

School — Skauluq (N), Skuuluq (S)

NAATA GUANGKUTA SKAULURLUTA. – WE SHOULD ALL GO TO SCHOOL.



Photo: Karluk school house. Clyda Christiansen Collection.

Russian entrepreneur Gregorii Shelikhov established the first European-style school in the Kodiak region in the 1780s. Young boys taken hostage by Russian traders or enrolled in the school by their fathers learned to speak, read, and write in Russian and studied mathematics, carpentry, and navigation with the goal of becoming sailors. In 1794, Russian Orthodox clergy took over the school.

By the turn of the twentieth century, American missionaries also had established schools on Kodiak. The Baptist mission school on Woody Island is the best known, but there was also a mission school in Ouzinkie. Federally funded government schools, designed to educate children through the eighth grade, developed in the early twentieth century. Like mission schools, these institutions sought to acculturate Native youth, teaching a largely foreign, western curriculum and forbidding the use of the Alutiiq language.

Students who wished to continue their education beyond the eighth grade had to leave home for boarding school, most commonly the Mt. Edgecombe school in Sitka. Although the federal government paid for boarding school, many students did not have the money to return home for vacations and did not see their families for years. An entire Alutiiq generation grew up far from their communities. When they returned home, they felt like outsiders. There were few jobs that required the skills students had acquired in school, and they had not learned the traditional skills that teenagers once acquired in village settings. Today there is a school in every Alutiiq community, allowing most children to complete their high school education at home.