

**UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE**  
**ALEUT IDENTITY AND INDIGENOUS COMMERCIAL**  
**FISHERIES**

**Katherine L. Reedy-Maschner**

**Pembroke College**

**This dissertation is submitted for the degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**in**

**Department of Social Anthropology**

**UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE**

**2004**



# ALEUT IDENTITY AND INDIGENOUS COMMERCIAL FISHERIES

Katherine L. Reedy-Maschner  
Pembroke College

## Summary

The 21<sup>st</sup> century Aleut of the Alaska Peninsula and eastern Aleutian islands are dependant on an indigenous commercial fishery, arguably one of the world's most volatile industries. While continuing to harvest traditional foods, they have translated a long relationship with the sea into commercial enterprise that permeates every aspect of Aleut life, from family relations to engagement with the global community.

This study traces the fisheries as they relate to the expression of individual and community relations and to the development and experience of Aleut identity in the Aleut fishing village of King Cove, Alaska. I thus argue that the term 'identity' itself requires definition within a specific cultural milieu. For the Aleut, commercial fishing has become a cultural system in which participation and success are sources of pride and family connectivity, as well as food and cash. I examine how status structures within the fishing franchise both shape individual and community identity and underpin social relations. As such, I argue that striving for status forms a foundational aspect of these processes. In this context, I propose alternative explanations for identity development that include the important relationship between status as something that is both an aspect of personal identity as well as part of the structure of community identity.

As *commercial* fishermen, who are not only involved in market exchange but in capitalist enterprise, this is an unconventional primary self-definition within the Alaska Native community, which affects how they are seen and defined by others. I am thus challenging the assumption that Alaskan indigeneity is inextricably linked to 'subsistence' and contributing to the on-going critical discussions about indigeneity within anthropology more generally.

These indigenous peoples are highly modernized and embedded in global processes, which negatively affect their access to fisheries. The potential loss of identity tied to a marine ecosystem—through changes in marine productivity, market forces, management plans, and environmental policies—is creating social conflict, economic burdens, and political pressures for the Eastern Aleut. I therefore examine behavioural responses, both positive and negative, to changes of fisheries access, policy, and local systems of status and identity. Aleut communities are struggling to claim an indigenous identity that encompasses their entire way of life: one that is based on progressive commercial interests. Here I explore how the Aleut fight to be recognized as indigenous people and as legitimate commercial fishermen, and struggle to combat damaging policies set forth by environmental groups and government agencies. A major finding of this study is that the struggle to preserve local rights to commercial fisheries has become indistinguishable from social and cultural requirements.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES.....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>vii-xi</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1. NAUTICAL NATION: INDIGENOUS COMMERCIAL FISHING IN AN EASTERN ALEUT COMMUNITY.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction to the Aleut World:	
1.2 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Fishermen	
1.3 Research Questions and Theoretical Framework: Identity and Status	
1.4 Culture Change and Conflict	
1.5 Method	
1.6 Organization	
<b>CHAPTER 2. IDENTITY, STATUS and the structure of TRADITIONAL ALEUTIAN SOCIETY IN ETHNOHISTORY.....</b>	<b>39</b>
2.1 ‘Historical’ Identity	
2.2 Through Russian Spy Glasses and into Aleutian History: Incestuous Sourcing and Historiographical Issues	
2.3 Pre-Russian Period (Prehistory to A.D. 1741): Social Complexity and Identity	
2.4 Russian Period (A.D. 1741-1867): Reorganization	
2.5 Early American Period (A.D. 1867-1950)	
2.6 The Cannery Period	
2.7 Renewing an Historical Identity	
<b>CHAPTER 3. ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE PELAGIC ZONE.....</b>	<b>72</b>
3.1 The Fishing Nexus	
3.2 Political Structures	
3.3 Indigenous Commercial Economies	
3.4 Fishermen and the Cannery: Strained symbiosis	
3.5 Fishing Vessels and the Harbor House	
3.6 The King Cove Fleet: Salmon fishing, gear and vessels	
3.7 The June Fishery	
3.8 Alternatives: Crabbing and Groundfish	
3.9 Fisheries Economics	
3.10 Discussion: Politics at Sea and the Passion for Piscary	
<b>CHAPTER 4. LIMITED ENTRY SYSTEMS in an EASTERN ALEUT COMMUNITY..</b>	<b>122</b>
4.1 Limited Entry Systems	
4.2 Life Cycles, Opportunities and Limitations	
4.3 Family Organization	

- 4.4 Rank, Leadership and Village Politics between the Land and the Sea
- 4.5 Status and Money between the Land and the Sea
- 4.6 Perfect Drift

**CHAPTER 5. FISH WARS, IDENTITY AND DEHUMANIZATION.....155**

- 5.1 Global pressure
- 5.2 Salmon Wars and “Chum Chucking”
- 5.3 The Ocean’s *Posse Comitatus* and Aleuts Under “House Arrest”
- 5.4 Reluctant Politicians
- 5.5 Looking Forward
- 5.6 Conclusion

**CHAPTER 6. DISENFRANCHISED ALEUTS.....187**

- 6.1 Aleut Identity in the Face of Socioeconomic Vulnerability
- 6.2 A Generation Adrift
- 6.3 Family
- 6.4 Good Fishermen are not Drunk Fishermen
- 6.5 Culture and Crime
- 6.6 Court and Criminal Data
- 6.7 Social conflict and fishing?
- 6.8 ‘Anchorage’s Next Street People’?
- 6.9 Conclusion

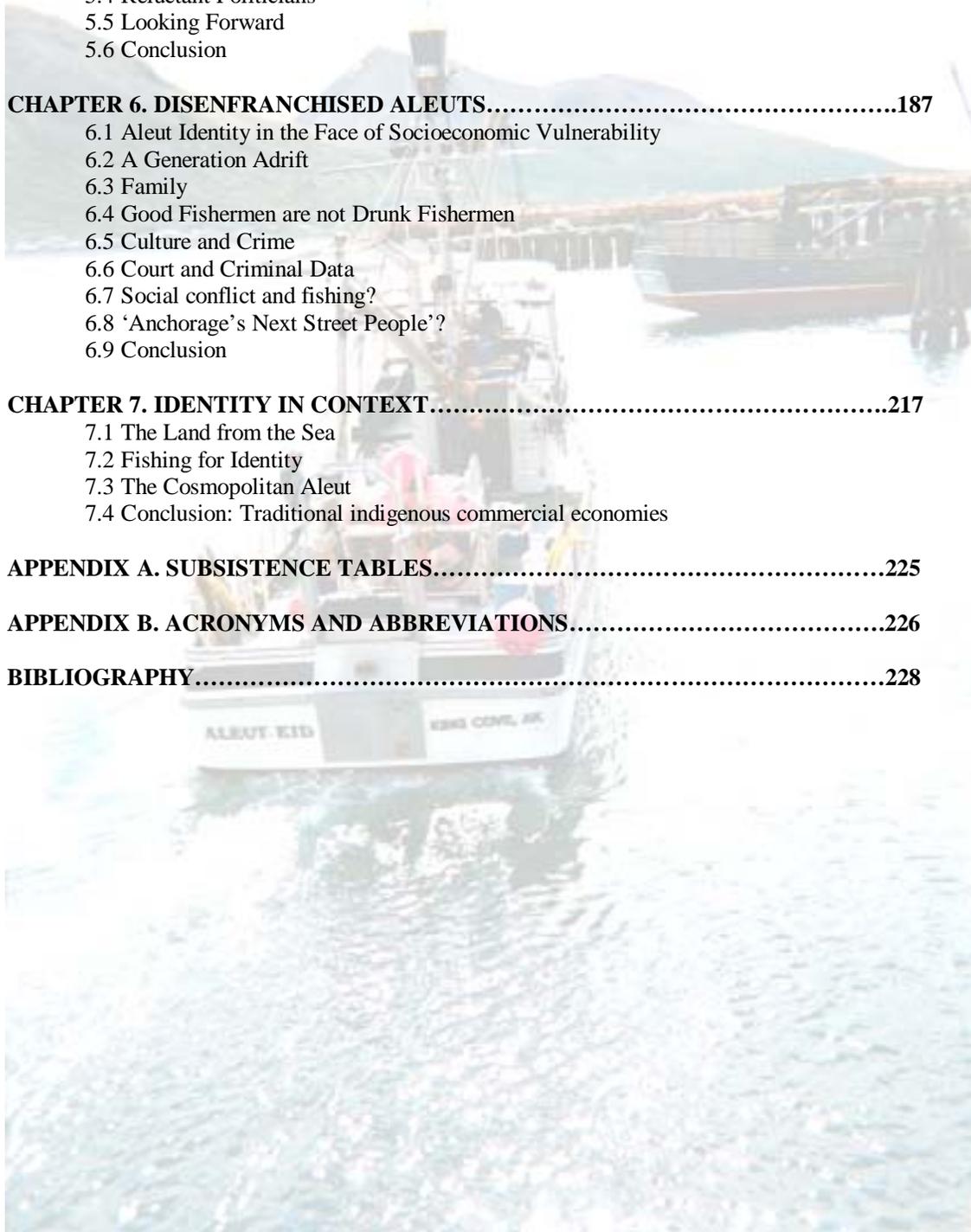
**CHAPTER 7. IDENTITY IN CONTEXT.....217**

- 7.1 The Land from the Sea
- 7.2 Fishing for Identity
- 7.3 The Cosmopolitan Aleut
- 7.4 Conclusion: Traditional indigenous commercial economies

**APPENDIX A. SUBSISTENCE TABLES.....225**

**APPENDIX B. ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS.....226**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY.....228**



## LIST OF FIGURES

- 1.1 Map of the western Alaska Peninsula and Aleutian Archipelago
- 1.2 Detailed Map of the Eastern Aleutian Region
- 1.3 King Cove, Alaska, Summer 2002, photo by Jane Trumble
- 1.4 Aleut Dancers with ABC's *Good Morning America* camera crew, June 2002
  
- 2.1 Map of Ethnohistoric Place Names
- 2.2 Political Timeline
- 2.3 Photo of a fish trap in operation, provided by Tommy Dobson
- 2.4 Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century King Cove and the cannery, provided by Tommy Dobson
- 2.5 Fisheries Timeline
- 2.6 Russian Orthodox Church in King Cove, Alaska
  
- 3.1 Map of waters and lands
- 3.2 Annual cycle of subsistence/commercial harvesting in King Cove
- 3.3 Example of the processing and distribution of salmon from a single fisherman
- 3.4 Example of a crewman supplying households with subsistence foods
- 3.5 Subsistence salmon harvests (numbers of fish) in King Cove per year, 1985-2002.
- 3.6 and 3.7 F/V *Catherine J* and F/V *Ocean Pride*
- 3.8 Boat model made by Paul Tcheripanoff, King Cove. Photo by Della Trumble
- 3.9 Relationship of permit transferors to transferees for all salmon permit types, 1980-2000
- 3.10 Alaska Peninsula/Aleutian Permit holder's Residency, 2000
- 3.11 Example of a purse seine crew, King Cove salmon fleet
- 3.12 Example of a set gillnetting crew, King Cove salmon fleet
- 3.13 Example of a drift gillnetting crew, King Cove salmon fleet
- 3.14 Number of vessels, average length and median length, 1990-2002
- 3.15 Average number of gear types per vessel, 1990-2002
- 3.16 Contrasted crab boats heading for the Bering Sea, 2000
- 3.17 Pounds landed for crab, groundfish and salmon in King Cove, 1981-2001
- 3.18 Ex-vessel value to King Cove fishermen for crab, groundfish and salmon, 1981-2001
- 3.19 Number of permits held and fished by King Cove fishermen, 1981-2001
  
- 4.1 Age/Sex Distribution, King Cove, Alaska, 2000
- 4.2 Children's boat model contest, Fourth of July party, King Cove 2002
- 4.3 Frances Larsen holds up a piece of *ulla*, or whale meat, while also processing king salmon.
- 4.4 Jarred salmon, 2002. Photo by Lisa Wilson
- 4.5 Sociogram of a sorority family indicating fishing assets and sharing, winter 2002/2003
- 4.6 Corporate Family fishing group #1
- 4.7 Corporate Family fishing group #2
- 4.8 King Cove Harbour, Spring 2002
  
- 5.1 Map showing Areas M and AYK, with AYK's 2000 designated disaster area
- 5.2 Steps to conserve chums in the Area M salmon fishery
- 5.3 Bumper sticker distributed by the Aleutians East Borough, 2000
- 5.4 'Don't Shoot Sea Lions': Sticker attached to a seiner's wheelhouse, King Cove harbour
  
- 6.1 Three-year activity report, King Cove Police Department, 1999-2001
- 6.2 Monthly Breakdown of Calls/Incidents to the KCPD, 1997-2000
- 6.3 Offender sex and age data for numbers of crimes between 1990 and 2002, King Cove
- 6.4 Civil and Criminal cases of domestic violence filed by King Cove residents, 1990-2002
- 6.5 Number of domestic violence cases involving King Cove residents filed by court location, 1990-2002
- 6.6 Total reported crimes versus number of fishing vessels, 1990-2001
- 6.7 Relationship between groundfish pounds harvested and crimes, 1990-2001

## **LIST OF TABLES**

- 2.1 Population table of Aleut villages through time
- 3.1 Partial List of cost estimates of subsistence activities, 2002.
- 3.2 Basic Capital cost estimates for entering Area M, commercial salmon fisheries, 2002
- 4.1 and 4.2 Frequencies of divorce and marriage in the Aleutians East Borough, 1995-1999
- 4.3 Comparing numbers of descendants for 20 fishermen issued permits in 1973 versus 20 men who were not.
- 5.1 Subsistence regulations from Areas AYK and M
- 5.2 Eastern Aleutian fishermen voters by House and Senate Districts
- 6.1 Survey Results regarding community concerns for Youth, EATS, 1999
- 6.2 Number of male and female plaintiffs/petitioners in domestic violence cases filed, 1990-2002

## Foreword and Acknowledgements

Cold Bay, North Pacific, June 4—aboard the F/V *Aleut Kid*.

Our Aleut fishermen friend picked us up at the dock in Cold Bay, Alaska, a long, unprotected deep water port where the logistics of getting a baby from a high dock down a slippery ladder onto a rocking boat with a strong wind blowing was enough to make me want to turn around and go home. I watched anxiously from the deck of the boat as my husband Herb attached a rope to the baby backpack and lifted the pack onto his back with 10-month-old Alexander strapped in. Herb's camp manager Russ held the rope on the dock while Herb and Alex descended the ladder.

Now that we are on board and sipping coffee in the warm, dry wheelhouse, I relax a bit, but clutch my son tightly. This boat seems to plow through the water rather than rock on the surface, and for the first time, I don't reach for the Dramamine. Finally, I relinquish my son to the captain who holds Alex on his lap while steering the boat, and cracks the window to let the air and sea spray on his face. Later, I lay down with him on a bunk and let the boat rock him to sleep.

We are on our way to King Cove, my research site of the past two years, before dropping my husband and two of his crew off at his remote archaeological field camp. For the next six weeks, he will be unreachable, only able to call me on his satellite phone at \$5 per minute. On board with us is an Aleut man who was raised in Cold Bay and has volunteered his labour on my husband's crew. He was not told that he was Aleut until he was a teenager, and has spent the last three decades making up for lost time. He is now an expert kayak (*baidarka*) builder and basket weaver and teaches these crafts at the Alaska Native Heritage Center in Anchorage. The boat captain remembered going to their unplumbed, non-electrified house years ago. "There was a dead seal hanging in the kitchen, a big ole bull kelp cooking on the stove that your dad sliced up to eat." He shook his head. "They were eating *old* Aleut food. We don't eat that stuff anymore."

Looking out across the water, we see land that my husband and I have surveyed for ancient Aleut sites, having plodded over hummocky tundra in rain and wind, mapping hundreds of ancient villages, camps, historical trapping cabins and World War II debris. For most of our time in the Aleutian region, we have looked out at the sea from the land. But now it strikes me, after so many boat rides, that for thousands of years, this has been the view of the Aleut: the land from the sea.

This was also the view of my grandfather's, the sailor Ralph Croner, from the 1930s to the 1960s. He was a Merchant Marine navigation officer and served all over the Pacific Rim on everything from the Bureau of Indian Affairs ship the U.S.S. *Pribilof* to the geodetic survey ship the U.S.S. *Explorer* to the F/V *Cyrus*, a seagoing tug that had been converted into a crabbing vessel, the only ship he ever captained. He also served on Alaska Marine Highway ferries, the M/V *Matanuska* and the M/V *Tustumena*. The latter ferry still serves the Alaska Peninsula and Aleutian chain based out of Homer. A month and a half before the present trip, my husband, our son and I rode this very ship between King Cove and Cold Bay on our way home to Idaho to prepare for a two-week trip to Japan. The purpose of the trip was to bring back artefacts from an ancient Aleut

village in Port Moller excavated by Japanese archaeologists in the 1970s and 80s. My grandfather also spent a great deal of time in Japan, Korea and the Philippines on ships, where he insisted that the women fell hand over foot for him. He was very vain, and a swarm of “sweet little gals” always seemed to be on hand when he was choosing gifts for my mother and her siblings. He seemed to have a girlfriend in every Pacific port. Though he always said that Filipinos were “the most beautiful people in the world,” he came home to the old Croner homestead in Fairfield, Idaho, with a Korean woman and her daughter, much to the family’s horror. My step-grandmother was reportedly a laundress or a prostitute in Korea, the stories were unclear. Her name was Dung Nam, but my grandfather called her Tsunami, after the huge sea wave caused by undersea earthquakes or volcanic eruptions in the Pacific Ocean, shortened to Sue Nam.

Grandpa Ralph drove a car like he was steering a ship, making big wide turns. He called himself ‘Celestial Sam,’ even wrote a novel with himself as protagonist, and sang hilarious sea shanties. For every new endeavour he would always say, “I’m getting my sea legs.” In his younger days, he boxed professionally with the nickname ‘Sailor’. We all wondered if he had gotten the sense knocked completely out of him; he used to make belts and purses for us by seaman’s square knotting, but had a harder time remembering our names.

There is a strong oral tradition in my family; we are storytellers. Most of what I know of Grandpa Ralph comes from stories of my uncles, aunts, mother and grandmother, stories repeated hundreds of times with the same gestures, pauses and punch lines that I now find myself repeating. I wish I had paid closer attention while he was alive. Grandpa Ralph was in the Pribilofs where he squeamishly witnessed a fur seal harvest, and used to tell stories of islands with no trees, just wind. Many Aleut elders in King Cove remembered a few my grandfather’s ships passing through, and one geodetic survey ship that anchored near King Cove for a winter.

When I tell people in the Aleutians that I am from Idaho, often the response is “ah, inland,” followed by a declaration that they could never be landlocked. I like to think that I inherited some of my grandfather’s love of the sea, if not his sea legs. I get seasick and my grandmother says with heavy emphasis, “So did he.” I get homesick for the smells, the harbour and the boats even though I grew up not just inland, but in arid southern Idaho amidst sagebrush, and I never learned to swim.

My interest in the Aleutians began in 1995 while an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and volunteered my summers on archaeological field projects on the lower Alaska Peninsula and Unimak Island, the easternmost in the Aleutian chain. Growing tired of tent life and pining for civilization I began to focus on the modern Aleut villages.

This project evolved from a study of interpersonal violence and crime in Eastern Aleut society using a combination of diverse theoretical perspectives and methodologies to one in which violence and crime are two lines of information in a broad analysis of the processes and consequences of social, cultural and economic change. Proposals rarely survive the field. Variable levels of violence and crime have been quantitatively established for Eastern Aleutian villages, but

preliminary research lead to the discovery that there is less violence and crime than anticipated and, though important, is only part of a story of Aleut identity that needs to be told. My focus shifted to one of defining Eastern Aleut identity and what happens when that identity is threatened both internally and externally, and extended to a study of social disenfranchisement and threats to individual status, culture and community.

This research examines theoretical perspectives not yet applied to the realm of culture change among Alaska Natives or American Indians. Secondly, the examination also provides an understanding of what cultural persistence is, the conditions under which it occurs in its great variety, and the consequences of change from the perspective of the local Aleut population. Eastern Aleut culture can no longer be separated from the commercial fishing economy.

Though I had considerable experience in the region in other capacities, dissertation fieldwork began in the spring of 2000. ‘Gatekeepers’ were contacted, many of whom I had previous experience with. Attendance at relevant public meetings in King Cove and in Anchorage was invaluable. Partway through fieldwork, I received a National Science Foundation grant; application was made possible by being granted a research affiliation on the Idaho State University Anthropology faculty, otherwise impossible as a student at a foreign university.

During the spring, summer and fall, I lived in the village of King Cove, first at the Fleet’s Inn Hotel owned by the King Cove Corporation, then with the tribal council administrator and her daughter, punctuated by stays in a small house belonging to an elder when she was staying in Anchorage. In the winter of 2000, my husband and I learned that we were going to have a baby. Despite my doctor’s green light to continue my research, a visit in the winter of 2001 to the village of False Pass was interrupted by medical concerns and I had to return home to Idaho for tests. I was able to return to King Cove soon thereafter for several weeks before it was decided that I should return to Idaho to be close to my husband and my doctor. To my surprise and gratitude, concern for my own well being resonated throughout King Cove. I requested and was granted permission to intermit from the University of Cambridge the summer of 2001 before our son was born. In the winter and spring of 2002, research resumed with baby in tow with visits to Sand Point, Nelson Lagoon and King Cove through the end of summer 2002 and again in 2003.

The notion of being incorporated into a Native family, as so many arctic anthropologists have been (I think somewhat self-indulgently, for example Briggs 1970:20 “I rather hoped I might discover myself Eskimo at heart.”), is not part of the Aleut way. I lived with a few families in several extended households, cared for their children, helped with life plans and college applications, and participated fully in household duties. A great deal of my time was spent in the household of the most politically active woman in the village and with her extended family. The people of King Cove welcomed my husband and me and liked how we divided our attention between “studying the living and studying the dead.” At the same time, they were ‘hands off’; they

were willing to be interviewed, to tell stories, and to share ideas, but they did not want to be inconvenienced too much.

Fieldwork was supported by the Wyse Fund Fieldwork Grant and the Richards Fund, Department of Social Anthropology; the H.M. Chadwick Fund, Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic; and the Ridgeway-Venn Travel Studentship, all of the University of Cambridge. This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation, Arctic Social Sciences grant OPP-0094826. Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and do not reflect the views of the National Science Foundation. This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated in the text.

I am extremely grateful to everyone at Peter Pan Seafoods, Inc. for their interest and support, and for the free meals in the mess hall. I thank the many residents and transients of King Cove, especially Della and Trisha Trumble; Rick and Theckla Koso; Jim and Kathie Gould; Kathy, Ginger, LeAnna and Larry Bear; Alex and Mattie Samuelson; Cindy Samuelson; Marvin and Walda Hoff; Lawrence and Frances Larsen; Tommy Dobson; Gordon Berntsen, Sr.; Vernon and Lisa Wilson; Melvin and Lou Ann Koso; Big Shot Mack; Margaret Gould; Leslie Bennett; the entire Mack family; and Eddie, Glen and the Harbor House crowd for their friendship and generosity. The King Cove Corporation, the Agdaagux Tribal Council, the Aleutians East Borough, especially Bob Juetner, Eastern Aleutian Tribes, and the King Cove Police Department provided invaluable support. The City of False Pass and Lotta Hines were very generous to me. In Sand Point, I thank David and Susie Osterback, Alvin and Marie Osterback, Peggy Osterback, and Marilyn Larsen. Aleut artist/police officer Mike Livingston from the Anchorage Police Department generously guided me through the Alaska Court System and the Alaska Department of Public Safety. I also thank Lucinda Neel from Fish & Game in Kodiak. Jane Trumble and Lisa Wilson provided beautiful photos. Barney Mack graciously dug out an old suitcase full of pictures to share. The late, beloved Cindy Samuelson spent many an hour pouring over genealogies with me, and Marilyn Larsen of Sand Point offered her impressive accumulation of family histories, genealogies, and immigration records from years of her own work. Some boat sketches are my freehand adaptations from ADF&G's pamphlet on commercial boats and others are my own.

My supervisor, Barbara Bodenhorn, pushed me in new directions with her usual thoughtfulness and rigor. The Department of Social Anthropology and Pembroke College, Cambridge, provided a dream academic environment. Special thanks also to Loraine Gelsthorpe for careful commentary and to Anthony Webster for final edits. My gratitude to Idaho State University's Anthropology Department, especially the late Teri Hall, for granting me an affiliation and commenting on drafts. Appreciation also goes to Fae Korsmo, Chris and Ann Chippindale, Allen McCartney, Heidi Helmandollar, Gillian Wallace, Edward Reedy, Bill Simeone, Owen and Stephanie Mason, Sharon Plager, James Laidlaw, Piers Vitebsky, and fellow students at

Cambridge. I must also express thanks to my husband's dynamic crew of archaeologists, geomorphologists, and biologists who occasionally made King Cove base camp and managed to make themselves infamous during their stays, especially Garrett Knudsen, Amber Tews, Jim Jordan, and David Johnson. My wonderful husband Herb Maschner introduced me to the Aleutians and has supported me in immeasurable ways; nothing I could say here would adequately describe his love, humour and encouragement. Hugs and kisses to my son Alexander Beowulf Maschner, my patient, adorable research assistant who continues to show enthusiasm for eating all kinds of Aleut foods, raw and cooked, and who willingly travels all over the planet with his parents.