

Alutiig Museum



Exhibit Guide

Tamamta Liitukut. — Everyone is Learning



Iluani Inside

Cama'i	1
About Us	2
Kula'irluni – Visit	3
Activities	4
Museum Manners	5
Floor Plan	6
Visitor Areas	7
Picipet – Our Ways	8
Cuumillat – Ancestors ..	9
Llarpet – Our World	10
Qayat – Kayaks	11
Suupet – People	12
Ciqlluat – Sod Houses ..	13
Anerneq – Spirit	15
Unigkuat – Legends	16
Conquest	18
American Era	20
Keneq – Fire	23
Ancestors' Memorial ...	25
Resources	26



Cuqllirpaat Qik'rtarmiuwat The First Islanders

The Alutiiq/Sugpiaq people have a rich living culture. Alutiiq people honor their ancestors and their heritage. Yet, Alutiiq culture is also part of the present. Our traditions are shaped by opportunities, challenges, and the experiences of every Alutiiq person. About 2,000 Alutiiq people live in the Kodiak region today. Thousands more live across Alaska, the Pacific Northwest, and beyond. Our exhibits help you explore the Alutiiq world and share it with your students. This guide provides a preview with themes, text, and images from the displays.



Cama'i Hello

Before the Alutiiq Museum opened there were few places to learn about the Alutiiq/Sugpiaq world. Information about Kodiak's Native heritage was hard to access—preserved in the knowledge of Elders, and stored in archaeological sites and distant museums. Today, the Alutiiq Museum provides accurate accessible information on Alutiiq culture and opportunities for cultural exploration for people of all heritages.



As educators, you are important partners in our work. When you introduce students to the history of their home, you invite them to see the world in new ways. You challenge assumptions and help students consider how the past has shaped the present. We developed this exhibit guide to assist you. It will connect you to the museums' displays and gallery resources. Remember this is a starting point. Our staff can help you tailor a visit to the museum, design a classroom project that supports your curriculum, or facilitate a research project. Please let us know how we can work together.

Quyanaa tailuci. – Thank you for coming.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "April Laktonen".

April Laktonen Counciller
Executive Director

About Us

Our Mission

The Alutiiq Museum preserves and shares the heritage and living culture of the Alutiiq/Sugpiaq people.

Our Vision

Celebrating heritage through living culture.

Philosophy

Accurate knowledge of the past is essential. History is a resource that can help people confront difficult issues, engage in discussions, and consider multiple perspectives. The museum's programs provide an honest exploration of the forces that shaped today's Alutiiq/Sugpiaq culture, and they help traditions thrive in the present. Our programs are open to everyone. We build respect and enthusiasm for Alutiiq culture among people of all heritages.

History

Established in 1995 by the Kodiak Area Native Association, the Alutiiq Museum is a nationally accredited cultural center in downtown Kodiak.

Founding Organizations

- Afognak Native Corporation
- Akhiok-Kaguyak, Inc.
- Kodiak Area Native Association
- Koniag
- Leisoni, Inc.
- Natives of Kodiak, Inc.
- Old Harbor Native Corporation
- Ouzinkie Native Corporation



Kula'irluni – Visit



The Alutiiq Museum provides scheduled tours for educational groups of all ages. Our guided gallery tours take about an hour and help students investigate Alutiiq history, language, and culture. Whether you are studying sea mammals, geology, weather, or storytelling, our experts can design a tour especially for your group. There is no charge for school groups.

Prepare

Educators are invited to visit the museum before bringing a class. Stop by to talk with our staff about topics for discussion and plan activities. There is no charge to preview our gallery.

Accessibility

The Alutiiq Museum is pleased to assist visitors with special needs. Our facilities are wheelchair accessible and we can make other accommodations to support visitors. Let us know how we can help.

Schedule

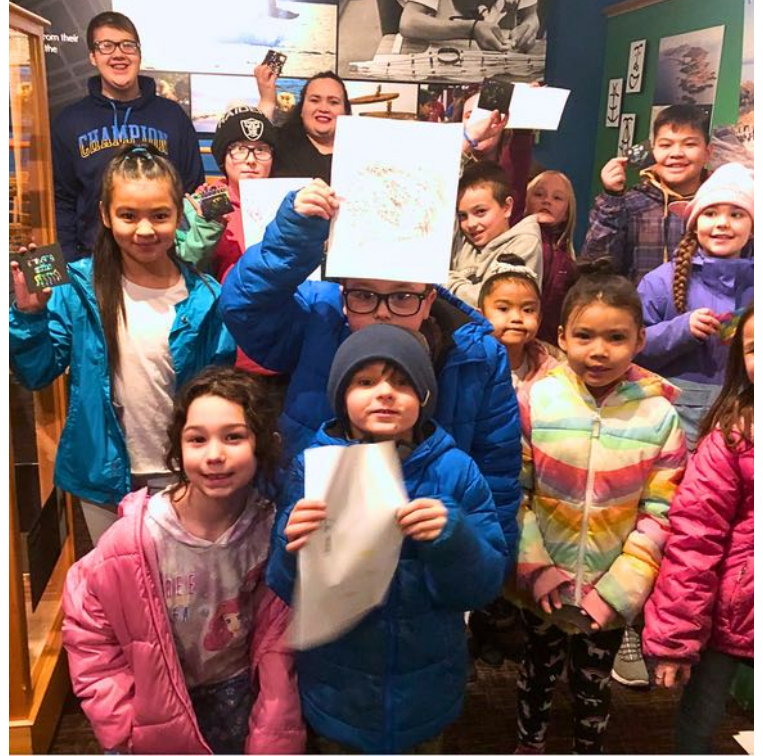
To request a tour, schedule online or email us at info@alutiiqmuseum.org. Schedule at least two weeks in advance.

alutiiqmuseum.org/museum/education/for-teachers/



Activities

Educational groups can participate in a gallery activity upon request. Please schedule in advance.



Ikukiu! – Find It!

Explore exhibits with a scavenger hunt. We'll provide pencils, clip boards, and clues that lead students through our displays to answer questions about Alutiiq culture.

Unakiu! – Touch It!

Students can learn about Alutiiq technology and manufacturing by handling stone and bone objects from ancestral settlements. Our experts will explain the tools and their uses.

Canakiu! – Make it!

Our gallery has a creation station where visitors can make an art card with petroglyph designs. Add your creation to a display to share with others, or take it home to enjoy.

See Behind the Scenes

Tours of our laboratory and collections vault can be scheduled for small groups (10 people or less) when staff are available. What is a museum? How do we care for objects? We'll explore these questions together.

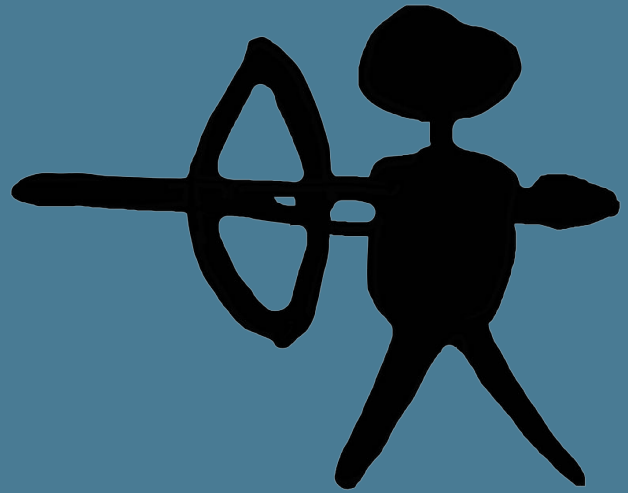


Museum Manners

The museum is a special place filled with unique cultural belongings and many visitors. For the safety of our patrons, staff, and collections please ask your group to follow these rules.

In the Lobby

- Bring adults to help chaperone your group. We recommend one adult for every eight students.
- Assemble your group in the lobby. Your tour guide will meet you here.
- Leave all coats, bags, umbrellas, food, drinks, and gum where directed by your guide. No food or drink is allowed in the gallery.
- Respectfully silence your phone/iPad.

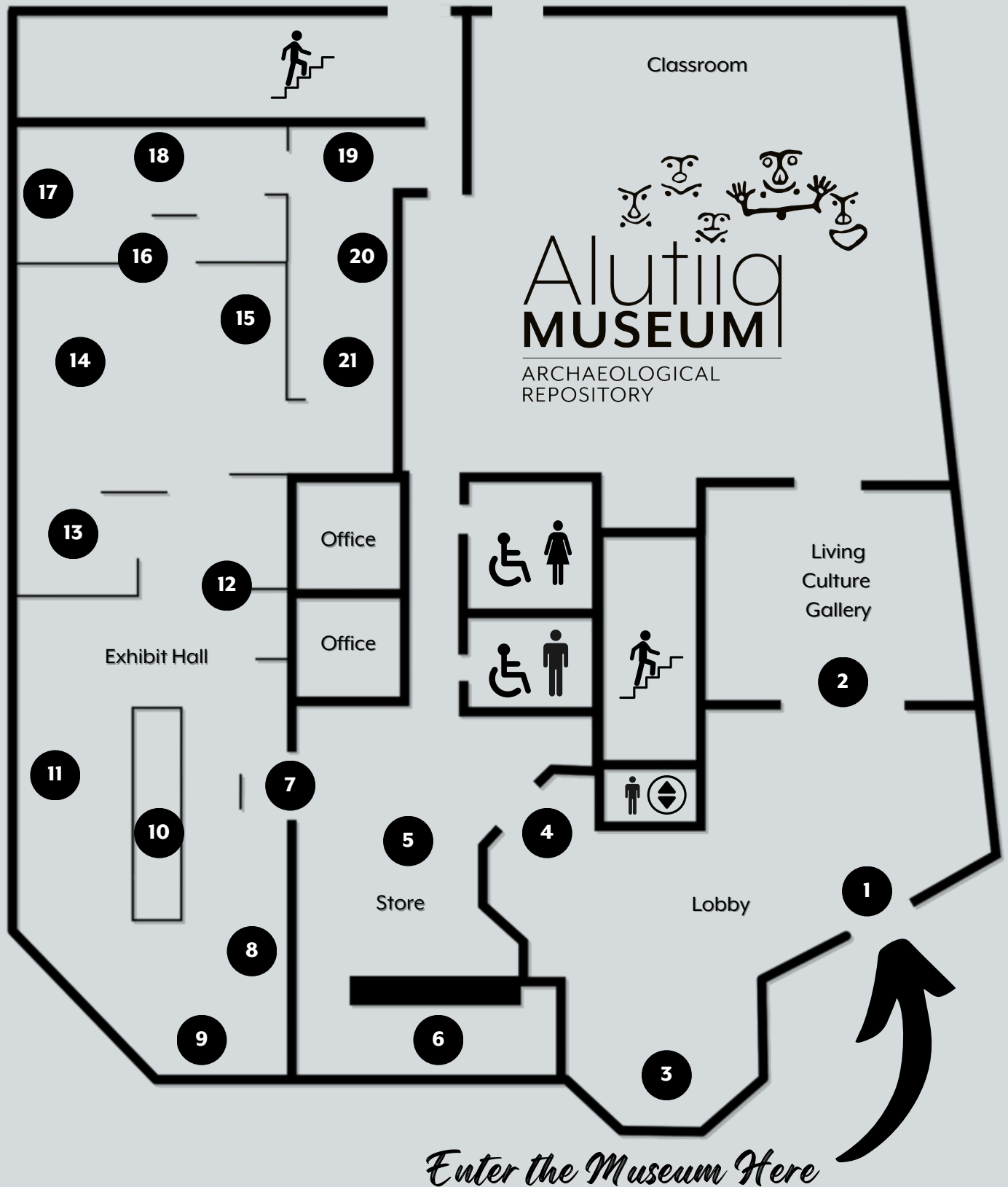


Oil and acrylic painting, Alvin Amason, 2016.

In the Gallery

- Stay with your group.
- Please walk. No running.
- Do not touch objects or displays unless you are invited.
- Use quiet indoor voices.
- Do not crowd the displays. Wait patiently for a turn to look.
- Photographs and videos are allowed without a flash.
- Be respectful of museum visitors. Other people may be enjoying our displays during your visit.

Floor Plan



Visitor Areas

- 
- 1 Museum Entrance**

The museum is a modern building in downtown Kodiak. We are a short walk from many local attractions and offer free parking beside our building. Enter through the glass doors below our logo.
 - 2 Living Culture Gallery**

Find visiting and locally curated shows in this free gallery.
 - 3 Mask Display**

Start your cultural orientation at the bronze mask. Tour groups will meet their guide here.
 - 4 Museum Entrance**

Enter here for our store and exhibit hall.
 - 5 Museum Store**

Our store features genuine, hand-crafted, Alutiiq artwork, books, clothes, toys, and more. There is no fee to visit the store. Please tell your students to shop at another time.
 - 6 Admissions**

Check in at our front desk. There is no charge for school groups.
 - 7 Exhibit Hall**

Our displays start here. Look for the map of Alaska and the video screen with our introductory film—Who Are We.
 - 8 Ancestors**

Explore Alutiiq history with ancestral tools.
 - 9 Rock Art**

Petroglyphs and stone carvings tell stories.
 - 10 Kayaks**

Craftspeople engineered boats for stormy waters from animal skins and driftwood.
 - 11 Harvesting**

Sea mammals, fish, birds, and berries feed Alutiiq families.
 - 12 At Home**

Sod houses provided a warm, dry place for families. Learn about their construction and play in our replica.
 - 13 People**

Communities had chiefs, healers, shamans, warriors, whalers, and spiritual leaders.
 - 14 Spiritual Life**

The Alutiiq universe is filled with spirits that guide life on Earth.
 - 15 Legends**

Storytelling shares history, values, and Alutiiq concepts of the world. Hear tales.
 - 16 Conquest**

Fur traders brought diseases, enslavement, Russian Orthodoxy, and new traditions.
 - 17 Villages**

Alutiiq people live in villages across Kodiak. Explore photos on a touch screen.
 - 18 American Era**

New industries, Western schools, introduced animals, and war transformed Kodiak.
 - 19 Light of Culture**

Stone oil lamps are a symbol of cultural endurance. See examples.
 - 20 Creation Station**

Make a piece of artwork to add to our gallery or to take home.
 - 21 Living Culture**

Explore the Alutiiq cultural renaissance and its history.

Picipet – Our Ways



Embroidery detail, Alutiiq Parka,
Etholen Collection, National Museum of Finland.

There is an Alutiiq/Sugpiaq way of living. Our worldview shapes how we harvest, care for our families, worship, and celebrate. It sustains us. The exhibit hall starts with displays tied to our values and traditions. Learn about our ancestors then explore galleries on harvesting, people, and spirituality.

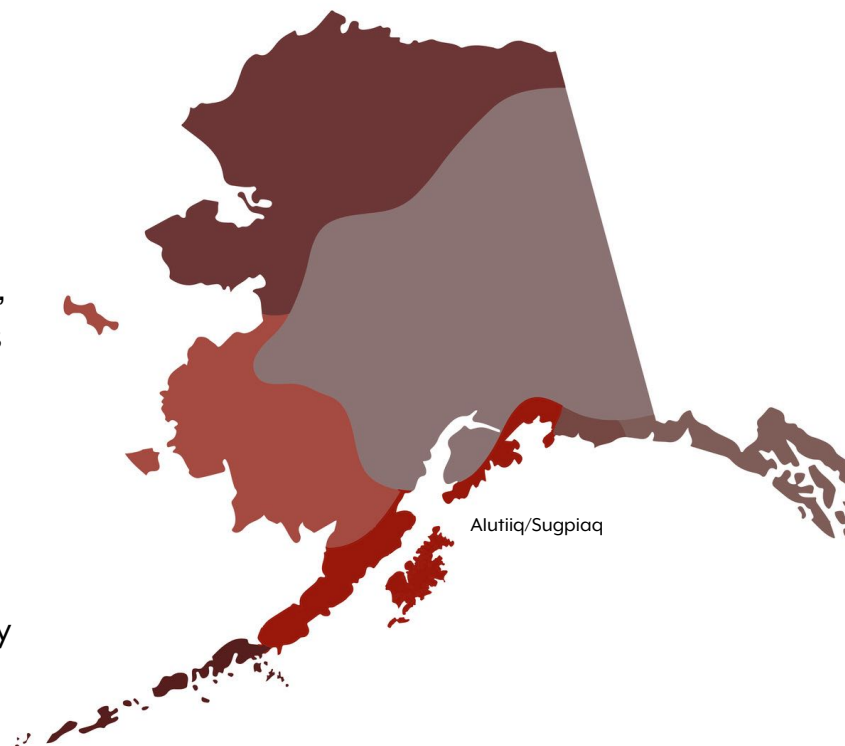
7 Alutiiq/Sugpiaq People

We are a maritime people who live in the central Gulf of Alaska. Our homelands include the Alaska Peninsula, the outer Kenai Peninsula, the Kodiak Archipelago, and Prince William Sound. Our ancestors settled here more than 7,500 years ago.

7 Who Are We?

What does it mean to be an Alutiiq/Sugpiaq person? This short film explores Alutiiq identity in the 21st century with interviews (9 minutes).

<https://vimeo.com/879488540>



Cuumillat Ancestors

Our ancestors settled Kodiak more than 7,500 years ago. Archaeological finds reveal their culture and how it changed.



Projectile points , Karluk Lake, Koniag collection.

8

Connections

Alaska's Native people are descended from ancient Siberians. Alaska's first settlers walked and paddled into North America when sea levels were much lower than today (see map). People were living around the Gulf of Alaska at least 10,000 years ago.

8

Alutiiq History

Alutiiq/Sugpiaq ancestors settled Kodiak from the Alaskan mainland. Over time, their communities thrived. People adapted to changing environments, resource fluctuations, and population growth by developing new technologies. Displays of artifacts trace our history through ancestral traditions—Ocean Bay, Kachemak, Koniag—to the colonial era.

9

Rock Art



Petroglyph carving began about 1,000 years ago. Alutiiq artists pecked images into the surface of shoreline boulders and rock faces leaving messages that are still present today. Learn about the different kinds of rock art and touch replicas.

Petroglyphs, Afognak Bay.



Llapet – Our World



Salmon in an Ouzinkie smokehouse.

We have deep ties to the waters, lands, and skies of Kodiak. Our homeland sustains us. Harvesting its plants and animals is a privilege. It requires skill, knowledge, and most of all respect. Harvesting is more than subsistence. It is suumacirpet—our way of living.

11 Fishing

Fish are abundant and predictable in the Kodiak region and an essential part of Alutiiq/Sugpiaq subsistence. Learn about the different fish we harvest, our seasonal fishing activities and tools, and how we preserve fish to feed our families in the winter.

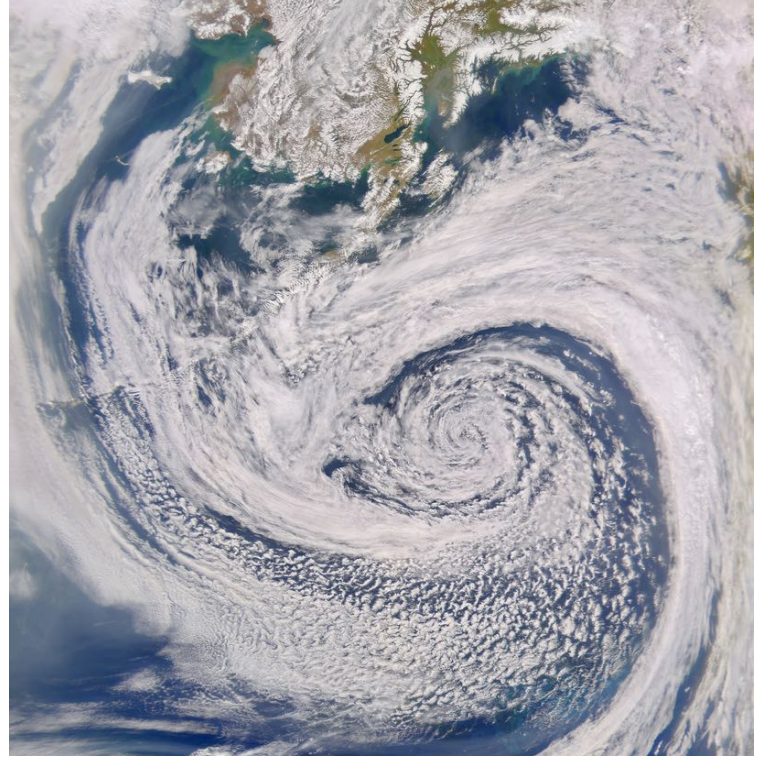
Commercial fishing and canning are an important part of our fishing traditions, and this exhibit explores our contributions.



Cleaning fish in Old Harbor. Rostad collection.

Qayat Kayaks

In Kodiak's stormy waters, sturdy boats, waterproof clothing, and knowledge of the weather are essential for ocean travelers.



Low pressure system in the Gulf of Alaska.
Courtesy of NASA.

A Heritage of Skin Boats

Our ancestors paddled long and slender kayaks built for the region's rough, windy waters. A split and upturned prow helped these boats cut through the waves. Long, slender, single-bladed paddles made deep, stabilizing strokes in rough water.

Boating Tools

To the deck of their boats, paddlers lashed harpoons, killing lances, quivers filled with arrows, fishing rigs, a stunning club, and an extra paddle. Inside the boat they carried survival gear—a bailer, containers of fresh water and food, sewing tools for emergency repairs, a bag of spare harpoon parts, and amulets for hunting luck.

Clothing

Waterproof clothing was part of every paddler's gear. People wore jackets made from water-resistant animal intestines with special waterproof stitches. The bottom of a jacket fit around the opening of a kayak. This prevented water from getting into the boat and warm air from leaving.

Paddlers in a double-hatched kayak, ca. 1889. Albatross Collection, National Archives.



Suupet – People



Simeonoff Family in Akhiok. Courtesy of Albert Simenoff.

We are connected to each other—to our family members, communities, and ancestors. Our strength comes from caring for each other. We share what we have, help those in need, and value the wisdom of our Elders. Ling’akutukut. — We respect each other.

12 Villages

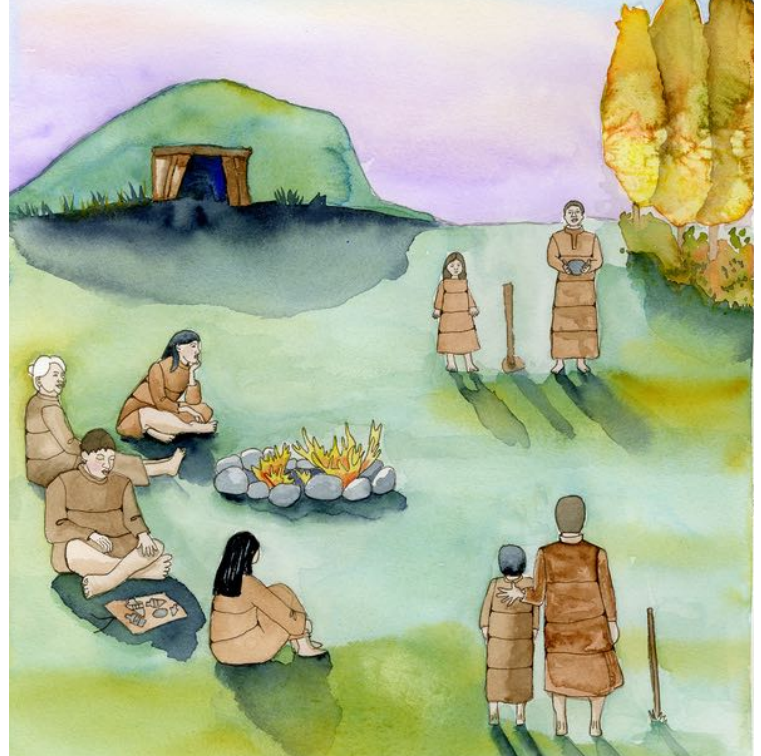
Our ancestors built their villages by the coast and along large rivers. They selected places with access to sea mammals and fish. Fresh water and a beach suitable for landing kayaks were also important. Villages ranged from small camps with a few houses to large settlements with many dwellings. Families often had two or more houses in different places—a winter house at a bay mouth and a fall house beside a salmon stream.



Old Harbor, ca. 1889.
Albatross Collection, National Archives.

Ciqlluat Sod Houses

From Kodiak to Greenland, Native peoples built warm, durable houses with blocks of sod.



An Alutiiq family playing yaamaq.
Watercolor by Cheryl Lacy.

Warm & Weatherproof

Sod houses were warm, waterproof dwellings with a driftwood frame and plank walls. The house was built partially underground, with the floor and sitting benches carved into the soil. The outside of the house had a thick, insulating cover of sod blocks and a thatched roof. People entered through a tunnel designed to keep cold air out.

Games

Games honed skills, encouraged physical fitness, reinforced spiritual beliefs, and varied with the seasons. Gaming remains part of life in Alutiiq communities. New games like bingo are popular, but many people enjoy ancestral games and Alutiiq versions of quu'uk—hide and seek, piuneq—tag, and laptuuk—baseball.



Wamwik—Place to Play

Our replica sod house is stocked with toys for our youngest visitors. Find dolls, puppets, puzzles, and Alutiiq games for hands-on exploration.

Puppets embroidered with Alutiiq animal names.



Suupet – People



Alutiiq family, ca 1917. McCubrey Collection.

Home Life

The large central room of a sod house was a family workspace and classroom. Here adults and children worked together to complete common tasks like cooking and toolmaking. Working beside family members of all ages, children learned essential skills.



Shaman's dolls, Karluk One site, Koniag Collection.

Social Roles

Alutiiq society had three classes: wealthy people, commoners, and enslaved people. From harvesting food to sharing a meal, giving gifts, or seating guests, social position structured daily life. Within this system, there were specialists—people with unique roles. Young people worked with an experienced mentor to learn skills.



Chief of Uganik and sons, ca. 1917. McCubrey Collection.

Political Life

Members of wealthy families were political leaders. They were selected by a council of community leaders for their character and skills. Leaders had to consult others, act thoughtfully, maintain order, and care for those in need. A person who failed to serve well was replaced.



Paddlers in an angyaq, Illustration by Eric Carlson.

Neighbors & Trade

Our ancestors traveled far in skin boats. Relationships with neighbors provided opportunities for harvesting and trade. Travelers formed alliances, built trading partnerships and arranged marriages. Some interactions led to warfare.

Auerueq – Spirit



Fog shrouded mountains of western Afognak Island.

We are spiritual people of diverse faiths. We honor our ancestral worldview. We share what we have, welcome everyone, and enjoy laughing. Trust is important to us. Llarpet allakat cali ling'akapet. – We respect our world and others.

14 Cosmology

The Alutiiq universe is multi-layered and filled with spirits. There are five worlds under the sea and five in the sky. Llam Sua is the most powerful spirit at the center of the universe. This all-knowing being lives in the fifth sky world, has exceptional vision, and can see and influence everything, including the weather. Alutiiq hunters asked Llam Sua for good weather. Shamans asked for spiritual assistance.



Anerueq – Spirit



Wood mask, Karluk One site, Koniag Collection.

Shamans

Shamans assisted others by interacting with the spirit world. These powerful, respected people could see the future, predict the weather, heal, and travel through their minds. Shamans could turn themselves into animals, send their souls to find lost people, and relay messages in a ball of fire.



Celebration in Akhiok. Rostad Collection.

Festivals

With harvesting complete, the winter festival season began. These gatherings were social and spiritual events. People visited, played games, feasted, sang, danced, and gave gifts. With special dance performances, communities thanked ancestors and animal spirits to ensure future harvesting success.



Dancing in the qasgiq, Illustration by Mark Matson.

Qasgiq – Community House

Many communities had a qasgiq, a gathering place for meetings and festivals. A wealthy family built and maintained the qasgiq. These special structures were like houses, but they were much larger. Some could hold up to a hundred people sitting on the floor and benches lining the walls.



Sadie Taqu Coyle. Portrait by Mike Haffeman.

Adornment

People shared messages with their clothing, jewelry, and body decorations. A person's dress or tattoos helped others determine their gender, family, and social status. It could also identify a friend or an enemy. Our legends warn about allanertat—strangers, people who can be helpful or harmful.

Unigkuat Legends

Before writing, people preserved history and traditions with storytelling.



Rainbow worm. Drawing by Nix Klemzak, 2021.

Quliyanguat–Stories

Stories share personal experiences—a bear hunt, childhood memories, the shaking caused by an earthquake, the bravery of a grandparent. Alutiiq stories are tied to daily life, known people, and events. People tell stories to entertain, share experiences, and teach history.

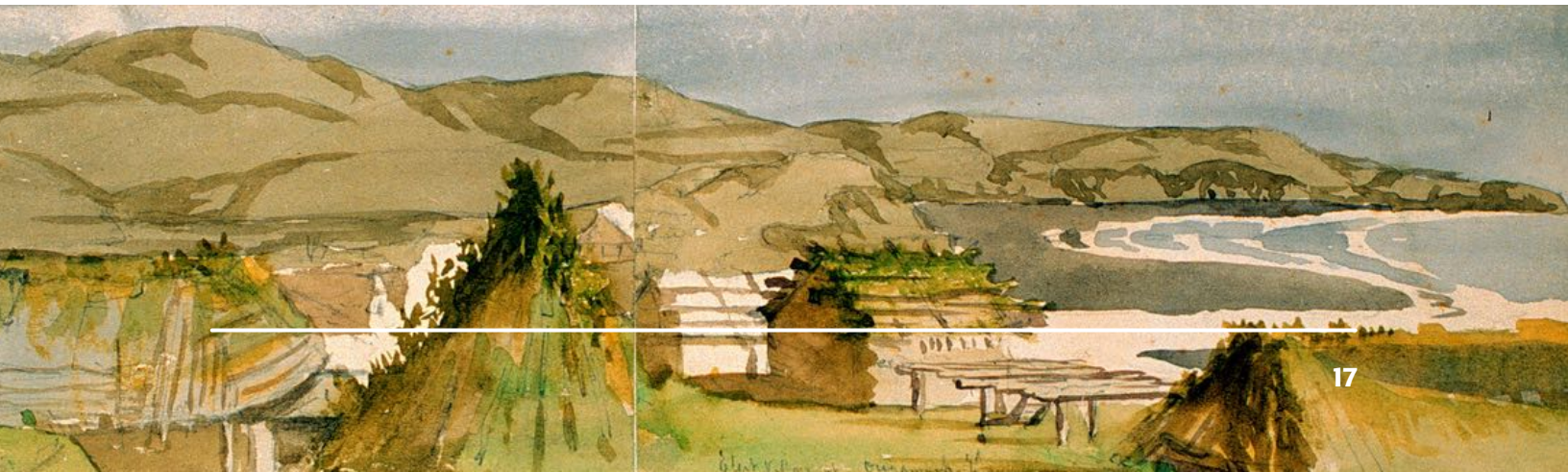
Unigkuat–Legends

Legends explain the world. These tales are passed down through the generations to share beliefs. They recount the origins of people, animals, and the stars. They explore the ways to interact with the spirit world. They reveal the human-like soul inside every animal.

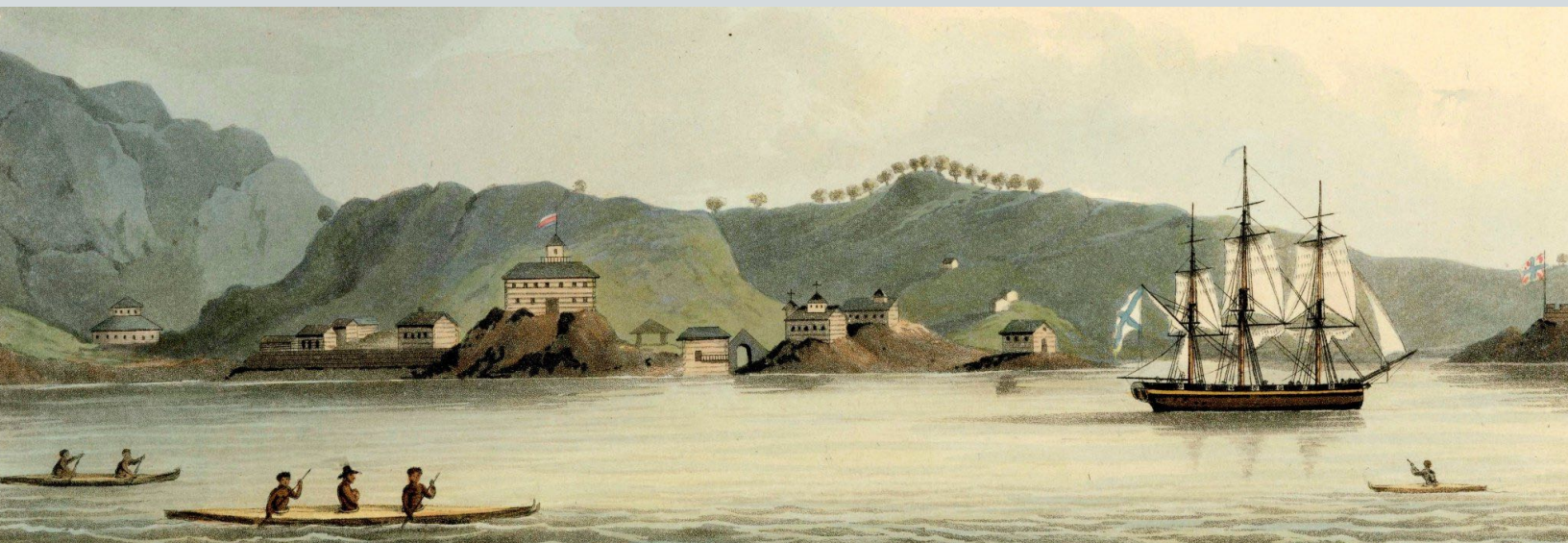
Listen

Pick up a handset to hear an Alutiiq storyteller share a traditional tale.

Chirkof Village, 1869, watercolor by Vincent Colyer, Beinecke Library, Yale.



Conquest



Russian sloop Neva in St. Paul Harbor, 1804. From Lisianski 1814.

The arrival of Russian traders irreversibly changed our culture. Our people were forced to adopt new languages, customs, and the Russian Orthodox religion as we were swept into the global economy. The Alutiiq story didn't end with the conquest of Kodiak. Our people adapted to the new reality and found ways to carry traditions forward.

16 Refuge Rock

In August 1784, Russian traders were scouting the coast of eastern Kodiak Island. Wary of the strangers, Alutiiq/Sugpiaq families retreated to a rocky islet. After a five-day standoff, the Russians attacked. Our ancestors tried to defend themselves, but their arrows could not compete with Russian cannons. Hundreds of our people died. Many more were taken hostage. The massacre was a turning point in our history. In the following months, armed Russian parties attacked Alutiiq villages across the archipelago, and we lost control of our homeland.



Refuge Rock, off Sitkalidak Island.

The Russian government worked to create Russian society in Alaska.



Squirrel skin parka, Susan Malutin and Grace Harrod, 2001. Supported by the Alaska State Museum.

Fur Trade

The quest for furs brought Russian traders to Alaska in the late 18th century. Coastal waters held thriving populations of seals and sea otters, whose plush fur was valuable in Asia and Europe. A hunger for profits drove a century of intense harvesting. It also led to the brutal exploitation of Native people and the destruction of resources.

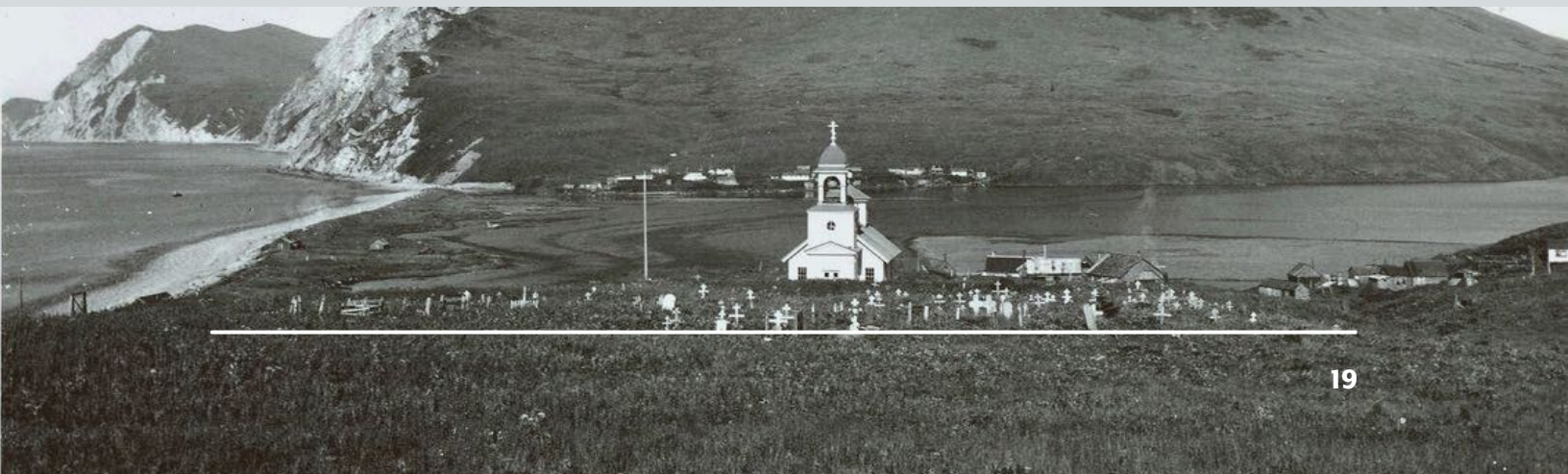
Epidemics

Many of the epidemic diseases common to crowded European and Asian communities were not found in the Americas until explorers arrived. With every wave of immigration, new diseases spread to Native people who had no previous exposure. The results were devastating. Millions of Native Americans died. Our people were not spared.

A New Religion

Spreading the Russian Orthodox faith was important to the Russian government. The first Orthodox Mission to Kodiak arrived in 1794. Clergy members established the first Russian Orthodox Church in North America and began ministering to the Alutiiq community.

Karluk Church and community, ca. 1951. Courtesy of Tim and Norman Smith.



American Era



Akhiok, 2021.

In 1867, Russia sold the rights to govern Alaska to the United States. American control brought challenges—some familiar and some entirely new. Alutiiq people continued to live a subsistence lifestyle, teach their children cultural skills, speak in Alutiiq and Russian, and practice the Russian Orthodox faith. However, Western schools, missionaries, and industries forced more cultural change.

17 Villages

Kodiak has six Alutiiq/Sugpiaq villages. These small communities are descended from ancestral villages where people have lived for hundreds of years. Today's villages have many of the amenities of larger Alaskan towns. However, they are isolated. To reach Kodiak's villages, people travel by boat or small airplane. Wind and fog can make transportation unreliable.



Explore village photos on a touch screen display.

Education

We were told not to speak our language on school grounds and Auntie Sheratine told on us and we got spanked . . . so I quit going to school.

Julia Pestrikoff, Afognak



Ouzinkie School ca. 1940. Lamp collection.

Americanization

In American schools, teachers worked to Americanize Native children. They believed Western schooling was necessary to create productive citizens. The transition to the American education system separated youth from their language, traditions, and even their families, as some children were forced to attend boarding schools. As missionaries pushed new faiths and children experienced cruelty at school, the transmission of Alutiiq traditions waned.

Boarding Schools

In the late 1800s, the government set up boarding schools to educate Native students. Children received some instruction but often labored for the school, businesses, or area families in terrible conditions. They suffered hunger, punishment, sickness, shaming, and isolation as educators tried to strip them of their Nativeness. These schools were far from home. Many lived for years without seeing family. Most lost their ability to speak their Native language and never learned traditional skills. Some died of disease and poor care.

Girls dressed for baptism, Kodiak Baptist Orphanage, ca. 1920. Kodiak Baptist Mission collection.



American Era



Alutiiq couple with pelts. Tweten family collection.



Downtown Kodiak after the 1964 tsunamis. USGS Photo.



Karluk wedding. Clyda Christiansen collection.



The Koniag board of directors, ca. 1975.

New Industries

As the fur trade waned, our people began working in new industries—commercial fishing, whaling, canning, fox farming, mining, and guiding. Native-run businesses and wage labor helped people purchase household goods. However, mistreatment, racism, and competition for resources created challenges.

Disasters

Natural disasters are recurring events in the Gulf of Alaska. Major earthquakes rock the region and generate destructive tsunamis. Volcanoes erupt and spew ash across the landscape. Our ancestors managed natural disasters by joining family and friends in neighboring regions and passing down information in stories.

World War II

In the 1930s, the United States began strengthening military facilities in Alaska. Kodiak was a focus of the build-up. The Kodiak Naval Operating Base was built in 1938. More facilities followed the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Rapid construction brought thousands to Kodiak and transformed the community into a military hub.

Land Claims

We have been stewards of Kodiak's lands for thousands of years. Our ancestors settled here, named places, and cared for resources. In the 18th century, we lost control of our homeland. In the 20th century, we reorganized our communities, reclaimed land and resources, and worked to support our people.

Keneq – Fire



Allutiiq dancers , Kodiak, 2011

Keneq—fire represents the persistence of our way of life and the cultural torch passed from generation to generation. Despite two centuries of cultural suppression, the Alutiiq/Sugpiaq way of life thrives. Today we live our culture openly and celebrate our traditions proudly. The light of Alutiiq culture burns bright.

19 Light of Culture

The oil lamp is an ancient technology. For over 7,500 years our ancestors used stone lamps to brighten their homes. In cozy sod houses, families gathered around the lamp to sew and carve, share meals, and tell stories. Alutiiq culture was perpetuated by lamplight.

The burning naniq—oil lamp is a symbol of culture and prosperity. It reminds us of the ties between people and nature. The natural materials in the lamp work together to provide light and heat. They push back darkness and cold. Oil lamps also illuminate our connections to ancestors and the importance of our traditions.



Keneq Fire

Suumacirpet Siluklluku.
We Are Proud of Our Way of Life.



Elder Nick Alokli records in the Alutiiq language.

21 Cultural Renaissance

The clash of cultures forced us to change how we lived and hide our identities. Many traditions were lost or practiced only in private. In the 1980s, efforts to share our history fueled a cultural renaissance. Today, we celebrate our heritage proudly. We speak, dance, create, and harvest to express connections to our ancestors and homeland.

21 Celebrating the Arts

The arts are a source of cultural pride. They highlight the ingenuity of ancestors, the beauty of the Alutiiq/Sugpiaq world, and the endurance of traditions. Creating beautiful items expresses a connection to ancestors and respect for the environment that sustains human life.

20 Creation Station



Visitors can make an art card with petroglyph motifs. Add your creation to our magnetic board to share with others, or take it home to enjoy.

Artist Rolf Christiansen in his studio.



Ancestors' Memorial



The Alutiiq Ancestors' Memorial on Kashevarof Street in Kodiak.

This public park honoring the Alutiiq/Sugpiaq people is just a block from the museum. Find interpretive signs about Alutiiq history, a memorial archway, a planter surrounded by seating, and hundreds of engraved bricks celebrating local people, families, and businesses. Parking available, wheelchair accessible.

Tour

We offer guided tours of the memorial to introduce visitors to Alutiiq history, historic preservation, and efforts to repatriate and reburial the remains of Kodiak Alutiiq ancestors.

Schedule

To request a tour, schedule online or email us at info@alutiiqmuseum.org. Please schedule at least two weeks in advance.

alutiiqmuseum.org/museum/education/for-teachers/



Each fish represents a repatriated ancestor.

Resources



Education Boxes

Bring Alutiiq culture to your classroom, camp, or event with one of our traveling boxes. Each box explores an aspect of Alutiiq heritage with hands-on activities that can be adjusted for many ages. Materials come in a sturdy box with instructions and can be shipped to you. Reserve online.

alutiiqmuseum.org/museum/education/traveling-boxes/



Craft Activities

Activities are a great way to learn about the Alutiiq world, enjoy the arts, and express your creativity. The Alutiiq Museum has instructions for crafts, games, and cultural activities you can try in the classroom.

alutiiqmuseum.org/museum/education/crafts/



Publications

Our books help to tell the Alutiiq story and connect educators and students to accurate, accessible information on the Alutiiq world. Find digital copies on our website and paper copies in our store.

alutiiqmuseum.org/museum/publications/



A culture illuminated is never lost.



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