

AHTNA LEADERSHIP: TRADITION AND CHANGE, 1850–1971

William E. Simeone

2641 Porter Place, Anchorage, Alaska 99508; wesimeone2@gmail.com

Michelle Anderson

Ahtna, Inc., 115 Richardson Highway, Glennallen, Alaska 99588; manderson@ahtna.net

Kathryn Martin

Ahtna, Inc., 115 Richardson Highway, Glennallen, Alaska 99588; kmartin2@ahtna-inc.com

Wilson Justin

P.O. Box 839, Slana, Alaska 99586; epic.spook@icloud.com

ABSTRACT

This article describes traditional Ahtna leadership and changes that occurred in that leadership as a result of American colonialism and the creation of Western political institutions that were designed to manage all economic, social, and political aspects of Ahtna life. Historically, Ahtna leaders were autocratic with absolute authority over every aspect of Ahtna life. American colonialism usurped that authority and assumed the functions of a *kaska*e or *denae*. In their place rose new Ahtna leaders whose authority is fragmented and derived largely from external sources.

INTRODUCTION¹

For generations, until the gold rush of 1898, every Ahtna clan had a leader who was either a *denae* or *kaska*e. Today the Ahtna have a traditional chief who is a well-respected elder who speaks for all Ahtna. All Ahtna villages have elected officials who preside as a village council, and Ahtna, Incorporated, the regional corporation created under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), has a president and elected board of directors. None of these are anything like the old-time *denae* or *kaska*e. Ben Neeley described the old-time leader as a rich man who had “stuff.” He was not poor, and he was not young or inexperienced.

They don’t call anybody chief. Like now days. They call that man chief, head man in the village. Man that got two or three cache out there and stuff; man that got things, that’s what they call chief, early days. That’s a chief. They don’t call poor people [or] young people chief. Them days, is “no,” nobody like that. People call you chief you got noth-

ing, you are not that old, that’s what people didn’t like. Early days us when older people, man that got stuff, rich man, that’s what they call chief. (Neeley 1987)

DENAE AND KASKAE

Both *denae* and *kaska*e were dynamic individuals: bigger than life, charismatic, and wise regarding the environment and its proper treatment. They were able to provide for a large number of people. Their achievements were considered superlative, and they acted as models of exemplary behavior. They were often autocratic. Using the word “chief,” Ahtna elder Andy Brown described the pivotal role of the leader as a provider and role model.

Every village got one chief. That man take care of the whole village. Everything depends on just that one man. Chiefs were boss for their same relation [i.e., their fellow clansmen].

See, my uncle [mother's brother]. Long time ago, he's my boss, my chief. He talks to me: "build a house, I want to build a house." I help him. He give me lots to eat. He give me moose, and butter, and hardtack. I help him. My mother's brother, I help him. He brings me to the store. I got no money. He give me shoes, clothes, I help him. (de Laguna and McClellan 1958a)²

While there were similarities between the *denae* and *kaska*, there were also differences. The *denae* could be considered a kind of landed gentry. In the Ahtna language, the word *den* means land or terrain and also refers to a specific place, while the suffix *nae* refers to person. *Denae* were sometimes called *nen'k'e hwdenae'*, or "on the land person," indicating their close association with a specific place. Ahtna elder Annie Ewan (de Laguna and McClellan 1960a) described these men as "[b]ig chief, like

somebody live in a place for years. Like somebody born there and died there in that place is more important. A rich man." The *denae* had authority over a specific territory and controlled the allocation of important resources within that territory.

Denae often held titles, which meant they were the most important resident of that village. Such titles were composed of a place name and the word *ghaxen* or *denen*. So, for example, the chief of Mentasta was known as *Mendaes Ghaxen*, "Person of Shallow Lakes." The Ahtna recognized at least 17 chief's titles: eight in Lower Ahtna territory, six in Central Ahtna territory, one in Western Ahtna territory, and two in Upper Ahtna territory (Fig. 1). This suggests that the titles were associated with sources of copper, important salmon fishing sites, and major trails leading into and out of Ahtna territory (Kari 1986:15).

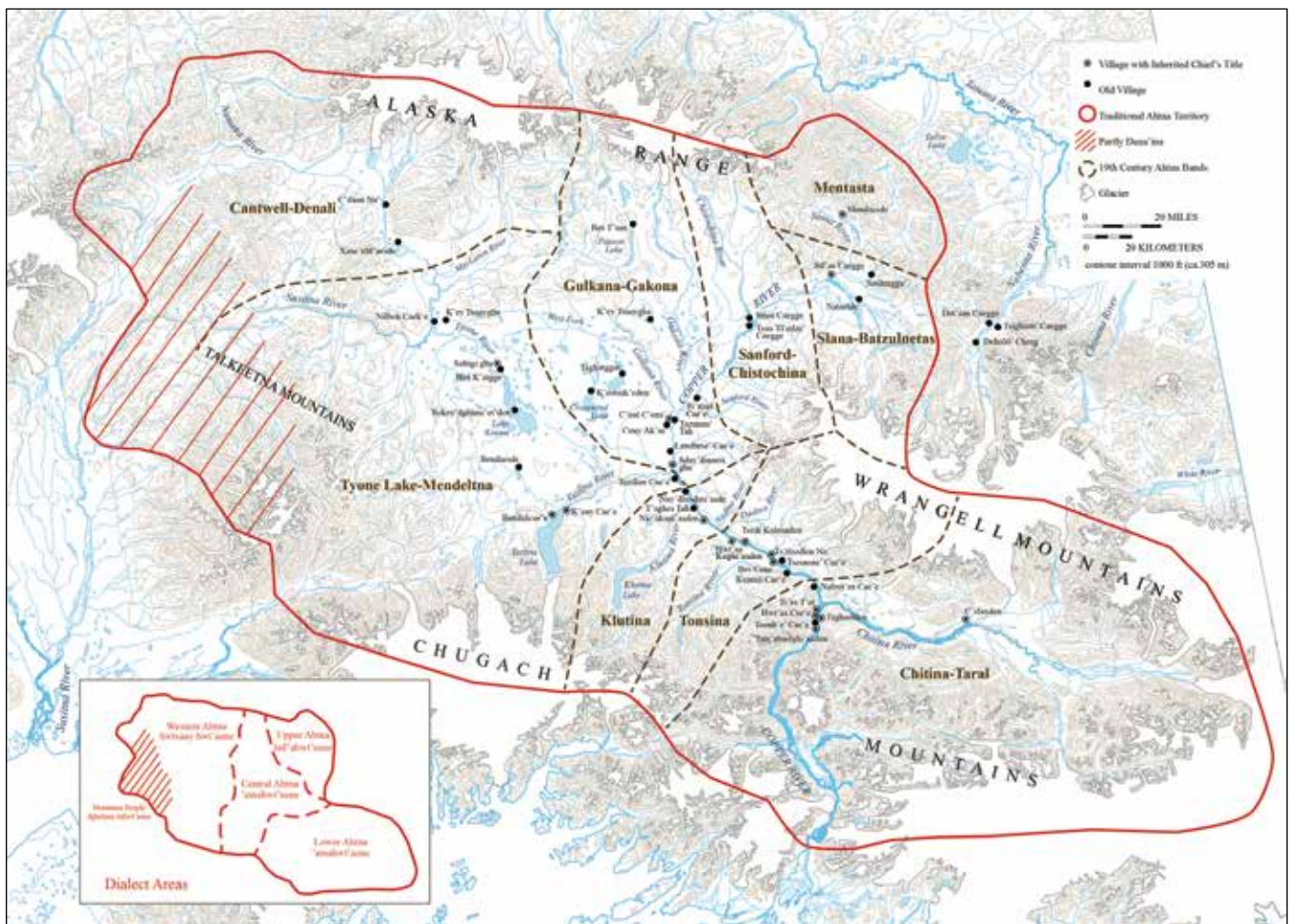


Figure 1. Traditional boundaries of the Ahtna homeland, with contemporary Ahtna communities. The community names are given in both the English and Ahtna languages. Today Chistochina is called Cheesh Na and Copper Center Klut-Kaah, as shown in Figure 3. Source of boundary data from de Laguna and McClellan (1981:642) and Kari (2010:viii). Map by Matt O'Leary.

According to Lt. Henry Allen (1887:128), in 1885 four *denae* controlled the entire upper Copper River. Nicolai, *Taghael Denen* (“Person of Barrier in Water”), was in charge of the Chitina River and Taral, while two other chiefs, *Bes Cene Denen* (“Person of Riverbank Flat”) and *Nic’akuni’aa Denen* (“Person of Where Land Extends Out”), controlled the river between Taral and the mouth of the Tazlina River. *Bets’ulnii Ta’* (“Father of Someone Respects Him”), who was probably *Stl’aa C’aege Ghaxen* (“Person of Rear River Mouth”), was headman among the upper Ahtna.

A *kaska*, on the other hand, was not necessarily associated with a specific place but was often referred to as a “boss,” “spokesman,” or “lawyer.” A *kaska* is a spokesperson, according to Ahtna elder Nick Jackson (Simeone 2016a). The father of a child can be referred to as a *kaska*, or person who speaks for that child. According to Ahtna elder Fannie Sthienfield, the *denae* was the principal leader while the *kaska* was his spokesman. She said, “There’s two names [for leaders]: *kaska* and *denae*. *Kaska* is smart talking. *Denae* he just lay around there, and whatever he say, and *kaska* gonna talk for him” (de Laguna and McClellan 1958f). Larger villages had both a *denae* and a *kaska*, while smaller villages were led by a *kaska*.

Like the *denae*, the reputation of a *kaska* was based on his personality, managerial skills, and generosity. *Kaska* often defended their fellow clansmen in disputes. Fannie Sthienfield (de Laguna and McClellan 1958f) said, “They talk. *Kaska*, that means talk. He talks for *denae* and tells you what you gonna do. He tells everybody what to do for living.”

In the Navajo language, there is a verb *hashké*, “to scold” or “speak with anger,” which relates to the term *kaska* (Jim Kari, pers. comm. 10 August 2017). Athabascan leaders in east-central Alaska practiced what is called “chief’s talk,” a kind of oratory used at potlatches that often sounds like scolding or angry words. The language used in these speeches was often archaic or esoteric, reflecting the speaker’s knowledge.

The female counterpart to a *denae* was a *kuy’aa*, or “rich woman.” Like the *denae*, a rich woman’s reputation rested on being energetic, generous, and knowledgeable. Bacille George said, “Rich woman. They got like records—big name just for the name, big name. Big shot” (de Laguna and McClellan 1958c).

Women were not considered *kaska* or *denae*, but the word *kuy’aa* alludes to the potential leadership and hierarchy in which certain women were considered rich and

above everyone else. Ben Neeley said that women were not chiefs but that some women “were different, womens not all the same. But they’re not chief, but they have a name for it, for hard working womens” (Neeley 1987). These women often took the lead in many activities, such as teaching young girls how to make moccasins, tan skin, take care of fish, pick berries, and store food for winter. In fact, much of what was counted as wealth—food, skins, and clothing—came from the labor of women.

Horse Creek Mary (Fig. 2) was an example of a *kuy’aa* or rich woman. Anthropologist Holly Reckord (1983:17) believed Horse Creek Mary was born at Taral between 1835 and 1845 to an Ahtna mother and Russian father. She lived at Horse Creek, *Tay’sdlaex Na’* (Kuslina Creek; “spawning water creek”). Horse Creek Mary’s fame was based on the dried salmon trade. Walya Hobson (1995) said Mary put up bales of fish that she sent up to Mansfield in the wintertime; during the gold rush, she sold dried fish to non-Natives.



Figure 2. Horse Creek Mary, about 1905. Photograph courtesy Ahtna, Inc.

Besides the *denae* and *kaska*, there were two special types of leaders: war leaders and healers or persons associated with supernatural power. Most *denae* or *kaska* possessed supernatural power and some were medicine persons, but most were not war leaders. There are three different words for healers or people connected to the supernatural: *c'ededliinen*, meaning "one who sings"; *dyenen*, translated as "shaman or medicine person"; and *tetaesen*, literally "one who dreams." In the Ahtna language a war leader is called *c'eghaan tse'*, which is a combination of *c'eghaan*, "war," and *tse'*, "ahead" or "first." War leaders were not full-time leaders but acted only in times of war, and at the direction of a *kaska*. According to Chistochina elder Wilson Justin:

War captains were common but never held authority during peace, nor were they allowed to start wars. Medicine people often served as captains in war, but the authority to begin or end wars did not rest in their purview. That was strictly a clan function and practiced at the highest level of governance. (Wilson Justin, pers. comm., 23 February 2019)

HIERARCHY: THE PLACE OF THE LEADER IN TRADITIONAL AHTNA SOCIETY

Traditional Ahtna society was highly stratified or layered. Allen (1887:135) described four classes of people: the *denae* and his immediate family; the *ciile'* (Allen heard the word as "skillie"), working men who were near relatives of the *denae*; *dyenen*, shamans/medicine people; and *'elnaa*, vassals/drudges in varying degrees of servitude.

Jim McKinley (de Laguna and McClellan 1954) said that *'elnaa* worked under a chief: "He takes care of a chief." McKinley said they were not free, the chief fed them; they packed water and fish and they got wood. They also hunted for the chief, "pretty close to slave" (de Laguna and McClellan 1954). Drudges were often orphans, widows, or people captured in war. Allen wrote that the drudges were at the beck and call of the chief and his relatives:

I have seen one 14 or 15 years of age, sitting within a few feet of the river, order a man 6 feet high, a vassal to bring him water. These menials are used for all kinds of work, and are completely under the control of their masters as possibly could be, yet I have never heard of corporal punishment being administered to them. (Allen 1887:136)

Very wealthy people had slaves or retainers. According to Bacille George, the grandmother of *Tsedi Kulaen Denen*,

a *Naltsiine* chief who lived on the middle Copper River, had two *'elnaa*.

Two slaves take care of, just like million dollars you know. She eat, sleep, that's all. Don't work, don't carry water, no work, no cook. Eat, sleep that's all. Get her clothes. Two slaves take care of her all. *Naltsiine* chief. Woman married him and his daughter don't work. Got slaves, got own slaves. That woman, his wife don't work. Take a walk. Got to take care of her always like a big president's wife. She don't know how to sew, pack water. (de Laguna and McClellan 1960c)

The *denae* and his immediate family were the most important people in a community and could be considered an aristocracy or "higher" than anyone else. Lt. Allen went on to write that "the *tyones* would barely condescend to consider any of us their equals; nor did they fail to express disgust at seeing the head of our party carrying a pack or pulling a rope" (Allen 1887:135).

Pete Ewan (de Laguna and McClellan 1960b) said, "Long time ago they don't call poor people, don't look after them. Only rich people they look after." He added that, compared to poor people, those who were rich had more to eat and were expected to share, especially in hard times or when food was short.

Not much good living or not much good eat. Rich people, [had] all kinds of food. Rich people, everybody eats with him. Each time people come by, they eat with him. They just go where rich man lives. They don't come to poor person like me, they come from way up, long way, they hear about him (they come only during hard times). (de Laguna and McClellan 1960b)

A *denae* might single out his firstborn child to be a favorite, or *dzuuggi*, meaning a "precious one." If a *denae* was particularly wealthy, all of his children and even his pet dog could be treated as *dzuuggi*. Such children wore highly decorated clothes and were well fed. If a favorite daughter married a wealthy man, she might continue this lifestyle; otherwise she would have to work.

Bacille George described the position of rich people in traditional Ahtna society:

Any rich man's daughter, anything she wants, she can get. [In the] Old days. They never see no rich man now. Old days, rich man in Alaska. They no work, wives no work. Somebody take care of them. Give them water. He don't have to work. He ask for it, he get it. Old days, [woman] get married to rich man. Somebody take care

of them [rich man's wife]. A traveler can stay in a rich man's home. It don't cost you nothing. (de Laguna and McClellan 1968a)

Denae were clan leaders. Each *denae* and his clan are remembered in the oral record kept by the elders. Ahtna elder Frank Stickwan said that the only people spoken about were the “highest people”: “Just the highest people that’s all we talk [about]. That’s their own village, they take care of, their own village you know” (Kari 2010:54). Annie Ewan said the same thing: “they don’t tell who live there. They just remember where the rich live. Poor people, they don’t tell the names” [only the names of the rich are remembered in tradition] (de Laguna and McClellan 1960a).

Below, Martha and Arthur Jackson talk about *denae* who lived along the Copper River near Copper Center. Anthropologists Frederica de Laguna and Catharine McClellan recorded this conversation on June 30, 1968. The Jacksons begin by talking about Chief Andrew using his Ahtna name, *C’iitgheli*. They then mention his clan affiliation.

Chief Andrew (*C’iitgheli*), really chief, rich man.

No chief after that, Chief Andrew was *Nitsisyu* (clan).

Chief Andrew’s father was Tanana Jack.

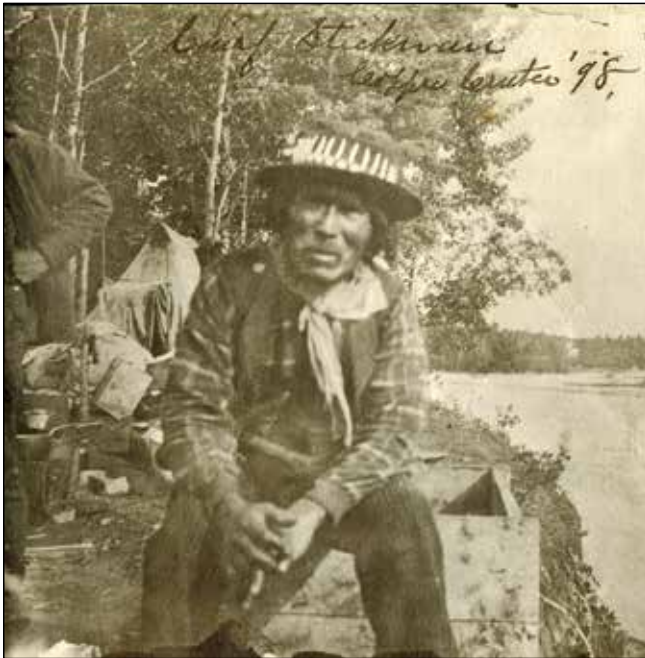


Figure 3. Chief Stickwan at Copper Center, 1898. Valdez Museum and Historical Archive Association, Art Hobson photo collection, No. 1996.030.0223.

Below Chief Andrew [downriver] was *Anasi* Stickwan, Chief Stickwan. [That was] Jim McKinley’s grandfather, he was [of the] *Naltisna* (clan) [see Fig. 3].

Before Chief Stickwan was Chief Bacille.

At Chitina there were four brothers all [of the] *Udzisyu* (clan), Hanagita, Nicolai, Eskilida [whose Ahtna name was *U’el’Scediy’ Ta’* (see Fig. 4)] and then Chief Goodlataw [whose Ahtna name was *C’ut’ata*].

Lower Tonsina is Chief Dr. Billum [whose Ahtna name was *Hwc’ele’ Ta Ik’e Ngedzeni*, “father of rags is standing upon it”]. He was followed by Kenny Lake George who was [of the] *Udzisyu* [clan].

Tony Jackson’s daddy was chief too.

The richest man is *Niggaas Ta’* [whose Ahtna name was “father of he turns gray”]. That’s the richest man he lived at *Bes Cene*. (de Laguna and McClellan 1968b)



Figure 4. Chief Eskilida in Chitina, around 1910. Photograph courtesy Ahtna, Inc.

The *denae* and his family lived in a large house and were distinguished by their fine clothing decorated with porcupine quill embroidery, beads, and buttons, as well as their necklaces, earrings, and bandoliers made of dentilium shells. At feasts and potlatches the chief's family sat in seats of honor. Allen (1887:59) described how, when he attended a feast at a village called *Bes Cene*, the chief, who was known as *Bes Cene Denen*, or "Person of Riverbank Flat," and his family were seated on the right while everyone else was seated on the left. Allen also saw other indications of rank that belonged to *Bes Cene Denen*, including flour, tea, sugar, and "fancy cups and saucers" that the *denae* had purchased at a store on Cook Inlet.

Not all leaders were equal. Lesser *kaskaey*, or "little chiefs," had to seek the advice and counsel of more important *denae* or *kaskaey* before taking any action; otherwise there could be trouble. Bacille George explained it this way:

Head guy, one chief, one relation, maybe all the way up from Chitina up this way. That's the boss. The rest of it he got little chief in every village. And if anything wrong he [the little chief] go see the head guy. And he see the head chief, and he tell him. And the head chief says "you go ahead and do what you like." He has the head chief behind [if he informs him of his plans]. He got to see big chief. If he don't tell the big chief, he's gonna have bad luck. Gotta ask another big chief, or he's gonna be in trouble, if he do something. (de Laguna and McClellan 1960c)

PATHS TO POWER

The path to power and wealth began with a person's social status, which was based on who their parents were and what kind of training they received when young. If a young man or woman was well trained, he/she was tough, resilient, and lucky. A story told by Huston Sanford reveals the Ahtna ideals of hard work and luck that make for a successful life.

A young orphan boy was being raised by his uncle, but the boy was lazy so his uncle beat him. The boy ran away and cried. God, *Nek'altaeni*, "the one who moves above us," spoke to the boy, and asked why he was crying. The boy said he was "worthless," that he had a hard time cutting wood and trapping. God blessed the boy and removed the impurity of laziness. The boy then went back to his uncle and began working, cutting wood and trapping.

Eventually, through hard work, and the luck bestowed by *Nek'altaeni*, the boy became wealthy. Because his uncle had beaten him four times, the boy made four potlatches for his uncle. Huston finishes by saying that the boy in this story served as a role model and that upon hearing the story Huston became "aware."

Yii c'a cu xugha nen' k'e badahwdezet ts'en'.

/This is how the word spread throughout the country about them.

Uts'en ghadu' k'ets' idaexden.

/We grew up with this.

Nenaan 'et neta' et nakakotniss xu' kesdult'e'i gha.

/Our mother and father told us this so that we could be on our own.

Yii daaga' ghadu' k'ensdzedi'et hwyaa syitdalnen

/Because of that I grew up and became aware.

Nanictesdzet

/I started to think for myself.

Ghadu' snakaey 'iinn nanedyaxi'iinn sts'en dahwduldiixi.

/The children who are growing up now can learn from me.

Xiigha' nanictudaexi gha.

/They can start to think about it. (Kari 1986:32–33)

Hard work and skill were important to a *denae*'s success, but luck was equally important. Luck is a multifaceted concept encompassing both good or ill fortune but also protection against powerful forces. In the Ahtna dictionary (Kari 1990), there are several different words referring to luck. The word *ses* is translated as safety, protection, or luck. There is also the word *daa*, as in *yidaadze'c'a*, which translates as "fortunately" or "luckily." Luck was obtained by having a connection with the spiritual power that animated all living things.³

Jim McKinley explained how the *denae* who held the title *Tsedi Kulaen Denen* ("Person of Copper Exists Place") got his luck when a hummingbird struck him, enhancing his fortune or luck so that he became a rich man and a *denae*.

He get luck. He was chief after that. He was always lucky after.

Some people are very rich—Indians or Whites. Some all be luck. All be chief—it's all due to luck. Lots of them are poor any place, like Fort Yukon, any place you find poor Indians and you find poor Whites.

Riches come from power. *Tsedi Kulaen Denen* was one of the richest chiefs—a millionaire. That's why they call him chief.

You see that man, that *Tsedi Kulaen Denen* he hear some kind of bird. Nobody knows where they come from, that bird. Just before he died he tell why he was big chief. He tell his grandson. I see that little bird—what you call . . . bees? Just like bumble bee.

It's the same thing but bigger (humming bird). He tells the story. It hit him on the head and knock him down just before he get rich. He was poor before and it hit him on the head. And it cripple his head all his life. He used to lay down and have headaches, and he wouldn't tell why. And he was big chief right there.

When he ready to die, he tell the story why I'm chief. "He hit me on the head when I was a kid," he say. That's why they prove it.

And my mother's daddy, he tell the same too. He see it, but it never hit him. He just hear it. Lots of people like that, but nobody knows. You can't tell other relation. You just tell your own people who are ready to die. (de Laguna and McClellan 1958e)

Luck was one source of power, knowledge another. Ben Neeley (1987) described some aspects of this knowledge. He said leaders were taught how to survive, to speak, and to know people's background. This knowledge was essential when different chiefs met at gatherings such as a potlatch. Neeley described what he meant by background as "[h]ow ancestors come from, what their ancestors been doing." In other words, he was talking about clan histories and the achievements of the ancestors.

Oh, that's Indian ways. Every how to live, how to survive. How to make money and tell us how to speak. Everything else and how to talk, and some lot of village come [together], another chief come around talk to them, he gotta have a background how to answer too. That's what they used to in old days. How to answer, how the background used to be. They make speech, they talk to each other and that's when sometimes more smart, this one not get called down. Just like lawyer. Lawyer got to win the case. They always think about how they going to call each other down, more smart, they want study more about their backgrounds. (Neeley 1987)

Much of the knowledge held by the *denae* was secret. Neeley goes on to say that *denae* and *kaska*e were smart, but they kept their knowledge to themselves.

Oh yes, smart man too. Them days is all secret. Secret people. You don't talk to another people too, [don't] talk next door too. They don't want nobody know from them, they keep for themselves too everything that's good. That's the way people used to be. That's why people wise, you gotta make it your way, you gotta do it your way. You gotta make your way to live. They don't tell others. Different relations, kids, they don't tell them too. That's only [tell] their father, might tell something they know. That's the kind used to be early days. (Neeley 1987)

A *denae*'s power was also dependent on the amount of social support he could receive from his clansmen. Each *denae* or *kaska*e had an entourage of young men who carried out his orders and did all of the manual labor. These helpers were called *ciile*' ("brother or male parallel cousin"). Joe Goodlataw (de Laguna and McClellan 1958d) said these boys were trained by the *denae*. They would get up at four in the morning to collect wood, and they were taught various skills such as carving wooden bowls.

Bacille George said, "The chief got own men with him all the time, like soldiers. When he say 'take that man. Kill him!' they do it. He gonna be there—to carry out the chief's orders" (de Laguna and McClellan 1958c). Andy Brown (de Laguna and McClellan 1958b) explained that a *denae* increased his wealth by deploying the labor of his young kinsmen. The meat these young men brought in was put in caches for later use. The *denae*'s wives and their helpers tanned the skins.

Denae, [had] his nephews [sister's sons] and grand-nephews with him. They are with him and they work for the *denae*. And he feed them, give them something to eat. And they fish in the river, making dry fish and put em away. And go out hunting. Kill moose, caribou, smoke all meat so no fly come in. They cut it thin and make'em smoke good so it's dry—just the outside. They make a big place and dry four of five moose. They good taste, can't spoil. They have lots of cache way out in the bush where nobody know. Maybe four or five. The war people clean up the camp sometime. That's why somebody hide the cache way out in the woods with no trail. They don't want to go hungry. And they put the dentalium down in the ground and cover it up so nobody see it. (de Laguna and McClellan 1958b)

Denae often had more than one wife, who contributed to their husband's wealth by processing skins and making

clothes. According to Martha Jackson (de Laguna and McClellan 1968b), “Rich man can marry more than one wife. Sometimes they marry sisters, sometimes women from different clans.” By marrying women from different clans, chiefs increased or reinforced their political standing and were able to attract followers, particularly brothers-in-law who acted as their retainers. This situation was vividly described by Fred and Katie John when they talked about *Takol’iix Ta’* (“Father of Daylight over Water,” also known as Russian John), who had wives and children from many different clans.

Mendaesde du’ dae’ c’udalne’e denae ghaye ghida’a.

/At ‘Shallows Lake Place’ a very aggressive man was staying there.

U’aat’iinn net’e’.

/He had many wives.

Yen’iin k’a tseh seldaedze’ iinn nidaetlde yen’ iinn ts’en ni’taenn.

/When the soldiers [Russians] had first come (to Batzulnetas) he was fathered by (one of) them.

Denae ghayet u’aat’ iinn denc’i’ iinn c’a u’aat’ iinn ghile’ ts’en

/The chief had four wives, and

Nittah nilacnginilyaan.

/they were raising (children) from different clans.

Dae’ ku’edi’a’, yen’ iinn de du’ c’udaghalne’ ts’en’

/He called them (his children) fierce, aggressive, and

nittahmedyaan ts’en’, t’ae’ c’ekudelnii xu t’ehghit’e’.

/being of mixed clans, they were indeed very fierce. (Kari 1986:110)

Wealth was measured not in money but in food, skins, clothing, and tools that a rich man could give away in support of his relatives and the poor. Martha Jackson (de Laguna and McClellan 1968b) explained that “A rich man gets rich by killing lots of moose, ducks, fish. No law that time he eats what he wants.” When asked how a man got to be chief, Annie Ewan (de Laguna and McClellan 1960a) said, “They kill lots of moose. Get rich out of them.” Pete Ewan (de Laguna and McClellan 1960b) said, “Kill lots of caribou. A thousand caribou they chase in the lake. Everybody eats with rich man.”

A person increased his social status and wealth not by hoarding wealth but by giving it away. Ben Neeley said that people would support a rich man who was nice and not stingy. “They don’t want no stingy. Smart chief, the one they like. That one easy, honored, kind, that’s the people likes it” (Neeley 1987). Bacille George explained that the *denae* was expected to meet the needs of his followers on a daily basis but also to hold potlatches:

If you have a million dollars you are not rich if you don’t potlatch. You don’t count, don’t mean nothing to nobody. If he do potlatch, that’s a big man, big man coming. (de Laguna and McClellan 1958c)

People who gave potlatches were rich, and they became wealthier if they observed certain rules or taboos after a potlatch. By observing these rules a person would increase their luck. George said that for 30 days after a potlatch the *denae* had to:

Eat all alone, take care of your water, stay in your room. Thirty days, take care of yourself for luck. If you don’t do it you don’t be lucky. You don’t get nothing. Don’t get no furs, no nothing. Everything come pretty slow. Them people who do that for 30 days and go out trapping get all the fur they want. That’s what they get rich on the furs. Or selling fish, you can see fish. Everybody want to buy fish, moccasins, any skins. Then [if] you lucky what you give away come back. Some people don’t listen, don’t believe that and they are broke all of the time. Today forget it all, nobody lucky. (de Laguna and McClellan 1958c)

ENFORCING THE LAW

A major responsibility of the chief was to mediate disputes arising from conflict between people. One way to settle disputes was to pay restitution; another was violence. Payments could be made to settle offenses ranging from theft to murder. If restitution was not made, the situation could escalate, resulting in revenge killings. But, as Bacille George said, if a *denae* “got lots of dentalium and guns, etc. he talk to chief, [because he] got lots of pieces to pay for that body. So they have trial—and then they can decide to settle dispute with stuff” (de Laguna and McClellan 1958c).

However, Andy Brown pointed out that if the parties could not resolve their differences through restitution and the aggrieved party “wanted to kill man back,” then one

alternative was to kill the murderer, even if he happened to be your own brother.

Then I gonna kill my own brother. Then no more talk. If I kill him then nobody can fight against me no more. If my brother kill somebody and somebody killed him in revenge I might get mad and kill somebody else back and more war. That's why our own brother kill 'em. People no more talk. (de Laguna and McClellan 1958a)

It was the responsibility of the *denae* or *kaskae* to see that restitution was made. According to Bacille George, if a person was too poor, then the *denae* had to pay:

He's the man gotta make good. But he gonna give you [the thief] a bad time too. That's why every man got his own [*denae*]. Take care of the law. Otherwise nobody would take care. [*Denae*], it's up to him or his relation. He's gotta pay, make good for anybody in his nation [clan]. (de Laguna and McClellan 1960c)

If a man got into trouble and had no relatives or leader to talk for him, that man could be made a drudge or slave. But, as Andy Brown explained, his relatives could ransom him:

All right, some man got no [leader], get in trouble. No body help then they can make him a slave. But if his clan relations find out the headman or [leader] of his clan can say why did you make this man a slave? "Why you [en]slave my people." Sometime pay, give them *c'enk'one'* (dentalium shell necklace). They give it that and don't say no more, nothing. And then man free. (de Laguna and McClellan 1958a)

TAKING CARE OF THE PEOPLE

A *denae's* reputation was based on his ability to feed and take care of his people. To do this, the *denae* and his wife organized and oversaw the production of most foods. The *denae* told the young men where and when to hunt, and he would watch what was being killed and regulate how much was taken to ensure that meat was not wasted. He directed the construction and maintenance of fish weirs and traps and corrals and fences used to take caribou and moose. Ben Neeley said that *denae* planned ahead and told the young men what to do.

He [the chief] tell them what to do, have a bunch of young people with him and he tell them what to

do. Tell him [young men] that summer going to be fishing. Summer comes just once a year and salmon come up, just come once a year, so he tell them boys to fish, to put up food. Put up this, so he talk to them to make them big place. (Neeley 1987)

Frank Stickwan (Simeone and Kari 2002:43) explained that *denae* such as *Cuuy*, who lived on the Gulkana River, actively managed the salmon fishery by keeping track of the number of fish in the traps and making sure the weir or fence was maintained so salmon did not escape. Once they caught all the fish they needed, *Cuuy* stopped the fishery and removed the traps.

LEADERS AND THE FUR TRADE

Ahtna leadership began to change with the start of the Russian fur trade, which made it easier for some *denae* to accumulate wealth. Beginning in the nineteenth century, certain *denae* organized trips to Russian trading posts located on Cook Inlet or at Nuchek on Hinchinbrook Island in Prince William Sound. These trips were difficult and often hazardous. Those *denae* living closest to the trade routes controlled the trade because they controlled the trails. According to Jim McKinley:

When trading with Russians, other tribe [clan] can't go where he make trail. They don't let other tribe [clan] to trade down there unless they have meeting to decide to let them go. Gave them permission. (de Laguna and McClellan 1960d)

Both the Russian-American Company and the Russian Orthodox Church had policies for identifying individual leaders with whom they could conduct business. The Russian term for these leaders was *toion* or *ty-one*, which is where the family name Tyone comes from. Russian "business" involved both trading of furs and conversion to Christianity.

Some of the most renowned traders were Chief Nicolai of Taral (*Taghael Denen*, or "Person of Barrier in Water") and *Saltigi Ghaxen* (or "Person of Saltigi"), who was the leader at Tyone Lake. As the trade developed, these men became rich in trade goods, which they used to stage big potlatches, thus increasing the value of their names. Ben Neeley remembered that Chief Tyone and his people made frequent trips to the American trading post at Knik. Neeley noted that when they got to the trading post, one Ahtna person was selected to serve as spokesman or "trading post man."

Russian days they call “Chief Dayaan,” leader. He used to go down, trading down at Knik, Knik trading post. He used to go down that way. Whole Tyone bunch and go down that way and when they come to city, stopping, they going to have trading post man, gotta have one leader. He [trader] make one leader for people. So that’s how Russian name him Dayaan, is a lot of Dayann from Tyone Lake area. This guy, he was rich man. (Neeley 1987)

Morrie Secondchief remembered that when Chief Tyone (Fig. 5) was a child, his uncle became one of the “first fur buyer[s],” making trips down to Cook Inlet to



Figure 5. Chief Tyone, U'eł yayaal Ta', "Father of He Walks with Him," father of Jim, Jack, and Johnny Tyone. Photograph courtesy Mary Joe Smelcer.

trade furs for tea, sugar, and ammunition that he later traded to other Ahtna. Later, Chief Tyone followed in his uncle’s footsteps and organized expeditions to Cook Inlet, where he traded furs for sugar, tea, ammunition, and tobacco, which he then sold or traded elsewhere. According to Secondchief, people really went for these things, but they did not like flour, which they did not know how to use (Secondchief and Secondchief 1988).

Often a *denae* assembled all the furs that had been trapped by his men, as well as furs taken by other Ahtna living farther up the Copper River and by people from the upper Tanana River. Bacille George (de Laguna and McClellan 1960c) recalled that young men, under the direction of the *denae*, packed the furs down the Copper River to Prince William Sound. They would go in moose-skin boats. When they got back, they would set up a store with all the things they had brought back and trade the furs and tanned skins for tea, sugar, and gunpowder. Everybody had to obey the chief, but some exceptional young men would trade on their own if they thought they could get a better price.

THE COLONIAL ENCOUNTER

American colonialism undermined the authority of *kaskaē* and *denae*. Up until the gold rush of 1898, Ahtna leadership represented the interconnected nature of Ahtna society and worldview. *Denae* and *kaskaē* were the ultimate authority in almost every aspect of life. Colonialism created an entirely new set of problems that could not be addressed by the knowledge and training of traditional leaders. The new reality required Ahtna to learn English and become familiar with the new centers of power, American bureaucracies. Conflicts were no longer resolved by *denae* but by government agents, who also handed out food and told the people when they could hunt. The U.S. Bureau of Education assumed education of the young people. The Americans also introduced the idea of democracy and elected government. Local leaders became elected officials whose authority derived not from the people but from the U.S. government.

Under the new economic order that fostered individual initiative, Ahtna no longer had to work for the *kaskaē* or *denae*. Instead, men worked for the roadhouses cutting wood, or became meat hunters, while women sold mittens and moccasins. One Ahtna elder summed up the situation by saying, “Every man was his own boss. Own *denae*.”

That's the problem, that's the way it is today too" (Reckord 1979:98). Another elder pointed out that:

Around here everybody work for White men. No rich (*kaska*). No work for selves anymore! Now everyone is *ciile'*, working man. That's almost like *'elna*, slave. Only Ben Neeley (Gulkana storekeeper) work for the Indian. Never see a White man work for Indians. That office work pretty good. Get good money for nothing. Indians laugh at a man working on the railroad all, the time. . . . Someone who works for somebody else is not a *denae*, no matter how many thousands of dollars he got. (Reckord 1979:98)

ADVANCING THE CAUSE

World War II was a watershed in the development of modern Ahtna leadership. During the war, two events occurred that galvanized the Ahtna, forcing a political consciousness, the development of local political organizations, and participation in the larger land-claims movement of the 1960s. The first event was the removal of Ahtna from their homes at *Latsibese' Cae'e* or Dry Creek Village in the winter of 1942–1943 (Ringsmuth 2015); the second was the realignment of the Richardson Highway in the summer of 1943 that split the village of Gulkana in half and passed within two feet of the village graveyard. The realignment made the village uninhabitable, forcing the Ahtna to relocate across the Gulkana River. In neither case were Ahtna consulted or even informed before the actions occurred (Neeley and Ewan 1987).

One of the few Alaska Native groups outside of southeast Alaska to embrace the political activism of the Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB), the Ahtna joined the ANB in 1954 and held the first meeting of ANB Camp No. 31 on April 10 of that year at the Copper Center Hall. Harry Johns was president, Fred Ewan vice president, Walter Charley secretary, and Oscar Craig treasurer. There was also an Alaska Native Sisterhood (ANS) Camp No. 31 that organized and fundraised for ANB members to travel to Juneau and Washington, DC. Members of the ANS included Glenda Ewan, Mary Craig, Mamie Charley, Mariana Montague, Walya Hobson, and Molly Billum (Craig 2017).

The ANB was, above all, a Native organization whose mission was to better the lives of Native people. Participation in the ANB provided the Ahtna with an organizational structure that enabled them to confront discrimination and reassert their rights to the land in a

number of ways. ANB camp members learned to organize and act cooperatively, putting aside clan rivalries. ANB camps had elected officers—presidents, vice presidents, secretaries, and treasurers with specific duties—and each camp conducted their business meetings by rules of parliamentary procedure or Robert's Rules of Order. The ANB also had specific goals, including campaigning for worthy causes and raising funds to further those causes, such as construction of a local high school.

Sometime in the early 1960s, delegates from ANB Camp 31 attended an ANB Grand Camp convention. The meeting provided the Ahtna with the opportunity to share their concerns about losing their traditional lands to homesteaders and the State of Alaska. Roy S. Ewan described the situation facing the Ahtna in the late 1950s and early 1960s:

All up and down the highway, we saw non-Natives moving in, claiming 160 acre home-steads and taking all the best land. There were some who were good, and conscientious, and tried to respect the places where Natives picked berries and had campsites. Others just moved right in and took over, even though campsites were clear evidence of past use. (Hess 1984)

ANB leaders encouraged the Ahtna to form a regional organization that could officially make a land claim. Regional organizations could challenge state land selections by filing “blanket land claims” covering much of their traditional territory. The blanket claim filed by the Ahtna was based on an earlier claim filed by John Billum Sr. with the Indian Claims Commission in 1951 (Ferguson 2012:67).

In 1964, members of ANB Camp 31 voted to form an organization called Ahtna' T'Aene Nene' with the purpose of providing better education for children, finding jobs, securing human rights, and solving water, land, and subsistence problems. Oscar Craig was elected president, and Beth Jackson and Harry Johns Sr. served as officers (Ahtna, Inc. 1999). In January 1966, the Ahtna' T'Aene Nene' board began discussions about the possible boundaries for a land claim and gave William Paul Sr., a Tlingit lawyer, power of attorney to pursue a land claim on their behalf (Ahtna, Inc. 1999). In August 1966, Ahtna' T'Aene Nene' was incorporated under the Indian Reorganization Act with Oscar Craig, Bacille Jackson, Frank Billum Sr., Beth Jackson, Harding Ewan, and Harry Johns Sr. as incorporators. Walter Charley was the first advisory board representative (Ahtna, Inc. 1999).

In October 1966, representatives from Ahtna' T'Aene Nene' and ANB Camp 31 attended what the *Tundra Times* called "the largest Native gathering in Alaska" (*Tundra Times* 1966). This was the first Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) meeting. Cook Inlet Native Association president Emil Notti called the meeting because the commissioner of Indian affairs had reportedly announced that the Bureau of Indian Affairs would recommend to Congress the contents of a proposed land settlement, without consulting Alaska Natives. Seventeen Native organizations were represented, and 250 people attended the meeting to discuss "common problems" and exert political pressure on candidates competing in statewide elections to support a fair congressional settlement of Native land claims (Arnold 1976:113–114).

Oscar Craig convinced Robert Marshall to attend the meeting in Anchorage. Marshall, who was to become the first president of Ahtna, Inc., recalled his feelings that the land claims movement was going to go a long way, it was important, and he had to get involved (Simeone 2016b). Those representing Ahtna' T'Aene Nene' at this meeting were Oscar Craig, Jack Larson, John Billum Jr., Walter Charley, Roy S. Ewan, and Harding Ewan (Ahtna, Inc. 1999). Markle Ewan Sr. represented ANB Camp 31. Both Oscar Craig and Markle Ewan Sr. were elected to the AFN board (*Tundra Times* 1966).

AHTNA, INCORPORATED: THE BEGINNING

ANCSA was signed into law on December 18, 1971. Under ANCSA, Alaska Natives were entitled to 40 million acres of land and \$962.5 million in compensation for claims that were extinguished by the settlement (Arnold 1976:146). Ahtna, Inc., was formally established in June 1972, with five members of the Copper River Native Association (CRNA) board acting as the corporation's

interim board. Robert Marshall served as president and Nick Jackson as treasurer (Table 1). The president was not a paid position; the executive director, as a paid employee, conducted the corporation's day-to-day business. Roy S. Ewan was hired as the executive director and first employee of Ahtna, Inc. The first annual shareholders' meeting was held on April 13, 1974 (Ahtna, Inc. 1999). Later, Ewan became president of Ahtna, Inc., and under his leadership Ahtna was the first regional corporation to distribute dividends to shareholders (*Alaska Review* 1978).

Ahtna leaders who grew up between 1910 and 1940 were influenced by Western education, employment in the Western economy, and Christianity. Beginning in the 1930s, the government forced Ahtna families to send their children away to school. Many were sent either to the Wrangell Institute (in Wrangell) or Mt. Edgecombe High School (in Sitka). At these schools, children were forbidden to speak their Native language, taught to read and write English, and taught about American culture and values. Attendance at boarding schools meant that students often lost or forgot their culture and language and became more quickly assimilated into non-Native American culture than their parents and siblings who remained in the villages. But attendance at boarding school also meant students received an education that proved to be useful in the long-term struggle to assert Native people's rights. Roy S. Ewan (2012) was an example of the new leadership produced by the boarding schools.

Ewan attended boarding school at Seward and later Mt. Edgecombe in Sitka. He served in the U.S. Army, and in 1957 he joined the Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB), for which he served as treasurer, and met William Paul Sr. at an annual convention in southeast Alaska. At the convention Paul told Ewan that he would help the Ahtna to file a land claim.

Table 1. Ahtna corporate leaders. Ahtna presidents were originally elected board members who also served as the chairperson of the Ahtna board. That precedent changed when Roy S. Ewan was hired as president during his second term.

President	Village	Clan	Years
Robert Marshall	Tazlina	Udzisyu	1972–1976
Christine Craig (Yazzie)	Chitina	Naltsiine	1977–1978
Roy Tansy Sr.	Cantwell	Udzisyu	1979
Nicholas Jackson	Gulkana	Udzisyu	1980–1983
Roy S. Ewan	Gulkana	Udzisyu	1984–1990 and 1993–1996
Wilson Justin	Nabesna	Ats'e'naey	1991–1992
Darryl Jordan	Kluti-Kaah	Udzisyu	1997–1999
Kenneth P. Johns	Kluti-Kaah	Udzisyu	2000–2011
Michelle R. Anderson	Gulkana	Udzisyu	2011 to present

Eventually, Ewan went into business and opened a store to help people in Gulkana who otherwise had to drive all the way to Glennallen to purchase groceries. He also became involved with Ahtna' T'Aene Nene', eventually becoming president. In 1967 Ewan went to work for the Alaska State Community Action Program, later known as RurAL CAP, and eventually became rural coordinator, working on projects in different parts of Alaska. Ewan and his family moved to Anchorage in 1969, and he continued to work for RurAL CAP.

Ewan had gone to the original AFN meeting in 1966 and served on the AFN board, but because he worked for RurAL CAP, a government-funded program, he had to be low-key in his support for land claims and was never involved when AFN met with the secretary of the interior. He nevertheless continued to represent the Ahtna people.

Early in 1971, AFN received a grant from the Ford Foundation to develop informational materials to explain the land claims to Native people and what they would need to do when the claims were settled. Ewan was one of two Alaska Native people sent to Washington, DC, to be trained and to produce a plan to implement the land claims. After ANCSA was signed in December of 1971, Ewan was urged to become president of Ahtna, Inc. He had support from the AFN and RurAL CAP: both wrote letters to the Copper River Native Association suggesting Ewan be hired as the first president of Ahtna, Inc. Overall, Ewan was probably one of the most influential of the new leadership who guided Ahtna, Inc., through its early stages of development.

Employment played a similar role by helping future Ahtna leaders to develop many of the skills that enabled them to be successful in the outside world. Employment also provided the money with which to become politically active. By the 1950s, many of the new Ahtna leaders had obtained jobs. Many worked for the Alaska Road Commission, such as Walter Charley, Oscar Craig, Robert Marshall, Fred Ewan, Ben Neeley, Frank Billum, Harry John, Harry Billum, Markle Pete, Lloyd Bell, and Henry Bell. All of these men became involved in the development of local Native organizations and the Native land claims movement.

In the nineteenth century many Ahtna accepted the Russian Orthodox religion, and influential leaders like Chief Andrew had become self-proclaimed priests. In the 1930s nondenominational Christian missionaries arrived in the Copper Basin, and the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church all but disappeared. Many of the new

leaders, such as Harry Johns, became pastors in the new church. The leadership that emerged at the beginning of the land claims movement in the 1950s looked nothing like the *denae* or *kaskaе*, but they were still expected to be role models and to follow tradition, as well as act as good Christians.

As Ahtna culture changed, so did the role of women. In the past there were rich women who had status and power, but in general women were considered subordinate to men. But when the men went away to work in the summer, their wives, sisters, mothers, and sweethearts filled the gap and kept things going. As one elder put it, "women held it all together"; they "took care of the kids, made the clothes, cooked, fished and processed the fish" (Ina Lincoln, pers. comm. 15 June 2007). Since the 1950s women have gained positions of political and economic power. They have been elected to village councils, and today a woman is president of Ahtna, Inc. (Fig. 6). Some of the most prominent people in contemporary Ahtna history are women, such as Katie John, Ruby John, Lena Charley (who was one of the first female big game guides), and Christine (Yazzie) Craig, who became the first female president of Ahtna, Inc.

In about 1988 a group of Ahtna elders decided the Ahtna people needed a traditional chief, and they selected Jim McKinley (Fig. 7). Later, Harry Johns, Ben Neeley, and Fred Ewan also became traditional chiefs (Figs. 8 and 9). Unlike a *denae* or *kaskaе* of old, the modern traditional chief has no political or economic role and is not a clan leader; he is a culture bearer, a person who embodies traditional Ahtna culture and speaks for all Ahtna.

LOOKING BACK

In an interview with the *Tundra Times* in 1984, Roy S. Ewan reflected on the passage of ANCSA and recalled how, during World War II, construction crews ripped through Indian graves when altering the highway right-of-way at Gulkana without a word from local Natives or concern for their feelings. "I thought this was unjust. We had to get title to some land!" (Hess 1984).

Mildred Buck commented on the difficulty in making the transition from *koh't'aene* (people) to shareholders and corporate people, and how leadership had changed.

Really, it's really hard. We're not corporation people. And now we're called shareholders where we used to be "*koh't'aene*" you know, people. Now we're "that's a share-holder." I don't like that word.



Figure 6. Governor Bill Walker visits Gulkana, 2016. From left: Michelle Anderson (president of Ahtna, Inc.), Craig Fleener (special assistant to the governor), Governor Bill Walker, Ben Neeley, and Roy Ewan (past president of Ahtna, Inc.). Photograph courtesy Bill Simeone.

I'd rather be called what we used to have before. I feel that shareholder being, us being called that is just cold—a cold word. “*Koht'aene*” is much different, it means people. Somebody with real heart, you know a real person.

It was hard for the elders especially to try to get used to the corporations and how some of the people running it are now—they are our own people. They don't seem like it anymore. They try to be business people but seem like very few are making it. When the Alaska Native Lands Claims came through I was very much involved there too because I had to go and testify about how we used to camp, how we respected the land and that ev-

erything is just about the same even though many Indians lived here and we never ruined anything. There wasn't a can in the creek where we live, it was clean, and I had to testify to things like that. So I was sort of involved there too. (Buck 1998)

CONCLUSION

The colonization of the Ahtna homeland after the gold rush of 1898 diminished and eventually destroyed traditional Ahtna leadership: men who held total authority and were the economic and political lynchpins of the culture. This decline in the role and status of traditional chiefs

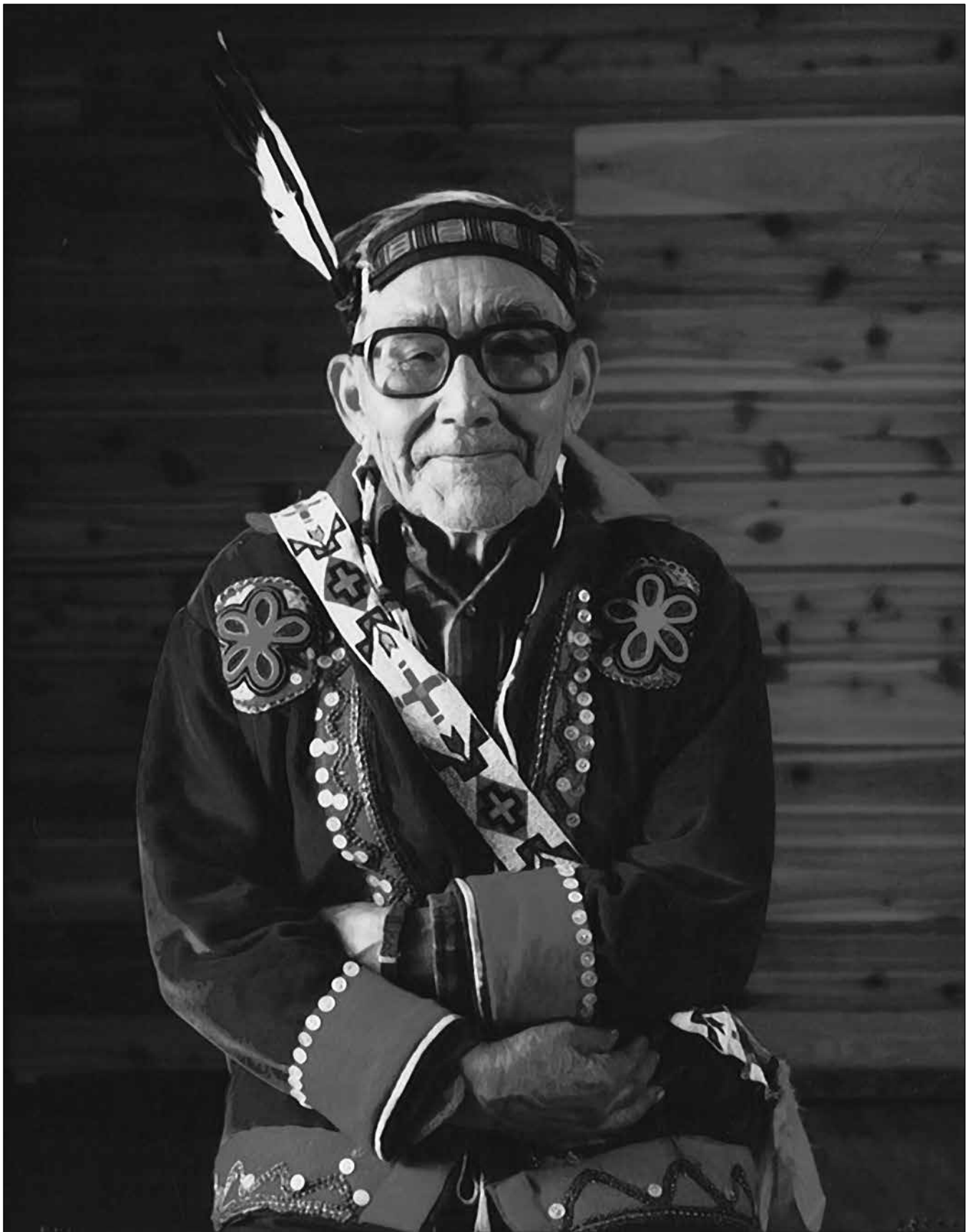


Figure 7. First Traditional Chief Jim McKinley. Photograph courtesy Ahtna, Inc.



Figure 8. Second Traditional Chief Harry Johns. Photograph courtesy Ahtna, Inc.

coincided with the implementation of Western political institutions and the growth of federal and state bureaucracies ostensibly designed to manage all economic, social, and political aspects of Ahtna life. Additionally, the formation of for-profit and nonprofit Native corporations under the auspices of ANCSA, also modeled on Western institutions and values, contributed to the perception of a loss of leadership.

When writing this article, the three Ahtna coauthors provided their perspectives on how Ahtna leadership has changed. It should be noted that one is the current president of Ahtna, Inc., one is past president, and the third is senior vice president. Today Ahtna has a traditional chief who is selected by the elders to represent the living tradition of Ahtna culture but is nothing like a *kaska* or *denae*. There is a strict separation between the traditional leadership, which represents Ahtna tradition, and administrative and business leadership. Administrative leaders, including village council presidents, are elected officials, whose purview is limited to running village governments. Business leaders run Ahtna, Inc., and have fiduciary responsibility to shareholders. Modern leaders reflect the changes in Ahtna culture. First, the role of women has changed: women are now prominent leaders. Second, as the Ahtna responded and adjusted to colonialism, traditional leadership simply faded. It was not until after World War II that new leadership surfaced to deal with outsiders and assert their rights as Ahtna. These leaders developed in an environment in which the kind of knowledge possessed by *kaska* or *denae* was not a prerequisite for running a village or a corporation.

Nick Jackson, past chairman of the board of Ahtna, Inc., reflected on many of the changes experienced by Ahtna people throughout the twentieth century leading up to ANCSA.

We started looking for work, whatever. Back them days they looked for survival, like hunting and fishing. There was no immediate jobs around. Once in awhile firefighting. People lived off the land them days. That's why when the depression was in the United States, it didn't affect Alaska Natives. They just lived...they hunted, burn wood, cut wood, pack water. Nothing different. There was no depression here.

So we came from different lives up to...that's where we transformed. A lot of people don't realize that, though. You sit back and see where we came from, and where we're at today. Man that's just amazing. (Jackson 2012)



Figure 9. Traditional Chiefs Ben Neeley and Fred Ewan (with rifle). Photograph courtesy Ahtna Heritage Foundation.

Jackson then said, “ANCSA changed the people. No Ahtna had ever spent much time in meetings, had no idea what a corporation was, and had to learn to plan ahead. That was *'engii* for traditional Ahtna.” (It was *'engii* for people to say in advance what they would do.) Jackson coined a term for the transformation when people changed after ANCSA: *Cuc'uun ts'ezdlaen*, literally “we became a different people.” He said, “We came from fish camp to wearing ties and whatever” (Jackson 2012).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank all those elders who came before and were willing to share their knowledge and insight. *Tsin'aen*—thank you—to these elders and their families: Elizabeth and Mentasta Pete, Pete and Annie Ewan, Bacille and Nancy George, Jim McKinley, Ina Lincoln, Fred Sr. and Katie John, Huston Sanford, Wilson Justin, Ruth Hicks, Ruby Sinyon, Kate and Adam Sanford, Ben Neeley, Jim Tyone, Elsie Tyone, Robert and Mae Marshall, Roy S. and Glenda Ewan, Harry and Ruth Johns, Tony Jackson, Walya Hobson, Fred Ewan, Mollie Galbreath, Bill and Maggie Joe, Lena Charley, Lemmie Charley, Frank Charley, Willow Creek George, Douglas and Maryann Billum, John and Molly Billum, Mildred Buck, Frank Billum, Henry and Etta Bill, Marilyn and Wilbur Joe, Sophie Lincoln, Eleanor Dementi, Louise Mayo, Jane Nicholas, Jake Tansy, Bud Carlson, Roy Tansy Sr., Nome Stickivan, John Nickolai, Jack John Justin, Andy Brown, Arthur and Martha Jackson, Nicholas (Nick) Jackson,

Frank and Elsie Stickwan, Virginia Pete, Markle Pete, Joe and Martha Goodlataw, Maggie Eskilida, James Sinyon, Long Lucy John, Fannie Sthienfield, Jeanie Maxim, Texas Charley, Walter Charley, Christine Craig, Christopher Gene, and Morrie Secondchief.

NOTES

1. A version of this article originally appeared as a chapter in the book *Ahtna: The People and Their History, Netseh Da' Tkughit'e' Before Us, It Was Like This* (Simeone 2018), published by Ahtna, Inc., for distribution to Ahtna shareholders. Following suggestions by two peer reviewers, this article was modified and expanded.

In the preface to the 2018 publication, Michelle Anderson, president of Ahtna, Inc., wrote that she hoped the book would not only generate pride and interest among Ahtna but also encourage non-Ahtna to learn about Ahtna history and culture and “understand why we fight so hard to protect our lands, our foods, and our way of life.”

2. The heart of this work is drawn largely from the transcripts of interviews conducted by anthropologists Frederica de Laguna and Catharine McClellan. The notes came from two sources: the archives of the Alaska Native Language Center, and Dr. William Workman and Karen Workman, who obtained a cache of material on the Ahtna from Dr. Jack Campbell.

Between 1954 and 1968, de Laguna and McClellan spent summers in the Copper River Basin interviewing Ahtna elders about their traditional culture. When they began work with Ahtna elders, both had considerable experience in Native communities. Their skill, empathy, and knowledge are reflected in their writings but especially in the notes, which provide a huge amount of information and insight into traditional Ahtna culture. Both de Laguna and McClellan took copious notes and made taped interviews that they transcribed and typed up. While the information from de Laguna and McClellan's field notes has been referenced in various academic publications, few of the direct quotes have been published.

3. When this article came back from the copyeditor, Wilson Justin commented on the use of the word *luck*. In the English language, luck is considered arbitrary fortune, or something bestowed indiscriminately. For Ahtna, luck is not arbitrary. It is the re-

sult of a gift bestowed by a powerful being—such as the hummingbird that visited *Tsedi Kulaen Denen*. The gift is an inner vision or inner eye that enables a person to see through a problem, to create solutions and have good fortune. Such a gift is bestowed not arbitrarily but based on a person's ability and potential to enhance the life of the people. Those who receive this gift become leaders or medicine people, and they wear regalia or necklaces that signify they have received this extraordinary gift. Traditional leaders wear dentalium shells, for instance; medicine men wear a single bear claw, a single feather, or a medicine pouch made of certain animal skins. The symbols vary widely on a clan basis, but the message is unblinking and straightforward: here is one gifted and trusted to wield power and authority (Wilson Justin, pers. comm., July 22, 2019).

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