaskana" made popular by authors like Jack London or Robert Service, one would assume that the land to the north was occupied primarily by tough men and a few random can-can girls. This land of heroes is one of America's most beloved myths: Alaska—the legendary Last Frontier.[306]

Certainly, the absence of real women from the Last Frontier is fiction. Women have always been major contributors to Alaskan culture and society, even though their place in history seems marginalized next to the adventure seeking, sometimes greedy, and always heroic men. Few examples of that marginalization can be demonstrated better than the portrayal of women in one of Alaska's most important activities—fishing.



"Thelma & snowshoes, 1927," Waugaman Salmon Industry Album, Accession number, 97-27-41, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

In *Fish Saving: A History of Fish Processing from Ancient to Modern Times,* food historian Charles Cutting notes, "In all periods and at all levels of technological progress, fish has usually played an essential part in man's diet."[307] Because fish is more susceptible to spoilage than certain other animal protein foods, such as meat and eggs, methods of preservation are essential to the utilization of fish as food. "Fish," according to Cutting, "occupied a key position as one of the most easily accessible sources of protein food, and the spread of man himself was probably determined by the success of the techniques of preservation and storage employed." While competent fishermen caught hundreds of fish for the village, it was the skill and wisdom of women processors, who developed ways to preserve and store fish, that kept the village fed well into the winter. Indeed, the person processing the fish for the "spread of man" was a woman.

In subsistence cultures in Alaska, the act of processing fish empowered women. According to archeologist Lisa Frink, who studied the role of female fish processors in western Alaska fishcamps, the esteemed role women held within this society demonstrates that processing fish was an extremely skilled occupation, that it was highly managerial, and that it was particularly complex. Because fish processing and its winter storage was critical to most Native communities, almost all Native women maintained important decision-making positions, and these positions have continued to the present day.[308]

Traditionally, cutting fish is a learned talent, requiring technical prowess and skillfully made choices. It required fish processors to know about the properties of different species of fish, the conditions of the fish at the time of capture, the effect of weather and insects on processing, and the productive capacity of the laborers available. In her study, Frink notes that "these were all crucial management factors and decisions negotiated and made by women."[309] Moreover, processing knowledge was taught, learned and passed down from grandmothers, mothers, and daughters who usually cut fish together. As a result, elder women were, and still are, active managers of the fish camp operation—not only

did they control the daily allocation of foodstuffs, but the food caches were "owned" and managed by an extended family's female elders, who "decided what is to be eaten and when."[310] In other words, in the fishcamp corporation, women maintained processing, managerial, and ownership roles.



"Forget-me-nots," Barbara Kistler, private collection.

In her book, *Cheap Wage Labour: Race and Gender in the Fisheries of British Columbia,* sociologist Alizja Muszynski contends that the level of power for women fish processors decreased as other economic structures developed through colonization, nation building, and industrialization. With the transplant of an American maritime society to Alaskan coastal and riverine regions, fisherman—not processors—became the frontier heroes. Muszynski suggests that the strong connection between fishing and masculine pursuits found in Western literary culture played a central role in lessening the esteemed position of the fish processor. Indeed, unlike indigenous cultures, American fish stories told tall tales of "the one that got away," and rarely mentioned the not-so-romantic cleaners and preparers of fish.

When the commercial fishing industry began in the 1870s, the factory system soon replaced the fish camp as the main center of economic activity on most Alaskan salmon streams. And even though preparing fish for market is arguably the most important step in the commercial canning operation, Muszynski convincingly points out that by reducing the job to "women's work," canners decreased the value of labor and thus legitimized lower wages paid to cannery workers, regardless of the overall value of the product.[311] This is, in part, the reason why canners, who hired Chinese men to clean fish in the early days of the industry, referred to their Asian workers as a "feminine race."[312]

Clearly, women's productive roles in fishing activities over the years have proven more complex and influential than history has offered. In fact, women played historically significant roles in what is perceived, even today, as a male-dominated industry. Western values limited women's place in the fishing operation, but women still influenced these industrial landscapes in numerous other ways. As argued earlier, canneries are historically considered cultural meeting places where men and women, representing a variety of ethnic backgrounds and social positions, worked and lived together. However, to fully appreciate the significance of these relationships is difficult because few women documented their experience, and thus, most sources from the industry only refer to female workers in passing, if at all. Few explain cannery life from a woman's point of view.

Sockeye Sunday is the exception. In this intimate memoir, Dorothy Fribrock offers readers insights into the social and working life at Snug Harbor and provides a rare perspective of women's roles in canneries:

> There were women, too: clam clippers in the twenties who cleaned the clams, wives and daughters of the owners, and after statehood, wives of fishermen. Housekeepers and waitresses cared for the cannery and fishermen. Cannery line workers vacationed from their lives at Homer and Seldovia. Cooks came, and the most important of all, granddaughters after 1977. Even hi-liners, when the gals got their own boats and out-fished most of the guys.[313]

To find meaning in the differences between men's and women's lives at canneries, *Sockeye Sunday* can be used as an analytical tool to interpret the significance of how women prioritized and shaped their own stories. For example, although she and Joe spent nearly forty years together at the same cannery, in *Sockeye Sunday* Dorothy tells a much different story of the Harbor than her husband or any other man working at the cannery might tell. Instead of machine breakdowns, labor problems, and fish reports—typical subjects associated with salmon canneries—Dorothy writes about children, gardens, female friends, romantic liaisons, and the beautiful surrounding landscape.

The information Dorothy offers in *Sockeye Sunday* demonstrates that this cannery wife was an actor living in the context of her own time. *Sockeye Sunday* is not meant to be an objective history. Instead, Dorothy offers readers something just as important—a women's voice in what is commonly perceived as a male-dominated industry. Here, she crafts a bond with the reader, as if she were telling her stories intimately over tea. When Dorothy tells us about a young female cannery worker, one can imagine that Dorothy might be telling this story with whispered breath, raised eyebrows, and her hand cupping the side of her mouth. "My friend was little more than sixteen at the time," reads *Sockeye Sunday's* narrative:

> ...and after a Snug Harbor romance, she became the wife of a forty-year-old Homer resident who augmented his earnings by working in our beach gang during the summer. In 1946, I was twenty-four and forty seemed terribly old. But the happy couple still live in Homer and have two sons." [314]

Understanding women's roles in cannery life is far more complicated than imposing the image of "the sinner or the saint" upon Snug Harbor's cannery women. Dorothy's words and stories, combined with the stories from the other women of Snug, introduce us to far more than this. Through their collective observations and experiences we begin to see that the presence of women actively transformed the cannery into to a colorful and complex community of men and women.

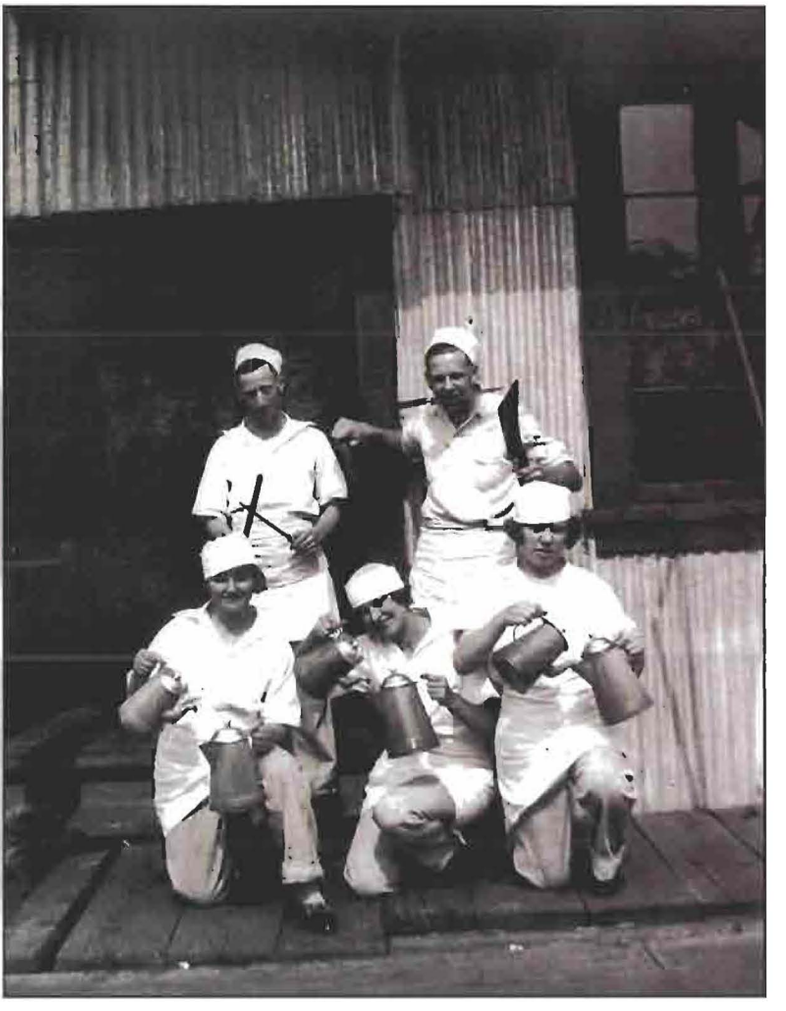
Dorothy Fribrock

In 1946, Joe and his new wife, Dorothy, sailed north from Seattle, Washington to work at the cannery. After quick strokes with her comb and a pass with her lipstick, Dorothy guardedly stepped off the deck of the *Orient,* climbed up a rope ladder and, while shaking from both cold and fear, took her first step onto Snug Harbor's dock.

That summer, while Joe supervised cannery activities, Dorothy set out to transform the industrialized world of Snug Harbor into a home. In letters to friends back in Seattle, Dorothy described how she learned to light kerosene lamps and

"build a fire in the stove and keep it going." In one letter she described her attempt to make coffee: "At the end of three hours," she lamented, "I still had water. It just wouldn't boil. After that, I learned how to make a fire and keep one that would be hot enough to boil water. Oh! It's a great life. I'm learning fast...If Mother could see me now."[315]

Once Dorothy conquered coffee, she set out to "civilize" their cannery home. "I spend the day cleaning house, washing and ironing," stated Dorothy in another letter. And, with a seven week old baby girl, she joked, "They certainly said a mouthful when they said a woman's work is never done." Over the summers, Dorothy hung curtains, built a patio, and maintained a lawn at her Snug Harbor home. Next to the lawn, Dorothy had a sunken pool surrounded by strawberry plants and violets. Her children, Jan and Barbi, enjoyed playing on their backdoor swing. The family even had an old piano that Eric and Emma Fribrock brought to the Harbor. "Just because you live in Alaska doesn't mean you can't be civilized," advised Emma, Dorothy's mother-in-law.



"Kitchen crew at Snug Harbor with coffee pots," Waugaman Salmon Industry Album, Accession number, 97-27-55, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Like frontier women of an earlier era, Dorothy imported and imposed American social views, typical of the late 1940s and early 1950s. For example, before entering the Blue Room for dinner, Dorothy made sure she and the children dressed in their best Sunday clothes. She also maintained a high moral opinion on alcohol. In Dorothy's view of the cannery was not only a harbor safe from storms, but from the deadly vice of liquor, too. In 1946, Snug Harbor was unique in Alaska because the Fribrocks strived to keep a "dry" camp.

> Many of the salmon canneries in Alaska are located in or very near small towns, where, prior to statehood, local bars, liquor stores and even grocery and drug stores all sold liquor. "Hooch," short for hoochinoo—a distilled liquor made by the Hoochinoo Indians—was very accessible to those wishing to indulge. Snug Harbor was really a blessing to those who couldn't leave the bottle alone. At least for three months of the year, these fellows were further removed from temptation and got dried out; filled out with a nourishing, well-balanced diet of about six meals a day.[316]

Mirroring the experience of many cultured women who moved to the frontier nearly a century earlier, Dorothy spent her first few years admiring and at the same time, trying to tame the Alaska wilderness. By creating garden spaces, Dorothy both decorated and domesticated the cannery's wild landscape, and paradoxically, its industrial landscape, too.[317] As one letter home illustrates, Dorothy received great satisfaction from her Snug Harbor garden:

> My garden bordered by fossilized rocks at the front of the house, is gradually filling with wild flowers. I have transplanted the blooming cliff flowers to the ground behind the fossils: blue forget-me-nots, white snow in the mountain clumps, a small white star-shaped flower, and a cactus-like plant with pinkish blooms, actually named Rose Root. The large plants of lupine on either side of the front door are beginning to show buds and the delphinium plants are sprouting. Yesterday, I added clumps of wild blue violets and yellow Johnny-jump-ups brought back from our hike up the hill.[318]

Motherhood, housework, and gardening were not Dorothy's only activities at Snug Harbor. As the years went by, Dorothy gained confidence and experience, which allowed her to share management responsibilities with Joe. Dorothy rolled up her shirtsleeves and pitched in where needed, either in the cannery hand-packing quarter-pound cans, or in the egg house, packing the sujiko for the Japanese crew. After forty years at Snug Harbor, cannery life had transformed this one-time Frederick & Nelson clerk into a competent cannery wife and administrator. After Joe died in November, 1979, Dorothy ran Snug Harbor one last summer until she sold the cannery to Columbia Wards Fisheries in 1980.

The Processors

From its inception, when Hemrich and Palmer built Snug Harbor in 1919, women have worked at the cannery. Twenty-seven years before Dorothy came to Snug Harbor, female clam clippers and salmon patchers inhabited the bunkhouses and combed the beaches for rocks and shells. One of those women was Thelma Meaham, who came with her husband and children to Snug Harbor to process clams and salmon from 1922 to1924. Not only did the Meaham family work at Snug Harbor in the summer, but they remained as watchmen all winter, hiking trails on snowshoes in the shortened arctic days and teaching their kids reading, writing and arithmetic during the long nights.[319] Thelma was the first of many women who, along with their husbands, cared for Snug Harbor during the winter. Forty years later, Dorothy

recalled the contributions of another winterman's wife, Mabel, who worked there from 1963 to 1964: "She used her talents to make the winterman's home very comfortable," explained Dorothy, "with little extra touches that spoke of a woman in the house."[320]

Fortunately for historians, Thelma took photographs of the cannery during her three year stint. Tall laced-up boots, baggy pants, neatly tied scarves, and bobbed hair seem to be required cannery fashion. One photograph of Thelma holding snow shoes depicts an adventure-seeker that would have even made Jack London proud. Other photos show men and women digging buildings from mounds of snow, working together in the messhall, and conducting gender-specific jobs inside the cannery. Some photographs showing scenes of beach parties, romantic walks, and displays of camaraderie, tell us that men and women not only played and socialized together, but they depended on each other for support.



"The processors," circa 1924, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

One rare written source comes from a woman named Edna Borigo, who included a chapter about Snug Harbor in her memoir, *Sourdough Schoolma'am*. Edna, who was a teacher in Palmer, worked one summer for Eric Fribrock in the mid 1940s. In this passage, Edna describes the camaraderie between men and women forged on the cannery line.

> After the filled cans left the Iron Chink they had to travel about four or five feet on the conveyor belt before they reached our table. If a can was very much underweight it would automatically be kicked off the main line onto our table. I'm not sure just how Bob arranged it but everyone along the line knew what was about to take place but me. Even the girls in the loft had been alerted to watch the fun. They were all peering down from above to witness teacher's reaction. Bob had hunted up a fish head that would fit into an empty pound can so that the open mouth of the fish would be about a half inch shorter than the can. In the fish mouth he had placed a lighted cigarette. He was very careful to place the can on the conveyor belt after it left the Iron Chink so that it would come through as a lightweight. Out of the corner of my eye I noted a lightweight being kicked off and grabbed for it with my gloved hand. When I saw that hideous gaping mouth with a smoking cigarette dangling from its lips they told me that I screamed. Without pausing to think, I hurled it across the cannery, narrowly missing one of the Oriental boys. That bit of scuttlebutt went the rounds of the cannery like a flash fire. In fact it went around many times. Even the foreman, a rather dour-visaged person, smiled as he passed me after that.[321]



"In the foreground is the 'patch table" where small pieces of salmon are inserted in cans imperfectly filled by machinery," The Alaska Sportsman, *August 1953.*

Wilma Williams, who worked at Snug Harbor in the 1940s, remembers, "At Snug Harbor the cannery workers were allowed a lot of freedom in the off hours but there were rules. The boys could visit, if they liked, but not in our room. We could play cards or visit in the large hallway that was a thoroughfare to all of the rooms." Indeed, the presence of women influenced every social condition from rules to work to play.

Although it was less apparent than at larger canneries, one social condition—racial discrimination—did occur at Snug Harbor, and it was usually targeted at the most marginalized group of women workers. In one particular story, Dorothy recalls how some of Snug's male workers called the female Dena'ina workers from Ninilchik, "Ninilchickens."[322] Even other female cannery workers took a moral stand against their fellow Dena'ina workers, blaming their more affectionate relationships with other cannery men as reasons for those rules—rules that restricted only the movement of cannery



"Cannery worker, Dot models the well dressed women cannery worker's garb," The Alaska Sportsman, *August 1953.*

women. But even though racism and gender discrimination existed as social constraints, platonic relationships that formed between the bottom tier of cannery workers, especially between female and Filipino cannery workers did, in fact, help breakdown racial lines at Snug Harbor. For instances, William's memory of working side by side with the Filipino crew illustrates how cultural differences eventually became accepted and understood among cannery workers:

> When we were working long hours, in the butchering sliming area, the Filipinos would suddenly wave their knives over their heads and holler at the top of their voices. It was a relaxation thing for them and once I understood it was not some sort of uprising, I took it in stride.

As significant as male and female relationships were at constructing Snug social community, the most supportive and necessary of those relationships seemed to be the bonds women created with each other. *Sockeye Sunday* contains many stories of Dorothy forging friendships with a variety of women—setnetter wives, waitresses, and cannery workers. She makes it a priority in her book to mention the flowers that her friend, Linda Stout, added to the table settings on the Fourth of July, giving the messhall that "woman's touch." Dorothy looked to other women for support when she felt isolated among a mostly male crew. In the 1950s, Snug Harbor's female population of three increased four fold when "the ladies of Homer" came to work as patchers in the cannery during the July peak. "Velma had been part of the contingent of workers Snug imported each July," writes Dorothy. "I had walked the beach with her one evening after dinner. Velma had reminded me so much of my Aunt Pet. This was my first experience away from home and family, and I was drawn to this vivacious and pleasant woman." Through Velma, Dorothy found the familiarity and comfort of family and home.[323]



"Picnic at Elephant Rock" circa 1924, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

Other women found comfort from their relationship with the natural environment. Most written and oral accounts of Snug Harbor by women who worked there always emphasized the beauty of the landscape. Elephant rock was an important site for parties and picnics, and other outdoor activities often involved berry picking and boating. Many women mentioned the volcanic skyline, the plethora of shorebirds, even the excitement of finding bear tracks.[324] But it was the beach that fronted the cannery where many women not only found fossils and shells but solace and peace. "As we started along the beach headed for the northern end of the island," recalls Ethel Kavanaugh, a cannery worker from Homer, "we passed some of the women searching for seashells."[325] Barb Kistler, Dorothy's daughter, summed up her feelings about the beach:



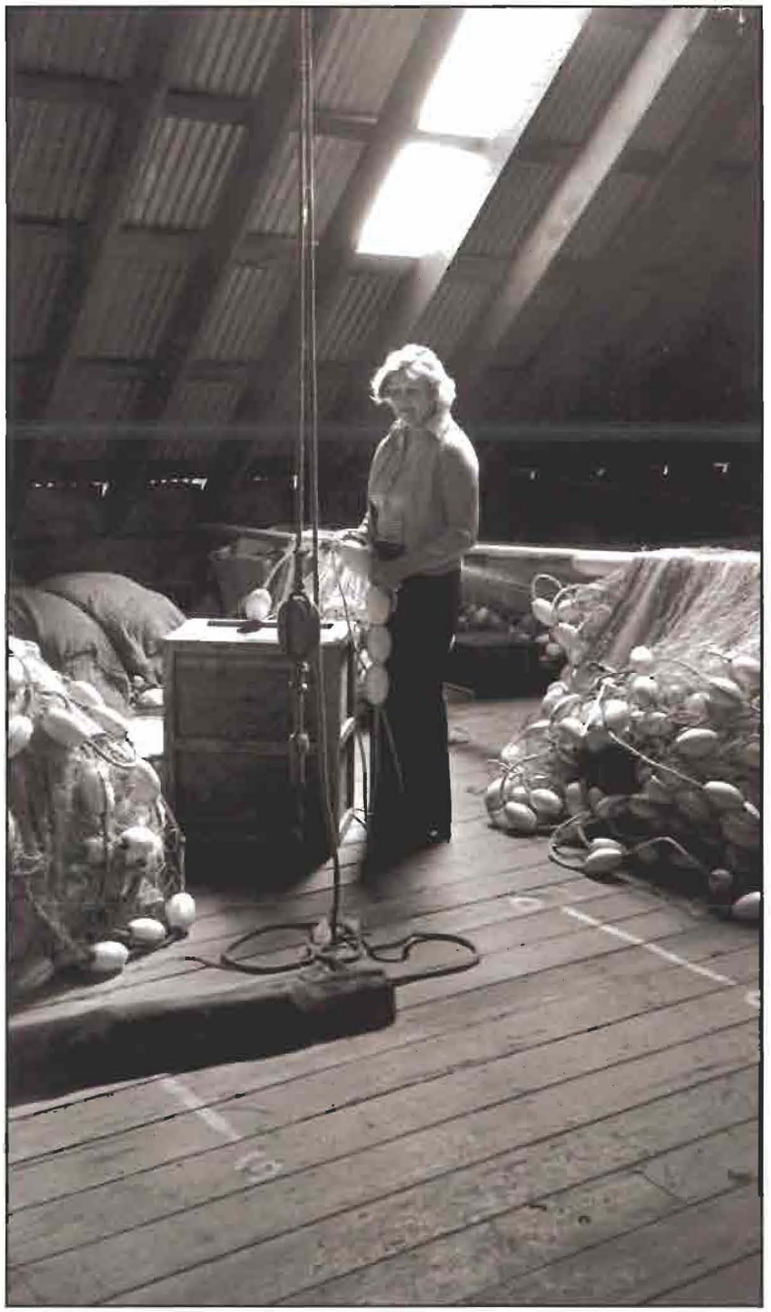
"On the Beach," circa 1924, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

> When I go over there [Snug Harbor] now, you hear the little voices, it's like almost one of those things out to the movies where you hear the shhhhhh, the ghosts of Christmas past or whatever. You just wander through and close your eyes and you can see it and you can hear people and you know what was going on. And it's kind of hard. The first day I get there, I cry. It's changed so much. It's decrepit. The paint is gone, this is that, the boardwalk is crumply...And then, I go down and hit the beach and everything is the same, different rocks have fallen, but it is basically the same. That's the part that will never change.[326]



"Three girls in dory," circa 1924, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

Over the years, Snug Harbor hosted a variety of women who worked among its bunkhouses and boardwalks. Sally Munger, a winterman's wife, even designated Snug, "Lady Cannery," perhaps because Snug Harbor was a home as much as it was a place to work. As far as questions concerning oppression or empowerment, the women of Snug Harbor experienced both. Without doubt, both men and women at the cannery alienated and stereotyped the female Native workers. On the other hand, for Euro-Americans, cannery life seemed to liberate them. For Dorothy, her experience at Snug Harbor gave her many freedoms she may not have experienced in the Lower 48.



"Dorothy in the net loft," courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

Married or single, Dena'ina or Euro-American, old or young, women at Snug Harbor made a difference. Perhaps their biggest contribution was in transforming Snug Harbor from a cannery into a community. They did not do it passively, either, as what some historians would call "reluctant pioneers." On the contrary, the women of Snug Harbor raised children, created beauty in an industrialized landscape through gardening, shaped moral systems, and provided a necessary and important work force. Women formed supportive relationships with cannery men, with each other, and with the natural landscape. They shaped both the social and the work environment. No longer can historians, the industry or the general public view women on the margin, second to the heroic fishermen in the fish stories of the last frontier. Rather than invisible cogs found on the fringe of the industrial landscape, women processors were located at the center of the cannery experience. And through their numerous relationships made Snug Harbor, for many, a home.

THE ORIENT TO SNUG HARBOR

(Excerpt from *Sockeye Sunday*)

By Dorothy Fribrock

Just before high water the *Orient* weighed anchor. An hour later, as the tide turned, we experienced the swift currents of the six to eight knot outgoing tide of Cook Inlet, forcing us to buck the rest of our way to the Harbor. Reconciled to a slow crossing after our late dinner, we retired to the tiny, one bunk cabin. Joe folded his 6'4" frame into the bunk, wedging his body against the wall to make room for me. In spite of our cramped position, we were soon put to sleep by the motion of the boat. Suddenly, I realized our boat had stopped. I could feel the motion of the water, but could no longer hear the sound of the engine. We had arrived!

As we had slept in our clothes, I needed only to put on my shoes and new down-filled jacket I had bought in the "Working Man's" department at Fredrick & Nelson. After quick strokes with my comb and a pass with my lipstick, I followed Joe out of the cabin. Excited and nervous, I stepped out on the deck of the *Orient*. It was low tide and the top of the dock was a long way up, twenty feet at least. The Snug Harbor I had heard about since I first met Joe Fribrock four year ago was at the top of the ladder. I looked up the length of the "Jacob's Ladder" that someone was slowly lowering to the deck. Other helpful hands held the top end tightly against the timber edging the dock so I could climb safely. My climbing experience had been limited to a step ladder. As I gazed upward, just the thought of climbing those non-ridged rope strands turned my arms to jelly and the cold of the morning air started me to shake.

My husband Joe guided my foot onto the ladder, and with weak arms, I carefully grasped each rope rung, slowly ascending, one foot over the other, until at last I was at the top of the ladder. Eager hands assisted me over the dock's edge while a loud voice admonished me, "Watch your step." The dock was newly driven, but the decking hadn't been nailed in place. Instead a few loose planks were strung across the horizontal stringers providing a narrow pathway I was to follow up its long length. As I carefully made my way toward the shadowy buildings on shore, I could sense the rapidly retreating water beneath the dock.

At the dock's shore end, loose planks at last joined solid decking between the warehouse and cannery wings. I continued through the dark cannery emerging at the far entrance. To the left a passageway had been dug in the snow towering above my head. Someone handed me a small feeble flashlight and pointed me in the direction of "Fribrock's quarters." Joe was nowhere in sight. Finally, I was at home, and as I walked through the open doorway and into the pitch dark hall, I couldn't detect any difference in the temperature. In the room to the left I saw an oil lamp shining its brighter light into a darker room full of sheet-draped furniture. If a fire had been lit in the stove, it no longer burned. It was stone cold. We had arrived much later than expected.

Soon Joe followed me into this cold room. Picking up the lamp, he led the way into the adjoining bedroom. The furniture here also was draped in white sheets to keep off the winter's dust. It was the coldest bed I had ever gotten into, but I was soon warmed as I cuddled next to Joe and fell fast asleep in his arms. It seemed just a few moments had passed when I heard Joe say, "It's a beautiful day. Ralph, our cook is expecting us for breakfast. Hurry, rise and shine." Joe was already up and dressed. As he pulled up the dark shade in our bedroom, bright sunshine flooded the room, sneaking past the high pile of snow blocking half the window's opening.

I stood there a moment, warming myself in the sunshine, listening to an unfamiliar bird call. As Joe and I made our way between shoveled snow banks to the warm messhouse kitchen, I saw the *Orient* tied to the dolphin in front of the cannery store which is in front of our house. Truly, it was a beautiful day. The cold and foreboding darkness of the night before had been banished by warm, bright sunshine, blue sky and by the optimism of youth, two people in love.

It's funny how a place can get a person so involved that all her plans and dreams are inescapably tied to a twenty acre parcel of land located in the wilds of Alaska. Alaska always seems to crop up in my conversation. If it's a repairman or laundryman or my lawyer, I invariably get the remark, "Now that's where I'd like to go—Alaska." Once, when my sorority sister heard I was taking my new seven week old baby girl to our wilderness, she inquired about facilities. I responded the way I always did, by describing the allure and beauty, the heartache and the fun that is Alaska. I'd try to cram my many summers of happenings into a ten or fifteen minute monologue on "what is Alaska."

Snug Harbor always has this special effect on me. It was a unique place, remote and wild, surprisingly full of life. Life appeared in the variety of wild flowers, of meadows and cliffs, in the majesty of the spruce trees growing on the hill. Life was found in the soaring glide of the seagulls as they road the island's thermal currents. It is in the punctual yearly return of the swift darting, violet green swallows to the Harbor in early May. Life is in the never ending treasure trove of shells and rocks and fossils to be found along its beaches. Especially, life is in the interesting, hard-working people we meet each year at Snug Harbor, making it an anticipated experience each spring. Even now after forty years, when I no longer have work to do there, when May rolls around, something in my blood stirs. My thoughts return to the Harbor and I soon follow...

Afterword

Snug Harbor: Gone But Not Forgotten

As Alaska enters a new century, the Fribrock women make every attempt to revisit the past. Although Snug Harbor is now owned by Willie Porter and his family,[327] Dorothy, her girls, and their daughters are always welcome to return. When they do, it is a bittersweet experience: kids immediately explore the old haunts, while Dorothy and her daughter, Barb, head to the beach. Once they gather the nerve, the generations of Fribrock women move toward the buildings. First they walk the steel dock that Joe built, section by section; then they move along the boardwalk, through the decrepit cannery. Finally, Dorothy, Barb and the girls arrive at their old Snug Harbor home. Their eyes fall upon the overgrown backyard, where the lovely lawn of green grass they worked so hard to achieve has disappeared. The surrounding beds of wild flowers collected from the nearby cliffs and hills are smothered in overgrowth. Each season takes Snug Harbor further away from Elmer Hemrich, George Palmer, and the Fribrocks. Watching the past slip away makes Dorothy almost cry.

Joe and Dorothy always believed Snug Harbor's worth warranted more than the simple title "fish cannery" implied. One story, told by one of the cannery's new owners Jennie Porter, underscores the meaning of family and community which the Fribrocks seemed to consistently represent. This past summer, while cleaning out the Fribrock's old house,



"Coffee Boat," Katherine Johnson, Lake Clark Katmai Studies Center, Anchorage.

Jennie noticed increments carved on the kitchen doorframe. Each gouge in the wood marked the growth of their children. "And they didn't just measure their own kids," explained Jennie. "They measured all the cannery kids, our kids, even the cat!" As Jeannie cleaned away the dust, she understood that each increment scratched on that doorframe captured a timeless memory. Indeed, Snug was a place where people worked, played, made friends, and fell in love.

Today, Snug Harbor is destined to become a bed and breakfast for fishermen and a point of entry for visitors to Lake Clark National Park and Preserve. Bear viewing and sport fishing have replaced commercial fishing on Cook Inlet's economic front. The Porters, a one-time Snug Harbor fishing family, hope to transform the cannery into a retreat for tourists. Besides catering to birdwatchers, hardy hikers, and halibut fishermen, the Porter's plan is to recapture some of Snug Harbor's glory days to entice history buffs, transfixed by Alaska and the Last Frontier. But for now, it remains a place full of memories which the Porters intend to preserve.

Like the Porters, the Fribrocks also envisioned Snug Harbor as a place where anyone could come to learn about Cook Inlet. "For geologists," explained Dorothy,

> ...there is Fossil Point and the world-famed Jurassic section. For biologists, the reef at the end of the island protects many sea creatures. For botanists, the island is home to over 200 species of wild flowers and trees. For wildlife environmentalists, the island is a national bird reserve, a wilderness area with its share of big brown bear as well. With sea gulls and kittiwakes, the island is a Mecca for bird watchers. Over the summers, oil geologists headquartered at Snug, and for anthropologists there is the upper Tuxedni's pictographs. Something for everyone to study.[328]

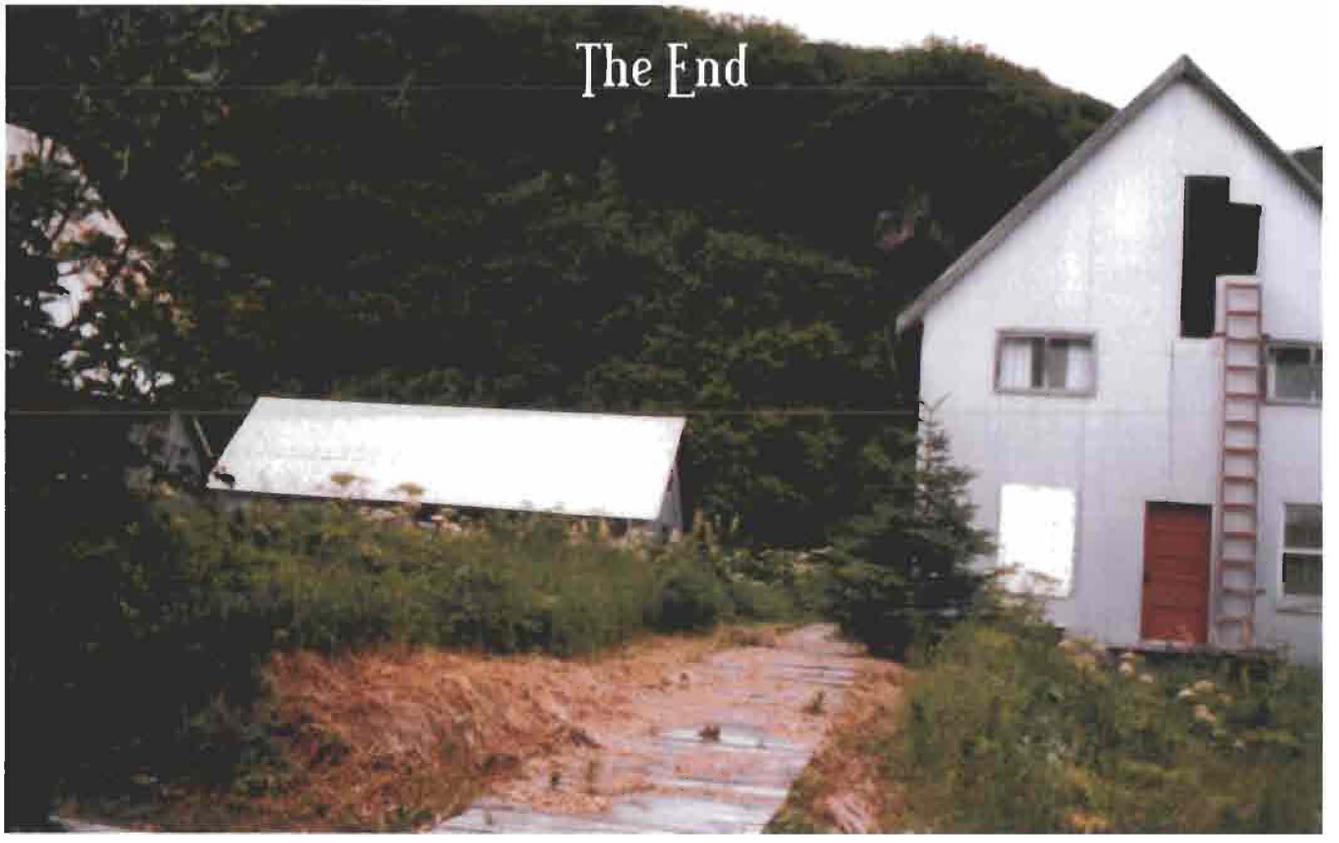
For historians, Snug Harbor can be used as a tool not only to better understand the commercial fishing industry, but to broaden our historical interpretation of Alaska's Cook Inlet region. Like all other Alaskan salmon canneries, Snug Harbor was a composite of ethnic diversity, gender, and class. It was a place where various peoples—owners and workers, Alaska Natives, Filipinos, Euro-Americans, and women worked and lived together. By examining Snug Harbor as a blueprint for twentieth century Alaskan society, historians can offer new ways to explain the impacts of industrialization, immigration, and cultural integration on the state's most populated region.

Although this perspective may challenge the romance of the frontier model, it is anything but boring. Snug Harbor was associated with some of Alaska's most interesting, though lesser known, characters such as Elmer Hemrich and George Palmer. It played a role in the political struggle against fish traps, which led to nothing less than Alaska statehood. In addition, Snug Harbor was part of an industry that brought monumental social, economic, and cultural change not just to Cook Inlet, but to much of coastal Alaska. At Snug Harbor, historians can study the impact of ethnic minorities—history's seemingly forgotten people—to better understand their role in shaping Alaskan history. This was a place where farmers became fish canners and women changed canneries into communities. Indeed, Snug Harbor is a valuable historical site. The cannery people may be gone, but their stories and what they mean to us should not be forgotten.

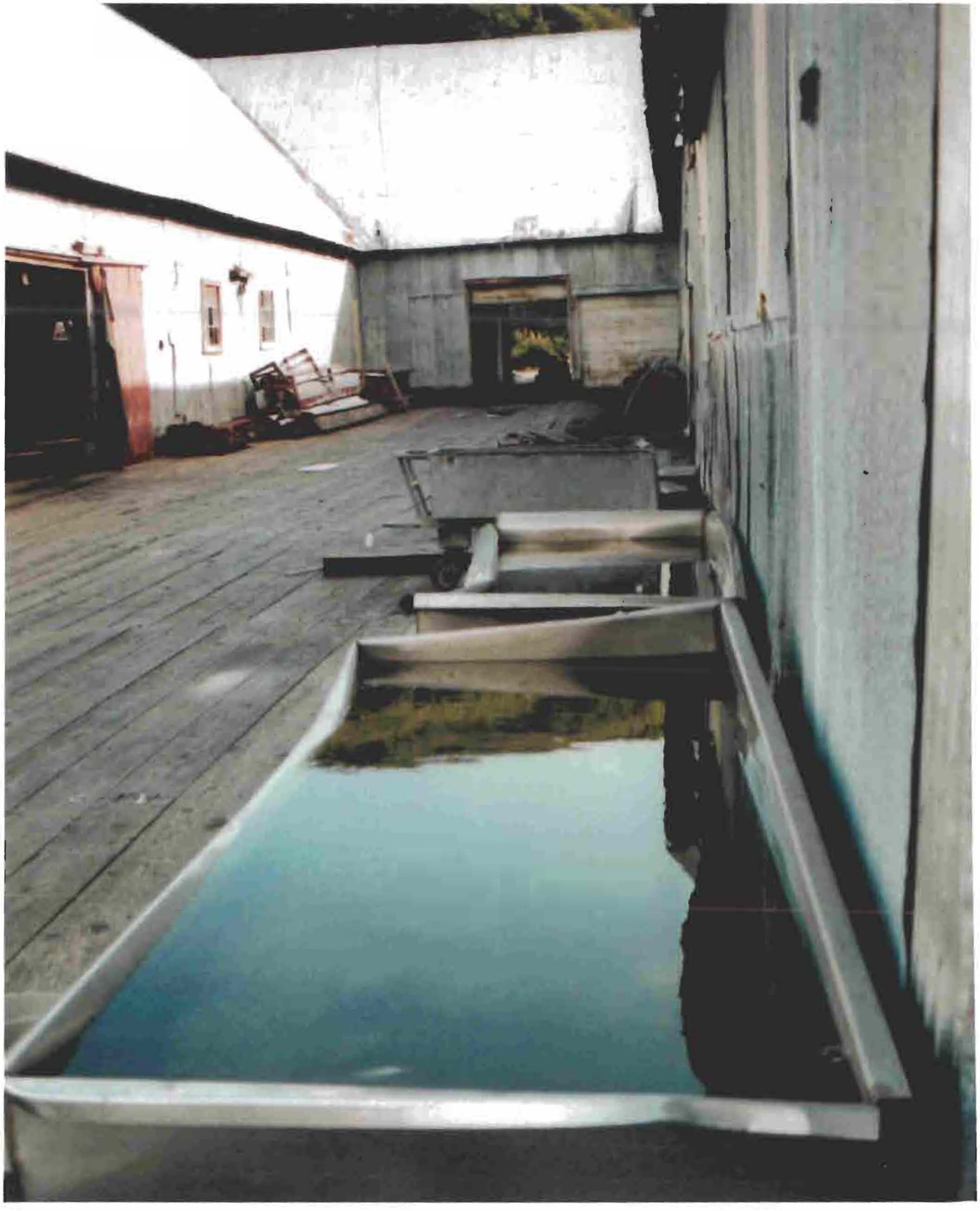
As the cannery's "story keeper," Dorothy Fribrock has dedicated the last few decades of her life to making sure that voices from Snug remain heard. At the time of this writing, Dorothy sent me one last story of Snug Harbor. It described a wedding she attended on Snug's now permanent dock. As she watched the young people exchange nuptials and begin their life together, Dorothy pondered her own long life, a life full of experiences in Alaska:

> The pioneers and old timers, as some call them, are growing fewer. It's time for a new generation of doers to take over and experience the pleasures and dangers of this truly beautiful and inviting land. I've experienced the end of traps, the building of roads and the beginnings of oil exploration. I saw the devastation of the '64 earthquake. I experienced the fishing industry's change from a viable productive group of large companies to dwindle down to handful of small, almost mom and pop canneries. I have seen the beautiful spruce forests of the Kenai Peninsula devastated by killer beetles. I'll always remember the wonderful fresh air, the colorful and varied wild flowers, especially the sea of blue lupine of the hills of Homer. The magenta fireweed along the peninsula's highway and the yellow mimosas and blue forget-me-not cliffs of Snug Harbor. The sweetest sound of an early dawn symphony of bird calls.

When Dorothy arrived at Snug in 1946, she was the youngest person there. Now, at the Green's wedding, she was the oldest. The wedding party had asked her to give the toast for the bride and groom: "May the newlyweds find in their marriage," said Dorothy, raising her champagne, "beauty like the flowers of Snug Harbor. Variety like the seashells found along the shore. The endurance of the fossils. And in their lives, the sweet melody of the song birds of Snug."



"Overgrown boardwalk," circa 1980, Barbara Kistler, private collection.



"The alley," Barbara Kistler, private collection.

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[24] Richard Cooley, *Politics and Conservation: The Decline of the Alaska Salmon* (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1963), 26.

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[29] Ibid., 71.

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[32] "The Official Story of Canned Salmon in the Army," *Pacific Fisherman Yearbook*, (1919).

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[35] Katherine Johnson, *Buried Dreams: The Rise and Fall of a Clam Cannery on the Katmai Coast,* (National Park Service, 2003), 42.

[36] *Grays Harbor Post.* July 1, 1933.

[37] Dorothy Fribock, *Sockeye Sunday,* 48.

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[57] James Kari and Alan Boraas, *A Dena'ina Legacy, The Collected Writings of Peter Kalifonsky* (Fairbanks, Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska), 1991.

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"Digging out the cannery from under a blanket of snow," circa 1924, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

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[106] "Will Operate Snug Harbor Cannery," *Pacific Fisherman* Vol. 25 No. 3 (1927).

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[108] "Joint Operation at Snug Harbor" *Pacific Fisherman* (May 1932).

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[115] "Fribrock Buys Foster's Share in Snug Harbor Co.," *Pacific Fisherman* (Feb, 1944).

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[128]Snug Harbor Trap Sites—Copied from a photo of a wooden map that used to hang in the Snug Harbor Net Loft. The Map and Photo are in Dorothy Fribrock's possession.

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[135] "Locating Cannery and Trap Sites in Alaska."

[136] Dorothy Fribrock, "The Pile Driver and Fish Traps" in *Once Upon a Kenai* (Marceline, MO: Walsworth Publishing Company, 1984), 387.

[137] Ibid, 388.

[138] Ibid, 390.

[139] Ernest Gruening, *State of Alaska,* (New York, NY: Random House Press, 1954), 169.

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[141] Delegate Wickersham's response during Congressional hearing in 1916. In Gruening's *State of Alaska,* 198.

[142] Ernest Gruening advanced the argument that the federal government had neglected Alaska during its territorial days in his monograph, *The State of Alaska,* published in 1954.

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[149] Dorothy Fribrock, "The Pile Driver and Fish Traps," 394.

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[154]Joe Fribrock to the Small Business Administration, April 14, 1964, Fribrock's Personal Collection.

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[158] "Five 'Fribrock Converts,'" *Pacific Fisherman* (June 1962), 13.

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[164] Transcription of Joe Fribrock's remarks made during Tuxedni Wilderness public hearings held on April 25, 1967. Wilderness Record for Bogoslof, Bering Sea, Tuxedni Wilderness Study Areas, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska Resources Library and Information Services, Anchorage, Alaska.

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"Snug Boats," circa 1967, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

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"Cannery workers" circa 1924, courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

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[327] Today the property, which the cannery sits, is owned by *Snug Harbor Past Tymes, LLC.* The LLC is incorporated by members of the Porter family: Morrie Sr., his son and daughter Willie and Kathy, their spouses, Jennie and Reilly, and Willie's children, Abe, Eli, and Zach.

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"Snug Harbor Cannery" courtesy of Barbara Kistler, private collection.

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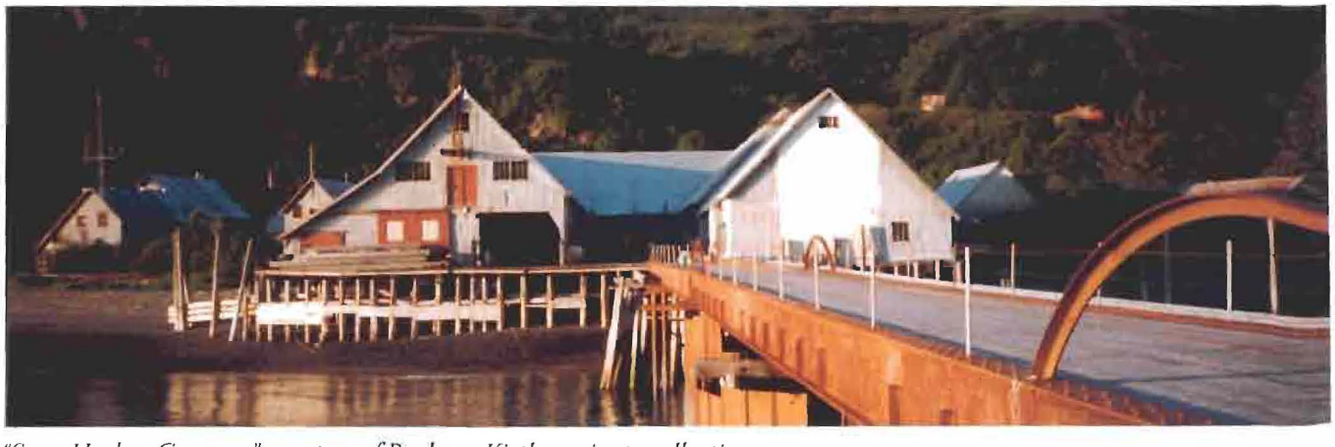
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"Snug Harbor Cannery" courtesy of Barbara Kistler, private collection



"Tender full of fish," courtesy of Dorothy Fribrock, private collection.

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Jeanne M. Schaaf
Cultural Resources Manager
June, 2005



"Fish," Barbara Kistler, private collection.

