

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL DISPLACEMENT OF ALASKA NATIVE VILLAGES

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The displaced Alaska Native communities described in the two papers in this section are a very small representation of the many settlements abandoned, created, or consolidated as a result of Euro-American control of Alaska lands. Both Dumond's and my paper report on a process that began with Russian colonization in southern Alaska, and continued under the American territorial government and commercial endeavors. However, leaving a settlement behind, or coming to a new settlement, was not unusual prior to European contact. Alaska Native groups frequently moved to new locations because of natural disasters or changes in resource availability.

Dumond's paper describes the villages of the Alaska Peninsula that were moved as a result of the 1912 Novarupta volcanic event. The 1912 eruption occurred after local people were already thoroughly entrenched in the Western economy. While natural disaster precipitated the moves, commercial pursuits also played a large part in the continued viability of new communities.

My paper is about several Unangan villages in the Unalaska Island area left behind in the evacuations and relocations of World War II, and never permanently resettled. Like the Alaska Peninsula villages at the turn of the twentieth century, by the Second World War the Aleutian Islands had long been part of the cash economy.

Residents made money by selling fox furs and baskets, as well as from seasonal labor harvesting seals in the Pribilof Islands.

Another similarity between the two regions of Russia's former colony is the importance of the Russian Orthodox Church. For both the Alutiiq communities on the Alaska Peninsula and the Unangan settlements in the Aleutian Islands, the church was a symbol of permanence for a village. If a village had a church, it had a better chance to persist as a village. When a village was left behind, a leader or the last resident marked the end of the village by closing down the church.

While both papers deal with moves occurring in the early twentieth century, these displacements anticipate the contemporary process of Alaska Native migration to urban centers such as Anchorage, or to places outside of Alaska. The same processes that pulled Kashega and Biorka residents toward Unalaska, as my paper reports, or away from Savonoski to cannery or trading centers, as in Dumond's paper, continue today to pull Alaska Natives to hub or urban areas, in order to make a living or enable family members to attend school. Today, education or commercial opportunities are usually more important than preserving a local church, but religion is still a factor in decisions to move.

