

Ship — Skuunaq (schooner), Raa'uciq (sailboat)

SKUUNAQ TANG'RK'GKA. – I SAW THE SHIP.



Photo: Sailing ships at the dock in Kodiak, ca. 1940.
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Sailing ships were a common sight in Kodiak waters in the historic era. Russian traders traveled to Alaska aboard wooden vessels that carried men, provisions, weapons, and smaller boats for coastal exploration. The Alutiiq word for ship, *skuunaq*, comes from the word “schooner,” as does the Alutiiq name for the city of Kodiak, *Sun'aq*, because Kodiak was a port with many sailing ships and a place where ships were built. Russian entrepreneurs had a small shipyard on Woody Island where they built sailing ships to transport goods both in Alaska and back to Russia.

What did Alutiiq people make of the first ships to sail Kodiak waters? Johann Heinrich Holmberg, a Finnish naturalist who visited Kodiak in the summer of 1851, learned of an early encounter from Elder Arsentí Aminak. Aminak was a boy of about ten when a Russian ship wintered around Alitak Bay. He recalled that the boat confused the Alutiiq people. At first, they thought it was some type of odd whale and paddled out to see it. Upon closer inspection, however, they decided it was a monster, with a very bad smell and strange occupants who blew smoke from their

mouths: sailors smoking pipes.

An Alutiiq song passed down through generations also recalls early interactions with sailing ships and the sadness women felt when ships transported Alutiiq men far from home. The song says, “These schooners are making me cry . . . because of my boyfriend. What am I going to do afterwards? They’re taking my boyfriend away.”