

Accordion — KaRmauniat (N), KaRmuuniat (S)

NICK KARMAUNIARTARTUQ. – NICK (HABITUALLY) PLAYS THE ACCORDION.



Photo: Accordion player and family. Nekeferoff Collection. AM670.

In the mid-twentieth century, dances were popular events in Alutiiq communities, and many villages held weekly dances. Fridays were sock hop nights because Saturday evenings were reserved for religious services. Other dances might be scheduled around community events. During the Second World War, for example, Old Harbor organized dances when the servicemen stationed on Sitkalidak Island came to town for supplies. Dancing was particularly popular with young people, and some communities operated dance halls from the 1930s to the 1950s.

Music was a central part of community dances. Young men enjoyed playing instruments. Entertaining others and putting on a show was also a good way to meet young women! The most famous Alutiiq musicians were accordion players, who used either small round accordions or larger twelve-key instruments. Historic accounts suggest that accordion playing became popular in the 1890s when the typical instrument cost about \$3.50. Alutiiq men also taught themselves how to play the mandolin, ukulele, banjo, guitar, and harmonica. They learned songs from records

or other musicians, playing everything from Hank Williams tunes to square dances, polkas, and schottisches.

Live entertainment faded after World War II as television became more widely available. A few musicians continued to play accordions and guitars, performing at special events like weddings.