

Dock — PRIIS'tanaq

PARAGUUTAT PRIISTANANUN TAITAARTUT. – THE BOATS COME TO THE DOCK



Photo. Children on the dock in Ouzinkie, ca. 1960.
Smith Collection, courtesy of Tim and Norman Smith.

In Alutiiq communities, where boats are essential for travel, subsistence activities, and work at sea, docks are a necessity. Although Alutiiq people once landed their skin-covered boats on the beach and stored them around their houses, docking facilities are now a common part of rural communities. For example, in Larsen Bay, residents can tie their boats up to a large pier maintained by Kodiak Salmon Packers or use a slip in the new small boat harbor, completed in 2002. The city of Old Harbor maintains docking facilities that can accommodate barges from Kodiak and Seattle, as well as fifty-five smaller vessels. Port Lions has eighty-two boat slips and a pier large enough to accommodate the state ferry Tustumena.

In addition to being a central community facility, Old Harbor's community dock is the setting for an annual summer gathering. Each Fourth of July, following a Russian Orthodox Church service dedicated to local fishermen, residents walk down to the boat harbor. Here they watch a procession of purse seiners participating in a blessing of the fleet. Boats pass along the big ship dock, where a priest sprinkles each with holy water. The audience sings and waves flags. Then the ships line up for a race back to the dock. The ritual is intended to ensure a safe journey and a quick return for those who make their living at sea.