

INTRODUCTION: RETURNING TO RUSSIAN AMERICA

Kenneth L. Pratt

A primary objective of this special section of Volume 11 of the *Alaska Journal of Anthropology* (AJA) is to honor the memories of Lydia T. Black (1925–2007), Richard A. Pierce (1918–2004), and Barbara S. Smith (1936–2013), the passing of whom marks a great loss to the scholarly study of Russian America. The seven papers in this section serve to remind researchers that the field of Russian America studies contains a lot of fertile ground for scholarship and lends itself to interdisciplinary approaches.

The three papers by Katherine Arndt, Dennis Griffin, and Ken Pratt are essentially detective stories. Arndt critically examines a mid-nineteenth-century Russian manuscript describing a hostile encounter in 1792 between a Russian/Fox Aleut party and a group of Katmai Sugpiat in an effort to determine *where* the event actually took place. In the process she adds important context to an interesting account that (despite questions about the accuracy of some details) rings true in terms of the mutual distrust exhibited by the opposing parties and the ebb-and-flow nature of the event itself. Griffin describes archaeological and historical research findings based on his effort to verify the site of an 1809–1810 Russian hunting camp reportedly located on remote St. Matthew Island. His paper exemplifies the attention to detail necessary to successfully use scraps of information from multiple sources to solve a very specific site location puzzle. In a somewhat similar fashion, I carefully review known data sources about a Yup'ik Eskimo group commonly identified as the Aglurmiut to determine their original homeland and evaluate the veracity of disparate accounts about their reported migration to the Bristol Bay region. My conclusions reflect a reliance on Yup'ik Eskimo oral traditions, cultural history, and place-naming practices.

Three other works by Evguenia Anichtchenko, Ryan Jones, and Alexander Petrov inform readers of certain practical, administrative, and philosophical problems related to maintaining the Russian colonies. Anichtchenko focuses on the fleet of the Russian-American Company (RAC), describing its development in a way that clearly reveals the great dependence of Russian colonization efforts on the fleet. Jones discusses some pointed criticism of RAC hunting policies and conservation measures by the Creole Alexander Kashevarov. His work demonstrates that controversy has surrounded subsistence management in this part of the north for nearly two centuries—much longer than many of us probably realize. Petrov uses newly (re)discovered documents to briefly examine a difficult period in the early history of the Russian Orthodox Mission in Russian America and a related grievance filed against the RAC by a member of the clergy. The piece underscores the reality that subtle tensions often existed between the clergy and the RAC and that neither party could afford to alienate the other.

Finally, Angela Linn brings us back to the present by describing a recently completed project by the University of Alaska Museum to stabilize and preserve a Russian blockhouse from the site of Kolmakovskiy Redoubt, on the middle Kuskokwim River. Her essay shows that valuable records from the Russian-America period are not limited to the medium of paper and also must be handled with extreme care.

Thanks to each of the contributors for sharing their work and making this special section become a reality. Hopefully, these articles will stimulate additional research on Russian America in the future.

