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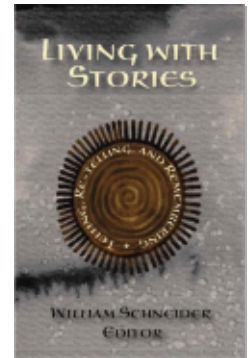
Published by Utah State University Press

Schneider, William.

Living with Stories: Telling, Re-telling, and Remembering.

Logan: Utah State University Press, 2008.

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3

The St. Lawrence Island Famine and Epidemic, 1878–80

A Yupik Narrative in Cultural and Historical Context

Aron L. Crowell and
Estelle Oozevaseuk

Aron Crowell is an anthropologist and director of the Smithsonian Institution’s Arctic Studies Center in Anchorage, Alaska. In his work at the Smithsonian he has created opportunities for Alaska Natives to share their cultural knowledge through exhibits and exploration of museum collections. The following essay was inspired by a trip to the Smithsonian with a group of Yupik elders from St. Lawrence Island. A magnificent gut skin parka led Estelle Oozevaseuk, his co-author, to retell her version of the St. Lawrence Island famine of 1878–80. The parka may date from that time and represents garments that were worn by the people who died. In her narration, the parka symbolizes their repentance for mistreating walrus and their preparation for passing to a promised land. Estelle’s story challenges the “official” interpretation of what caused the famine and shifts the focus from the islanders’ failure to hunt to acknowledgement of their transgression against animal beings. Documentary sources and oral tradition are presented to demonstrate how

each approach can add perspective to a tragic episode in the history of the Yupik people. This essay was originally published in 2006 in *Arctic Anthropology*.

Introduction

The participation of Alaska Native elders in studies of museum collections and the development of exhibitions has created a new context for the recounting of oral traditions (Clifford 2004; Crowell 2004; Crowell, Steffian, and Pullar 2001; Fienup-Riordan 1996, 1998, 1999, 2005). In Native commentary, museum objects can serve as anchor points for personal or collective histories—objects as “signs,” to use Susan Pearce’s terminology (Pearce 1992:15–35). Sometimes such objects are recognized as encompassing cultural symbols, as when southwest Alaska Yup’ik leaders Paul John, Andy Paukan, Wassilie Berlin, and Catherine Moore speak of being “in the drum” as a metaphor for integral Yup’ik identity (Meade and Fienup-Riordan 2005:111–17).

In 2001, a distinguished St. Lawrence Island Yupik elder, Estelle Oozevaseuk (Penapak), joined other elders from the Bering Strait region for five days of collections study at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) and National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) in Washington, D.C. The trip was one of a series organized by the Arctic Studies Center and regional Alaska Native organizations to research the Alaskan ethnology collections and lay the foundation for a collaborative web catalog (<http://alaska.si.edu>) and large permanent exhibition at the Anchorage Museum.¹ Mrs. Oozevaseuk, born at Gambell in 1920, is well known for her knowledge of St. Lawrence Island’s cultural heritage. Her lifetime of community service at Gambell has included work as a health aide, midwife, and teacher.

Among the objects that Mrs. Oozevaseuk discussed at the NMAI was a *sanighataaq*, or ceremonial seal intestine parka (NMAI 123404). The parka was donated to the museum in 1923 by San Francisco-based fur trader Arnold Liebes, who purchased it on St. Lawrence Island (Museum of the American Indian 1924:7). It is made of winter-bleached intestines of bearded seal and decorated in a man’s style, with plumes and orange beak-plates of crested auklets. The parka is further ornamented with baby walrus fur along the bottom edge and with alder bark-dyed seal fur on the chest.

On the basis of its distinctive design and decoration, Mrs. Oozevaseuk identified the *sanighataaq* as having originally belonged



NMAI 123404

Sanighhtaaq, or ceremonial seal intestine parka, National Museum of the American Indian.

to a family from her clan, the Sanighmelnguut (also called Aymaramket), once living in the village of Kukulek on St. Lawrence Island. She added that the people of the village were well known for their beautiful clothing. In this connection, Mrs. Oozevaseuk narrated a traditional story, inherited from her grandfather Uwetelen (born 1865),² about the last days of the village and the mass death of nearly all its inhabitants. Through this account, Mrs. Oozevaseuk linked the *sanighhtaaq* to a pivotal event in St. Lawrence Island history. At the same time, her words limned the symbolic dimensions of the garment as a vessel of both Yupik and Christian meaning.

The loss of Kukulek occurred during the St. Lawrence Island famine and epidemic of 1878–80, during which more than 1,000 people (two-thirds or more of the population) may have perished (Ackerman 1976:38–39; Bockstoece 1986:136–41; Burgess 1974:28–32; Fortune 1989:309–11; Krupnik 1994; Krupnik, Walenga, and Metcalf 2002). A recent analysis using archaeological and historical data (Mudar and Speaker 2003) projects an even greater loss of about 1,900 people out of a prefamine population of over 2,200. This disaster and its aftermath are described in a wide variety of sources, including Yupik oral tradition (H. Aningayou 1989; J. Aningayou 2002; Kava 1987:161–63; Kingeekuk



Estelle Oozevaseuk at the National Museum of Natural History, 2001.

1987a, 1987b; R. Silook 1976:62–63), contemporary written accounts by Euro-American witnesses (Elliott 1887:456–57; Hooper 1881:10–11, 1884:100–01; Muir 1917:108–09; Nelson 1899:269–70; Rosse 1883:20–21), and notes by others who gathered information from Yupik survivors and their descendants (Collins 1937:22–24, 2002:226; Doty 1900:187, 215–18; Geist 2002:235–38; Geist and Rainey 1936:10–11; Hughes 1960:11–13; Moore 1923:352–56).

Kukulek was also the site of massive archaeological excavations during 1931 to 1935, during which a large part of its historic ruins, artifacts, and human remains were removed (Geist and Rainey 1936). While this archaeological research today provides an additional source of information about life and death at the village, it was also a massive disturbance of the dead that was forbidden by local custom and belief (Healy 1889:12; Kingeekuk 1987b:115–16). Excavator Otto Geist shipped large numbers of human bones from the historic upper layer of the site to the Smithsonian Institution for study by physical anthropologist Aleš Hrdlička (Geist and Rainey 1936:48). These remains (estimated at 149 individuals) and others removed from the island in 1881 by Edward W. Nelson and Capt. Calvin Hooper (another 101 individuals) were held at the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) until 1997,

when they were repatriated to Bering Straits Regional Corporation under provisions of the National Museum of the American Indian Act (Mudar and Speaker 1997). Estelle Oozevaseuk served as a St. Lawrence Island representative during the Smithsonian repatriation process.

As discussed below, non-Yupik sources give various explanations for why hundreds perished in the winters of 1878–79 and/or 1879–80. Most accounts allege that an alcoholic “debauch” fueled by liquor from trading vessels caused the neglect of fall hunting, which led to famine and disease during a harsh winter of strong winds and poor hunting. The moralistic tone of these reports includes condemnation of the islanders’ “improvidence” and “degradation” (Hooper 1881, 1884; Muir 1917:110; Nelson 1899:268–70). Yupik chronicles corroborate the occurrence of wind, bad ice conditions, severe hunger, and a swiftly fatal disease that devastated the island’s population, while in most cases either placing little emphasis on alcohol or specifically denying that it caused the famine.

Estelle Oozevaseuk’s retelling of Uwetelen’s story presents an island-based view of the tragedy that diverges sharply from Western historical representations. The narrative interprets the famine within a framework of Yupik values and spiritual beliefs, reflecting, as oral historian William Schneider suggests, the common divergence between what is “reported” by outsiders and what is “told” within an interpretive cultural tradition (Schneider, personal communication, 2005). People of the village, it is said, cut skin from living walrus during a time of plenty, carelessly forgetting the importance of mutual caring and respect between animals and human beings. All that followed was a consequence of these actions. Directed by a spiritual leader, the people of the village dressed in beautiful clothing like the *sanightaaq* that inspired the story’s telling, acknowledged their wrongdoing, received forgiveness, and died peacefully in their sleep, bound for a pure, white land as promised by their guide. Several other versions of this Kukulek story, or references to it (J. Aningayou 2002; Bogoras 1913:433–34; Doty 1900:218; Silook 1976:62–63) indicate that it has been part of the island’s oral tradition since at least the 1890s.

An earlier recitation by Mrs. Oozevaseuk appears in a bilingual oral history collection published by the Bering Straits School District (Appasingok et al. 1987a,b; Oozevaseuk 1987), and she has told it many times to Yupik school children as an elder storyteller. She also presented it to a public audience at the National Museum

of Natural History in Washington, D.C. during the 1982 opening of the exhibition *Inua: Spirit World of the Bering Sea Eskimo* (Fitzhugh and Kaplan 1982).

The contrasts between this narrative and other accounts of the 1878–80 tragedy, especially those authored by outsiders, are the focus of the present discussion. Perhaps its most striking feature is that Yupiget are held responsible for what occurred, not through improvidence but rather through a lapse in their regard for a spiritual code that sustains the life of all arctic hunting peoples. External and perhaps secondary “causes,” whether weather, disease, or alcohol, are not adduced. Moreover, the story’s imagery reflects a synthesis of Christianity with traditional Yupik belief. The challenge is to discern the present meanings and purposes of this living oral tradition. Indigenous narratives are often told *against* Western history, presenting representations of the past that are a foundation for contemporary cultural identity and autonomy (Crowell 2004; Friedman 1992). They are also told because they exemplify values and lessons for living that are relevant to the present lives and needs of Native listeners (Cruikshank 1998; Morrow and Schneider 1995).

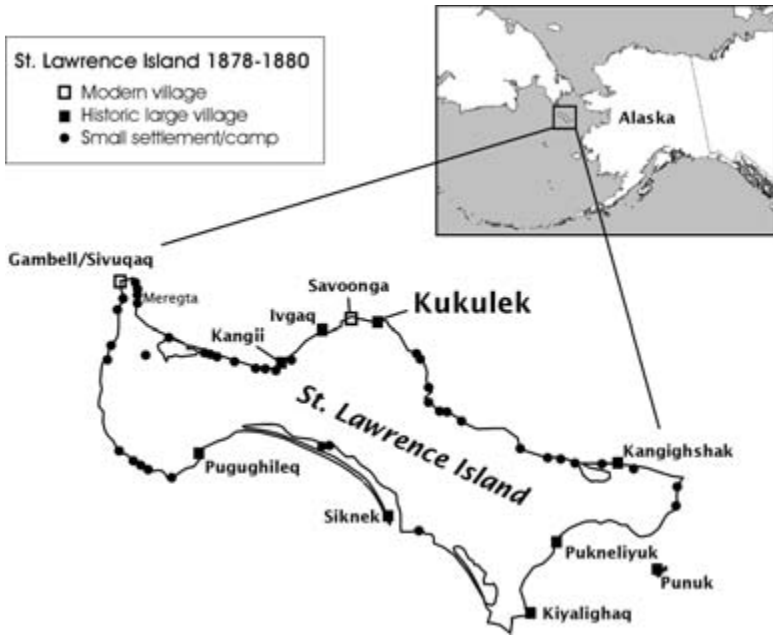
The St. Lawrence Island Disaster Viewed from Multiple Perspectives

St. Lawrence Island has been home for almost 2,500 years to a Yupik population that subsists on the harvest of walruses, bowhead and gray whales, seals, fish, and seabirds (Collins 1937; Gerlach and Mason 1992; Hughes 1960, 1984). Of the island’s two contemporary villages, Gambell, or Sivuqaq (population 649 in 2000) is by far the oldest, having been occupied for the entire human history of the island. Savoonga (population 643 in 2000) was founded in 1911–12. The Yupik language of Saint Lawrence Island is also spoken in villages on the near parts of the Chukotka mainland, some 40 miles to the west, with which the island has traded, married, and fought through the centuries. People of the island are affiliated to patrilineal clans (*ramket*), many of Siberian origin. Estelle Oozevaseuk’s Aymaramket-Sanighmelnguut clan is from the village of Ungaziq (Old Chaplino or Indian Point) on Cape Chaplin. While many of this group migrated to Sivuqaq (Gambell) after 1880, others are said to have come earlier and to have resided at Kukulek at the time of the catastrophe (Krupnik 1994:57 and personal communication, 2005).

Western contact with the island, both direct and indirect, began with the Russian explorations of Bering (in 1728), Kobelev (in 1779), Billings (in 1791), Kotzebue (in 1816), and others (Burgess 1974). Intensive interaction with the American commercial whaling fleet occurred throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, when dozens of vessels stopped each year to exchange firearms, whaling guns, iron tools, cloth, hardtack, beads, and liquor for walrus ivory, baleen, furs, and clothing (Bockstoce 1986; Hughes 1960, 1984; Petroff 1882:10). Archaeological collections from Kukulek indicate the great extent to which the Yupiget had come to rely on imported iron tools by the late 1870s (Geist and Rainey 1936:133–34). In addition to bringing new implements, foods, alcohol, and diseases, the whaling fleet slaughtered massive numbers of the whale and walrus populations that were critical to the Native subsistence economy, almost certainly an underlying cause of the acute food crisis in 1878–80 (Bockstoce 1986:131–37; Jackson 1898:565). Cultural impacts of a different sort came with the establishment of a Presbyterian mission and school on the island in 1894, headed by Vene C. Gambell, after whom the village of Sivuqaq was renamed.

Estimates of St. Lawrence Island's pre-1878 population are uncertain, ranging as low as 300 to 400 (Dall 1870:537; Elliott 1887:546) and as high as 4,000 (Burgess 1974:63; Foote 1965), with 1,500 as the most commonly cited figure (Collins 1937:22–23; Ellanna 1983:69–77; Hooper 1884:100; Hughes 1960:12; Muir 1917:107–08; Teben'kov 1981 [1852]:36–38). Mudar and Speaker (2003) derive a population estimate of 2,274 from archaeological data, using counts and dimensions of winter house pits to calculate the populations of nineteenth century settlements (Collins 1937; Crowell 1984).

Teben'kov's charting survey in 1830–33 recorded five villages by name as well as a number of other smaller settlements (Teben'kov 1981 [1852], Map 19). Elliott recorded five principal villages in 1874, on the basis of a partial survey (Elliott 1887, end map). Based on historic sources, archaeological data, and villages named in oral histories (Apassingok, Walunga, and Tennant 1985, Apassingok et al. 1987a,b; Krupnik, Walunga, and Metcalf 2002), there were at least ten large pre-famine communities, including Sivuqaq, Kangii, Ivgaq, Kukulek, Kangighsak (Northeast Cape),³ Pujuk, Pukneliyuk, Kiyalighaq (Southeast Cape), Siknek, and Pugughileq (Southwest Cape), in addition to numerous smaller camps and warm season sites for fishing, hunting, and egg-gathering (Ackerman 1961;



Historic villages and camps on St. Lawrence Island.

Crowell 1984). The first post-famine U.S. census in 1890 recorded 286 residents at Gambell (Porter 1893), not counting an additional 25 to 30 at Pugughileq (Krupnik 1994:56).

Historical Reports and Interpretations

Large-scale starvation brought about by sustained southerly winds and poor hunting for seals and walrus began in the winter of 1878, according to information gathered by trader J. J. Nye, who found no survivors at three of the four villages he visited in the fall of 1879 (Bailey 1880:26; Burgess 1974:29). Nye blamed alcohol brought by whaling ships for the failure of the islanders to lay in sufficient food supplies before the beginning of the hard winter. Another whaler, Ebenezer Nye, wrote to the New Bedford *Standard* in August 1879 that one third of the Native population south of St. Lawrence Bay, Chukotka (i.e., on both sides of Bering Strait) had died of starvation during the previous winter, including half of the people on St. Lawrence Island (Bockstoece 1986:137-38). He blamed the losses on severe weather and the depletion of walrus by the American commercial whaling fleet. In July 1879, A.

E. Nordenskiöld visited St. Lawrence Island and observed recent graves at Meregta (near Sivuqaq) but learned nothing about the disaster from survivors there, apparently for lack of a translator (Nordenskiöld 1881:250–56). In June 1880, Captain Calvin L. Hooper of the U.S. Revenue Steamer *Corwin* reported hundreds of dead at villages along the north shore of the island, including Kukulek⁴ (Hooper 1881:10–11). His information, consistent with previous reports, was that these deaths occurred during the winter of 1878–79. Three hundred people at Sivuqaq had survived a second winter of bad hunting (1879–80), this time resulting from severe north winds, unbroken sea ice, and heavy snow. Relatively few died, but residents were forced to eat their dogs and the walrus hide covers of their boats and houses. It appeared that all other villages on the island had been abandoned. Hooper echoed J. J. Nye’s opinion that drinking had played a major role in the two-year famine, and suggested that the islanders would soon be totally extinct if the liquor trade were not stopped. Henry Elliott also mentions that the winter of 1879–80 had been extremely severe, with ice that closed in around the island and kept the walrus herds far to the south (Elliott 1887:456).

The *Corwin* visited again the following summer (1881), this time with naturalist John Muir and Smithsonian naturalist-collector Edward W. Nelson on board. In late June, the vessel stopped briefly at Pugughileq (Southwest Cape), where there were many dead as well as two families of survivors (Hooper 1884:22–23). On July 3 the ship visited Sivuqaq and several abandoned settlements on the north shore of the island (Hooper 1884:33, 100–01; Muir 1917:108–10; Nelson 1899:269–70). Both Nelson and Muir seem to have understood (in error) that the main loss of life had occurred in the winter of 1879–80. Their eyewitness descriptions of the abandoned villages are quite graphic. At one unnamed location, Nelson saw twenty-five deceased adults inside a single house, and others on the ground outside. The *Corwin* stopped at a much larger settlement where Nelson, Muir, Hooper, and I. C. Rosse, the ship surgeon, all went ashore. They found two hundred dead, many wrapped in reindeer skins and lying on the sleeping platforms of the semisubterranean winter houses, where they “met their fate with tranquil apathy,” according to Muir. Inside one house about fifteen individuals had been placed in a pile. Other victims lay in the entryways to the houses, on the ground outside, or along the route to the community burial ground about one-half mile distant.⁵

It appeared that the initial effort to carry victims to the cemetery by sled had gradually been abandoned.

This village can be securely identified as Kukulek on the basis of archaeological data. Kukulek was the largest prefamine historic community on the north shore (with the possible exception of Sivuqaq), located on a high mound of older deposits that date back two millennia to the Old Bering Sea period (Crowell 1984:81–83). Its appearance is consistent with Rosse’s observation that the location they visited “must have been a very old settlement, judging from the thousands of walrus skulls strewn in every direction and from the character of the kitchen-middens” (Rosse 1883:20). Muir reported that it had “about twelve houses” close to the beach, matching the eleven mapped at Kukulek by Geist and Rainey (1936:54). Archaeological descriptions of the people found at Kukulek—lying side by side or in piles on the sleeping platforms, collapsed on the ground outside, and along the route to the community burial hill—closely match the *Corwin* reports (Geist and Rainey 1936:55–81).⁶

Captain Hooper recounted seeing an entire family of eight or nine who were found dead inside a summer house at the village.⁷ Hooper thought the circumstances were strange, since a skin-walled summer house would not have been erected before the arrival of warmer weather and with it the opportunity to hunt seals in the open ice leads. He wrote,

Believing they were doomed, they submitted quietly to what to them appeared inevitable, and daily growing weaker, stretched upon the ground and covering themselves with furs, waited for the end. In this position we found them lying as if asleep, their guns, bows, arrows, spears, and traps lying strewn on the ground. (Hooper 1884:100)

Reports by the 1881 *Corwin* group reflect differences of opinion about what had happened on the island. According to Nelson:

Just before the time for the walrus to reach the island that season [which he dated Fall, 1879], the Eskimo obtained a supply of whisky from some vessels and began a prolonged debauch, which ended only when the supply was exhausted. When this occurred the annual migration of the walrus had passed, and the people were shut in for the winter by the ice. The result was that over two-thirds of the population died before spring. (Nelson 1899:269)

Nelson noted that some kind of disease had accompanied the famine. Hooper (1881, 1884) agreed that the tragedy originated in the abuse of alcohol, but along with Muir he doubted that hunger

was the sole cause of death, because edible emergency foods such as walrus rawhide and other skins remained in some of the houses they visited (Hooper 1884:100–101; Muir 1917:109). In fact, he wrote, “the percentage of deaths appeared so extraordinary that I have at times thought the island must have been visited by an epidemic” (Hooper 1884:100). Rosse believed that disease was the most important cause for the loss of life and cited information from a whaling captain who had visited during the famine and observed that people were afflicted with “measles or black tongue”⁸ (Rosse 1883:21). Unlike his compatriots, Rosse doubted that “intemperance” could have really initiated the disaster since, he argued, it was unlikely that the islanders could have obtained enough alcohol from any ship to last more than a few days.

Several general points may be made about these reports and conjectures by Euro-American observers, before considering Yupik memories and oral traditions about the events of 1878–80. The reliability of the information that Nye, Hooper, and others obtained on the island is open to question because of the brevity of their visits and difficulties of communication. For example, Uwetelen and others told Otto Geist in 1929 that no Yupik translator assisted Nelson in his inquiries (Geist 2002:238), and Rosse reported that the expedition’s ability to communicate with local residents was “very imperfect” (1883:21). Negative racial stereotypes and cultural misunderstandings also came into play. Muir described the people of Sivuqaq as “simple and childlike” (Muir 1917:26), and Hooper depicted “Innuits” in general as filthy, savage, superstitious, dishonest, and lazy (Hooper 1884:99–113). In this vein he wrote that the people of St. Lawrence Island were vulnerable to famine because “they make no provision for the future, but depend on what they get from day to day.” In actuality, Yupik subsistence activities from spring through fall (whaling, seal and walrus hunting, gathering seabirds and eggs, harvesting plant foods, etc.) are intensely focused on storing sufficient food for the winter (both today and in the past), although such efforts can fail in abnormal years.

The emphasis on alcohol in initiating the disaster, although supported by Yupik accounts for specific locations (see below), seems in general to be more a reflection of Euro-American prejudice or special interests than a logical or satisfactory explanation. Loss of human life during 1878–80 was so widespread—including substantial mortality in all the villages of St. Lawrence Island as

well as simultaneous famine along the coast of Chukotka and at King Island—that it seems impossible to attribute it to the incidental procurement of liquor supplies at a few locations (Bockstoce 1986:138–141; Collins 1937:23–24; Doty 1900:217). Bockstoce (1986) suggests that Hooper and others connected with the U.S. Revenue Service may have exaggerated the alcohol problem to increase congressional alarm and funding for the service's arctic operations (1986:139). Additionally, walrus are normally available throughout the winter on St. Lawrence Island, not just during the fall migration (Ellanna 1983; Fay 1982), so that failure to obtain them had to be due to prolonged weather patterns or the impact of disease rather than to any temporary alcoholic incapacitation.

As shown by Igor Krupnik's analysis of post-1880 census data, more people survived at Kukulek, Kialighaq, Pugughileq, and other locations than historic reports would suggest (Krupnik 1994). Evacuees from these villages congregated at Sivuqaq, and clans identified with these historic settlements make up a large proportion of its current population. After the epidemic, Gambell's population was also bolstered by migration from Yupik villages in Chukotka (Burgess 1974:33; Geist and Rainey 1936:11; Porter 1893:8,165). Pugughileq, the only other village to survive the 1878–80 disaster, was inhabited until the 1930s.

Yupik Sources

Statements from Yupik sources confirm that the famine arrived with heavy fall winds from the south, southeast, and east that kept solid pack ice away from the island.⁹ Winds and broken ice created impossible conditions for hunting walrus, either on foot or by boat, and strong currents caused the failure of seal netting at Sivuqaq (Collins 2002:226; Geist 2002:235–36; Giddings 1967:169; Hughes 1960:13). Paul Silook (Siluk, Estelle's father, born in 1893) told Henry Collins that this occurred in 1878 (or possibly a year earlier), corresponding with the chronology reported by J. J. Nye and Hooper. Geist's notes from discussions with Iqmaluwa, Uwetelen, and other elders in 1929 refer to the winter of 1879–80 as the primary period of famine (Geist 2002:235–38; see also Jimmie Ataayaghaq in Burgess 1974:68), preceded by a lesser crisis four years before that. Despite these inconsistencies in dating, all accounts agree that in the critical year solid ice did not form until January or February and that normal fall walrus hunting was impossible. According to Siluk, the bad ice and winds came on top

of poor summer hunting, so that there were no accumulated food stores, and famine followed (Collins 2002:226).

At Sivuqaq, men sought desperately to hunt and some fell through thin ice and drowned or drifted away on broken floes (Geist 2002:236; Moore 1923:357). Sivuqaq men walked to Southwest Cape (Pugughileq) to trade whiskey for meat (see below) because seal netting had been successful there, and starving Kukulek people came to Gambell in search of food (H. Aningayou 1987:53–55; Geist 2002:236). One man (Ukaamangan) traveled to Sivuqaq from Punuk by sled at the beginning of winter, and had to stay there through the winter because people ate his dogs (Geist 2002:237; Moore 1923:357). The village of Pugughileq eventually ran out of food, and people there were reduced to eating old seal oil collected from lamps and the floors of empty meat cellars (H. Aningayou 1987:53–55).

While these testimonies clearly indicate widespread food shortages, it appears that an unidentified epidemic disease (or several diseases), probably exacerbated by peoples' weakened condition, hit the island in early spring and was the primary vector of death. Jimmy Ataayaghaq (born 1878) recounted information to Francis Fay (in 1956 and 1961) that people at Kukulek and Kiyalighaq suffered from lack of food but that few actually died from hunger. In fact, hunting was good after the ice finally came in January and there was plenty of fresh meat, but the village was then struck with severe dysentery or diarrhea, from which many people quickly died (Burgess 1974:68). Survivors went to Sivuqaq, leaving behind full meat cellars. Geist's sources in 1929 also mention widespread deaths at Kukulek and Kiyalighaq from a disease that included severe diarrhea, and which killed people even after they had obtained meat (Geist 2002:235). Akulki (b. 1844) told Riley Moore that people died at Sivuqaq (Gambell) from "acute indigestion" after eating the first walrus meat to become available in the spring, probably a reference to the same fatal contagion (Moore 1923:357). Other Yupik accounts mention illness (combined with or following hunger) as a primary cause of mortality at Kukulek, Pugughileq, and Kiyalighaq (H. Aningayou 1987:53–55; J. Aningayou 2002:163; Kingeekuk 1987a:27; R. Silook 1976:63).

These accounts in general emphasize the rapid onset of the illness, which killed people "in their sleep" and in large numbers, so that the dead could not be buried. The disposition of the bodies at the stricken villages, and discoveries of full meat cellars and edible skins (Collins 2002:226; Geist and Rainey 1936:57; Hooper

1884:100–101; Muir 1917:109) provide material confirmation of these Yupik accounts and of the primary role played by disease in the widespread devastation. Estelle Oozevaseuk herself commented about Kukulek that “some villagers from other parts of the island . . . tried to find out what caused them to die. Some thought about starvation. But when they check their meat caches most of them are full” (personal communication, October 28, 2005).

Additional support for this view is found in a remarkable narrative recorded by Waldemar Bogoras during brief fieldwork on the island in 1901 (Bogoras 1913:433–434). The teller was Ale’qat, described as “an Asiatic Eskimo.” Ale’qat’s “Creation of St. Lawrence Island” moves from the creation of the island to the story of a young man who is orphaned by starvation. Weak from hunger and covered with sores, he is saved when the Sea God mercifully provides fish, walrus meat, and seal blubber. The young man, tended by six women who are divine assistants of the Upper God, recovers and becomes a walrus-man who intercedes with another sky spirit (the “Sun Man”) to bring an abundance of whales to feed the people. However, when the people of Kukulek kill this being by mistake he curses them, saying: “Such are you, and such shall be your fate. When you go to sea, you shall be drowned. When you stay ashore, you shall die of starvation. When you have food enough you shall be visited by the *tornaraks* [*tughneghaq*, shaman’s familiar spirit, devil]¹⁰ of disease.” In addition to its concurrence with specific events described in other narratives (e.g., the drowning of hunters, arrival of starvation, then illness), Ale’qat’s narrative frames the disaster in cosmological and spiritual terms that resonate with the Oozevaseuk story.

There are several other specific references to Kukulek in recorded oral accounts. Two speakers mention that the famine was preceded by an earthquake, which caused stones to knock together on the beach, and the clay lamps to sway in the houses, frightening the people in the village (J. Aningayou 2002:163; Geist 2002:236). This was later viewed, perhaps, as a premonition of disaster. The same accounts say that after the epidemic some people were found at Kukulek in a summer *aagra*¹¹ lying peacefully together as if asleep, their heads on a wooden pillow, with water and meat in front of them (J. Aningayou 2002:164; Geist 2002:238), the scene apparently also described by Hooper (above). A rich man (Sigughwaaq), who bought many beads for his wife and even owned a set of brass armor, was found dead with his children and

family inside a house that had been prepared for warm weather, further evidence that death struck in the spring after the food shortage had passed (Geist 2002:238).

While the majority of known Yupik sources either do not mention alcohol as a factor in the disaster or specifically deny that it played any role (Collins 1937:23–24; Hughes 1960:13), several do agree with historical reports that liquor was acquired before the famine, perhaps in substantial quantities. Elders told Geist that ships exchanged whiskey for baleen and walrus ivory during the spring and summer before the famine, and that one island man traded much of this supply (in barrels and bottles) to Kukulek and Kiyalighaq (Geist 2002:236–37). However, reports that heavy drinking was connected with the disaster seem to have come primarily from Pugughileq and Sivuqaq, the two villages that survived. Anagutaq (born 1866), a survivor at Pugughileq, said that walrus meat that had been stored for winter was traded away to men from Sivuqaq in exchange for liquor (H. Aningayou 1987:53–55). Aghtuqaayak (born 1877) said that people at Pugughileq were drinking when the ice came in and did not wish to hunt, thinking they had plenty of time to get food later on (Geist 2002:238). Akulki (born 1844) from Sivuqaq told Riley Moore that a large amount of whiskey was obtained from ships during the summer before the famine and that little hunting was done as a result, also mentioning one man who walked to Southwest Cape to trade liquor for food (Moore 1923:356–57). As argued above, the geographically widespread nature of the disaster and the documented impacts of bad weather and poor hunting conditions from summer through late winter of 1878 indicate that alcohol was a possible contributing factor at some locations, but unlikely as a primary or universal cause.

The Kukulek Narrative

This multisource review establishes that a sequence of circumstances and events—overall depletion of subsistence food resources by commercial whalers, sustained bad weather and hunting conditions, and an epidemic of one or more diseases that were highly virulent among the Yupik population (dysentery, measles, or other contagious diseases, perhaps influenza)—resulted in the dramatic and devastating loss of life on St. Lawrence Island in 1878–80. Ill-timed delivery of alcohol by trading ships may have exacerbated the situation in some villages, although this aspect was exaggerated in Euro-American accounts.

In the discussion so far, the historical actualities of people and events have been emphasized. The Kukulek narrative, on the other hand, seeks to provide an explanation of *why* such a tragedy could occur. While it draws on historical elements, perhaps most obviously the way that people at Kukulek and other villages seem to have died with calm resignation or in their sleep, its focus is on the ultimate cause of the tragedy rather than proximate causes or empirical facts.

Below is the complete narration, as presented by Estelle Oozevaseuk at the National Museum of the American Indian on September 10, 2001. She told it first in English and then agreed to our request to tell it a second time in her first language, St. Lawrence Island Yupik. The excellent transcription and translation are by St. Lawrence Island linguist, teacher, and historian Oovi (Vera) Kaneshiro (University of Alaska Anchorage), originally from Gambell.¹²

The People of Kukulek

- (1) *Kukulegmiiit, ayumiq, sivuneput.*
(Kukulek people, many years ago, our ancestors.)
- (2) *Elngaataall allaaghlluggaghtikat.*
(They did something very arousing.)
- (3) *Amyuqitiqeghllagluteng aatkiit—whaten legan—*
(They acted very cruel—they did this—)
- (4) *ukut aatkiit esghaghluki*
(when I saw these, their clothing)
- (5) *suumqaatkanka—iwhaani—uksuq pinighllaak,*
(I'm thinking about them—and so—how nice their winter is,)
- (6) *neqeteghllagyaqlegestun. Kiyaghteket elngaataall.*
(much food should have been caught. They just lived like that.)
- (7) *Nunavagllak pinghani atghaghluteng*
(Whenever there were a lot of walrus on)
- (8) *legan unguviita mangunameng*
(the cake ice, men would cut chunks of edible)
- (9) *ikulluteng, gaaghyaghqastun angkaan.*
(outer skin even if the animal is alive, they cut one meal size.)
- (10) *Amuqeti qeghllakat teghikusameng unguviita.*
(They acted very cruel towards live animals.)
- (11) *Taana esghaghu seghleghqellghat*
(This incident of wrong doing, the cruel)
- (12) *seghletun pillghat entaqun.*
(thing they did had consequence.)
- (13) *Seghleqellelgukaq esghapagtelghulghiikut.*
(There is a being that watches over us.)

- (14) *Taawa tawaten pighllagmi Kukulegmii uglaghllak yuuk.*
(During this time there were a lot of people who were Kukulegmii.)
- (15) *Yuggaq ataasiq esqaganlenguq akuzingigalngaq*
(One little man who lived there somewhere in the village who didn't say much)
- (16) *ukavaghpanlenguq elngatall qusevegngaghllalghii yuggaq*
(who is considered a lovely person, he was a very humble little man)
- (17) *pillguyugsigalnguq seghlequughngaadni*
(who did not argue or try to be the key person,)
- (18) *avelghaghaqegkangi*
(even if they were not nice, he just ignored them)
- (19) *liisimakeghngaaghmiki avelghaqiinaghaqegkangi.*
(even if he knew that they disliked him he would ignore them.)
- (20) *Tawaten sakaq, yuggaq aapghumangitughnguq*
(Something happened, the little man did not tell what)
- (21) *samatni naten lügikikumatneni.*
(happened, how he came to understand what he had to do.)
- (22) *Enkaam Kukulegmiiit takwaaqluki alegquqii.*
(So he went to the Kukulek people and talked to them.)
- (23) *Elngaatall aatkangllaatesqelluki,*
(He put an emphasis on urging them to make clothing.)
- (24) *whaten aarraasimeng.*
(the kind that are dressy.)
- (25) *Aatkiit igaghrakegteghllalghiiit, satughllaget quunpeng.*
(Their clothing had so much design and was very fanciful all the time.)
- (26) *Kukulegmiiit aatkaqeglleghuniiqegkanget, Qiighqami samani,*
(The people of Kukulek were known to have fancy clothing on the island.)
- (27) *almesiqegkangit. Ilangi repall*
(they were always like that. Some of them)
- (28) *sungaghmeng entaqun qughalkutiighlluteng ayuqaqelghiiit.*
(may have beads all around the clothing, probably like that.)
- (29) *Taghnughhaqulluki aarraasimeng ulimatesqiiit,*
(He told them to even make fancy clothing for their children,)
- (30) *pikegken naasqughhiitneng kanavek itegaghiitnum.*
(all the way from the head down to their feet.)
- (31) *Taagken elngaatall aghnat kakitkaq,*
(So then women sewed,)
- (32) *kakiyupiglleghhiitlu entaqun esghaghhu,*
(they were excellent sewers no doubt,)
- (33) *sangita pimaaki.*
(don't know why he had said that to them.)
- (34) *Apeghiiighyata taagken pimakangi,*
(When they were all done he said to them,)

- (35) *‘Unaami piyukufsi avelghaqaghaasi, navek pijqaafsi*
 (“Tomorrow, if you want to, refrain from going somewhere even if)
- (36) *pinighllaghngaana esla.*
 (the weather is fine.)
- (37) *Aliineghllugllagughngaana amsanaghllugllagughngaana.*
 (Even if it is very clear weather and calm weather.)
- (38) *Aanghnutkuminga uum kiyaghtaallemta esla pinighllequq.”*
 (If my asking is granted by the way of life the weather will be fine.”)
- (39) *Unaami taghtughyalghii meng legan amsanaghllugllak, meq*
 (The next day when they woke up it was so calm the water)
- (40) *leganqun taghneghaghquuta, qagivleghaghhangunani*
 (was like a looking glass, not even a ripple of waves,)
- (41) *imaghlluvleghaghhangunani. Elngaatall sumeghtaghaatk,*
 (and no swells at all. So they put in this deep thought,)
- (42) *Taawa yuggag temngi pingunghituq.’*
 (“So the little man is not just saying this.”)
- (43) *Aghuliitukaq napipenani yuuk nemetukaq tamaana.*
 (People did not go anywhere, they stayed home.)
- (44) *Taagken unogyagu esnamun—*
 (Then towards night, towards the beach—)
- (45) *tawaten emta neqenghaghqumaghmeng pitkat.*
 (as usual they made so much food—they went.)
- (46) *Quyatu elngaatall. Quyastekaqegkangi entagun qayughllak.*
 (They all felt very happy. He made them very happy supposedly.)
- (47) *Kumaghtighllagluteng esnakun.*
 (They made a large fire at the beach.)
- (48) *Leganqun laloramket bonfire-ngistun.*
 (Just like a white man’s bonfire.)
- (49) *Kumaghtighllakat unaghsimeng esnami.*
 (They made a big fire using wood at the beach.)
- (50) *Neghuusimaghmeng.*
 (They were eating as well.)
- (51) *Ataasikaghtaan ketfaghaqluteng esnemun tawavek pisqii tawaten.*
 (One by one he told them to come forward to the shore like that.)
- (52) *‘Seghleghqellesi apeghteghteki, qivghullesi sisi.*
 (“Tell the wrong things you have done, what you feel sorry about doing.)
- (53) *Qivghukelleghsi seghletun pilleghpesinun.*
 (What you feel sorry for wrong things you have done.)
- (54) *Apeghteghteki, ukmangightek elngaatall.*
 (Tell about them, cleanse yourself from them.)
- (55) *Nuna uka tagiiquq qateghrakegllak, iqangilnguq avangilnguq.*
 (A place is coming that is very white, very clean and free of soil.)
- (56) *Tawavek uugsaghqaaghtesqellusi pingwaamsi.’*
 (So you would be able to get on this place, I’m telling you.”)
- (57) *Naqamqun esgha tawaten qelallengumaat.*
 (So then they were given advice of what to do.)

- (58) *Taana yuggaq akuzingigalnguq aangayugsigalnguq.*
(That little man never said much, never acted big.)
- (59) *Pillguyugsigalnguq sangigalnguq.*
(He did not put on hot air, never did anything to be criticized for.)
- (60) *Qallemsuggaq. Ugpeqeqkaat.*
([He] was very quiet. They followed his advice.)
- (61) *Esnevaghaqluteng. Leganqun apeghralghiiistun pikat.*
(People came forward. They just did like confessing.)
- (62) *Sangwaa seghleghqelleghteng, seghletun pilleghteng*
(Any wrong doing, anything they did that is wrong)
- (63) *neqamikegqaghteng atightuqaat.*
(that they remembered they told.)
- (64) *Taaqenghata yuggaam aallgaqegkangi*
(When they were done the little man would brush them off)
- (65) *meghmun tawavek ukmangighniluki.*
(towards the water, saying he cleanses them that way.)
- (66) *Tunutestaqluki. Tawaten qamagtekaq,*
(He made them turn around and brushed. He did that to everyone,)
- (67) *iwerngaqun yugllak. Taawanguq whaten 'nguuq pikaqegkangi,*
(all the many people. He had said to them,)
- (68) *"Taghneghaghpesigun aaraaghlusi esghaghngaapesi whaa*
(“Even if you see your reflection all dressed up like that have)
- (69) *seghletun pillelgulghii. Ukmangighwaaghlusi esghiiisqellusi*
(wrong doing. It is for you to see how it is like to cleanse)
- (70) *tawaten katam aarralleghpesistun, nunamun tawavek*
(and dress nicely, you would be able to take a)
- (71) *amllughyaghqaagusi. Ulimaqaamsi.”*
(a step over to that land (place). I prepared you.”)
- (72) *Taagken elngaataall quyatk taaqluteng.*
(Then they were happy when this was all finished.)
- (73) *Enraqlunguq taam kingunganeng nenglum yuga*
(Then after that all the people of that)
- (74) *qamagtengngwaaghluni qavaghpagnikiit—*
(subterranean dwelling place went into a deep sleep—)
- (75) *ellngita tuqulaghaasata. Yupigestun*
(that's the term they had used. When a person or group of people die in their sleep—)
- (76) *tawatetefut qavamegneng tuukat qavaghpagniluki.*
(that was what happened to those people in their sleep.)
- (77) *Qavaq, qavaq.*
(Sleep, sleep.)
- (78) *Qamagtengngwaaghluni imaa qaamna tuqulaghaatkaq nenglumi.*
(“All the occupants of the house had died inside the building.)
- (79) *Apeghiiqat entaqun apeghiihluteng.*
(They were probably ready to go.)
- (80) *Repall esghaghhu sumeghtaghaghqelghiiinga ilangani*
(It really made me think, when I think about this sometimes,)

- (81) *entaqun quyastellghem saam kaatkaqegkangi.*
(and think that they came to the conclusion of happiness.)
- (82) *Taawa nagneghunnagaqegkegka sumeghtaghanemni, whaa.*
(So I try to continue to tell about it when I think about it now.)
- (83) *Taananguuq whanga whaten kiyaghusiqa.*
(That is what I like to tell about.)¹³

After concluding the story, Mrs. Oozevaseuk commented on one of its central points, saying,

Because of my ancestor, I try to follow the pattern that he had, just like turning from bad living to good living. For their own future they [the people of Kukulek] did that. That may have been a blessing to them, that someone had compassion for them, after what they had done. So I told my grandchildren never to kill anything that is not edible.¹⁴

She concluded an earlier presentation of this story in the *Sivuqam Nangaghnegha* collection (very similar to the version here), by indicating another of its personal meanings:

As I ponder this story, I am really amazed and now see comparisons. Thinking about them makes me thankful. I even tell our ministers, “I think that someday when the world ends we will see some of these Kukulek people who have found their salvation.” In these events I see the mercy of God. The Eskimo people, like the white people, believed in God. They understood Him and honored Him in their own way. Even Eskimo people have their own standards of what is right and what is wrong. That is the way God made it to be. (Oozevaseuk 1987:89)

Meanings and Messages

Notably, the narrative starts at a point when walrus are plentiful, rather than scarce (lines 5–7), in an ideal time before the disaster. In an earlier telling of this story, Mrs. Oozevaseuk commented that life was so easy for the people of Kukulek that they were tempted to abuse things around them (Oozevaseuk 1987:87). In both versions, they cut and eat the raw skin from living walrus (lines 7–10), although Uwetelen said that they might have abused other kinds of animals (Oozevaseuk 1987:87) and according to the version narrated by Roger Silook (Saavla, born 1923, Estelle’s brother), the people used their knives to cut *mangtak* (skin) from living whales (R. Silook 1976:62). These acts of cruelty to animals, and their fatal consequences for the people of the village, are dramatic and memorable features that appear even in shorter versions of the Kukulek story told by other narrators. For instance, James

Aningayou (Anengayuu, born 1878), reported in 1940:

They had one time, I guess, a shortage of meat or something. Somebody [at Kukulek] strike a young male walrus, pull it right on top of the ice. Cut it up before it died. Kind of a cruelty, having a good time cutting that live walrus. That is the way they had their fun with it (*said in a disapproving tone*).¹⁵ . . . And a short time afterward, same year maybe, something happened to them. Nobody will ever know exactly what happened to them, sickness or starving. (J. Aningayou 2002:163–64)

Doty also wrote that:

An old woman who now resides at Gambell, having left one of those villages on the north shore during the fall preceding the fatality, or the previous one, asserts that the people of her village flayed a walrus alive and threw the suffering creature back again into the sea, in the hope that they would secure it in due time after it had gained a new skin. (Doty 1900:218)

The killing of a walrus being, who created the abundance of food enjoyed by the people of Kukulek but takes it away with his dying curse, is also the central theme of Ale'qat's 1901 account, as discussed above (Bogoras 1913:433–34).

The Kukulek narrative is told by Mrs. Oozevaseuk in the form of a Christian allegory. A good and humble man assumes the role of religious leader and leads the people out of temptation and sin through steps of spiritual preparation (lines 22–50), confession (lines 51–54), forgiveness and cleansing (lines 62–72), and then passage through death to a pure land (Heaven), where (as stated above) the Kukulek people find salvation. Punishment from God—the “being that watches over us”—is mixed with His compassion, and atonement brings joy, peace, and resignation. Putting on the white intestine parkas is an act of spiritual preparation for a journey through death to the world beyond (lines 68–71). The garments themselves seem to be a visual metaphor both for the heavenly land that is “very white, very clean, and free of soil” and for the souls from which all stains have been cleansed.

A strong Yupik spiritual dimension may also be discerned. Although God observes the Kukulek peoples' transgression from above, the sea mammals, in traditional Yupik belief, would be watching from below. At the center of Yupik and other arctic indigenous cosmologies (e.g., Bogoras 1904–09, Fienup-Riordan 1994; Hughes 1984; Jolles 2002; Lantis 1946; Nelson 1899; Rainey 1947; Spencer 1959) is the belief that mutual attentiveness and respect

comprise the proper relationship between humans and animals. Hunting ceremonies, rituals, and observances, e.g., the wearing of clean, new clothing for hunting, the renewal of hunting gear and boat covers for each season, and the offer of fresh drinking water to newly killed sea mammals, are viewed as essential practices for hunting success and human survival. The consequences of the egregious disrespect shown at Kukulek—almost certainly, hunting failure and famine—would probably be an obvious point to Yupik listeners, even though not explicitly stated.

This view is partially illustrated in Mrs. Oozevaseuk's recounting of the story of Agnaga, a woman of the Uwaliit clan who went to live underwater with the seals, walruses, and whales.¹⁶ In this tale the spirits of these creatures are human in both form and intelligence, and only certain traits, such as the seals' large eyes, reveal their animal nature. The walruses are large, stout men who keep their tusks in a side room of their underwater dwelling. Each day they put on their tusks and go out to seek the hunters, allowing themselves to be caught by those who have carefully made lines, floats, and hunting gear. Those who are struck by hunters with "dull" gear break the lines and return home with harpoon heads embedded in their bodies, which Agnaga cuts out using her *ulaaq* (woman's knife). When Agnaga journeys home to Sivuqaq on the back of a whale, she sees how the hunting boats appear to the animals from underwater. Some are light and clean, while others are black and cast dark shadows down to the bottom of the sea. The whale avoids the dirty boats but goes straight up to the cleanest, brightest one in order to be harpooned, even as Agnaga tries to hold him back. This story, told in Washington, D.C., two days after the Kukulek narrative, underlines that hunting is a collaborative effort in which animals participate voluntarily in response to human demonstrations of attention and respect.

An additional detail of the Agnaga story may be significant. As she cuts the harpoon heads from the wounded walruses, Agnaga steals bites of the animals' raw flesh. When she does so, the walruses cover their mouths, perceiving that she is eating the flesh of human beings, which is how they see themselves. The dual nature of the walrus-man (as well as his ability to influence the availability of game) is also explicit in Ale'qat's narrative, as previously discussed.

The role and actions of the spiritual leader in the Kukulek narrative—who is never named—seem to reflect a Yupik model of ideal behavior. He does not argue with the people or push himself

forward but finds a way to both correct the community's bad behavior and to give them hope, without directly confronting or punishing. Significantly, he may have been a shaman, as Mrs. Oozevaseuk suggested in an earlier telling (Oozevaseuk 1987:87). Like a shaman he foresees the future and works to both heal the people and to restore balance with the animal world. When he brushes each person (lines 64–67) it is with a bird wing, a traditional gesture to remove sickness and evil influences (R. Silook 1976:7).¹⁷

The clothing that he tells the people to wear—especially the *sanightaaq*—was worn for traditional ceremonies of appeal to the animal spirits. This garment was decorated for men with auklet feathers and for women with tassels of fur from fetal seals. To make a *sanightaaq*, a woman first cleaned the intestines of bearded seals and then hung them outside to whiten in the cold and wind. She split the intestines and sewed them together with thread made of whale or reindeer sinew. Details of the design were different for each clan.¹⁸ People wore these dress parkas for religious ceremonies such as Ateghaq, a spring sacrifice (*eghqwaaq*) held by each whaling crew to ask for good hunting; for Kamegtaa, a thanksgiving that followed the hunting season; and for the ritual greeting that a whaling captain's wife gave to her husband's boat when it returned with a whale (Blasi 1985:217–223; Doty 1900:200; Hughes 1959, 1984:274–75; R. Silook 1976:18–20). The Maritime Chukchi wore them in ceremonies honoring the sea spirit Kere'tkun (Bogoras 1904–09:247). Perhaps in the Kukulek narrative when the people go to the beach and bend down to see their reflections in the still ocean water,¹⁹ they are also showing themselves to the sea mammals below the surface, dressed in the beautiful garments they would always wear to offer supplication and to honor to the animals' ever-watchful spirits.

The spiritual synthesis that lies at the heart of the Kukulek narrative expresses Estelle Oozevaseuk's own view that Yupik traditional beliefs and morality prefigured what would be taught by the Presbyterian ministers who came to St. Lawrence Island in the aftermath of the disaster. About the sacrifices of food offered to a higher being by whaling captains in the spring *eghqwaaq*, she said "That's what the Eskimos believed long before they knew the Christian religion, they knew it. They knew about the Creator."²⁰ It may also reflect the changes in spiritual practice that the missionaries introduced to her family. Uwetelen, her grandfather, was a whaling captain and held the traditional spring sacrifices, but changed

“his old custom,” i.e., became Christian in 1929 or 1930 (P. Silook 2002:132). Her father Siluk, Uwetelen’s son, was Christian from a young age, taught in the mission school, preached in the church, and rejected the old ceremonies.²¹ To some extent, then, Mrs. Oozevaseuk’s history of Kukulek may be her way of carrying forward the influence of both generations of familial teachers.

The story’s basic themes—the necessity of treating all animals with respect, lest they cease to make themselves available to hunters; the responsibility of Yupik people for their own lives; the essential goodness of the Kukulegmiit, even in error; and the compatibility of Yupik and Christian beliefs—seem to be a lesson and a hopeful message for the communities of St. Lawrence Island. As the story continues to be told and retold, meaning has been created that extends beyond the actual events of 1878–80, meaning that is relevant to contemporary life. Anders Apassingok, Yupik lead editor of the Bering Straits School District oral history series in which Estelle Oozevaseuk’s Kukulek narrative was first published, wrote that “the words in these pages are more than just facts or history. Behind the words is the heartbeat of the people. We want this heartbeat to live on in our children” (Apassingok, Walunga, and Tennant 1985:xvi).

Newly expressed in a museum context for a wide audience of web viewers and exhibition goers, the narrative can also be understood as an affirmation of Yupik pride and cultural identity against pejorative colonial portrayals of the island’s culture and history (e.g., Hooper 1884, Muir 1917). Beyond this is the notable fact of the narrative’s presentation at the Smithsonian Institution, where the physical remains and property of Kukulek’s last residents were stored for more than a century. Estelle Oozevaseuk’s retold tale may address, in a graceful and indirect way, the justice of her ancestors’ return, and in a more general sense, the rightful reclamation of Yupik heritage and historical voice.

Acknowledgments

My appreciation first of all to Estelle Oozevaseuk for sharing her words and those of her grandfather and for applying her extensive knowledge of St. Lawrence Island history and culture to the interpretation of the collections housed at the Smithsonian. Sincere thanks as well to Oovi (Vera) Kaneshiro (University of Alaska Anchorage) for her fine translation of the Kukulek story and other materials from the Alaska Collections Project. Branson Tungiyon of Gambell, then director of Kawerak’s Eskimo Heritage Program, helped to organize the Washington research and

contributed substantially from his knowledge of St. Lawrence Island traditions. Discussions in Washington, D.C., were facilitated by collections staff of the National Museum of Natural History and National Museum of the American Indian, with special thanks to Deborah Hull-Walski (NMNH) and Pat Nietfeld (NMAI). Kristine McGee (NMAI) assisted with archival research on the seal intestine parka. William Fitzhugh and Stephen Loring (both with the Arctic Studies Center, NMNH) and Suzi Jones (Anchorage Museum) lent their expertise to the collections dialogue. Dawn Biddison, Alaska Collections Project researcher in Anchorage, coordinated and contributed to multilingual translation and editing of the Washington interviews.

This paper was first presented at the 2004 annual meeting of the Oral History Association in Portland, Oregon, in a session organized by William Schneider (curator of oral history, University of Alaska Fairbanks) and Patricia Partnow (Alaska Native Heritage Center, Anchorage).

Igor Krupnik reviewed the manuscript and provided crucial points of information from his St. Lawrence Island research. William Schneider and Julie Hollowell also read the paper critically and offered useful commentary. The excellent publication *Akuzilleput Igaqullghet: Our Words Put to Paper / Sourcebook in St. Lawrence Island Yupik Heritage and History*, compiled by Igor Krupnik and Lars Krutak and edited by Krupnik, Willis Walunga, and Vera Metcalf (2002) was an invaluable resource.

Funding for the present research and the Alaska Collections Project was provided by the Smithsonian Institution, the Rasmuson Foundation, the National Park Service (Shared Beringian Heritage Program), Museum Loan Network (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), and Alaska Humanities Forum.

Notes

1. The Alaska Collections Project was organized by the Arctic Studies Center, Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History, in cooperation with the Anchorage Museum; Kawerak, Inc.; Inūpiat Heritage Center; Yupiit Piciyaarait Cultural Center; Aleutian-Pribilof Islands Association; Tanana Chiefs Conference; Alutiiq Museum; and Sealaska Heritage Institute, with sponsorship by the Rasmuson Foundation, National Park Service, Smithsonian Institution, Museum Loan Network (MIT), and Alaska Humanities Forum. The Anchorage exhibition is scheduled to open in 2010.
2. Yupik names and birth dates in this article are referenced to *Akuzilleput Igaqullghet / Our Words Put to Paper: Sourcebook in St. Lawrence Island Yupik Heritage and History* (Krupnik, Walunga, and Metcalf 2002).
3. The small nineteenth-century Kangighsak Point or Kangighsak Camp archaeological site (Crowell 1984:98; Geist and Rainey 1936:7; Smith et al. 1978:48–50) is tentatively identified here as the village referred to as Northeast Cape in historic accounts (Doty 1900:187, 215–18) and visited by Hooper in 1880 (1881:10, his village “A,” 10 miles west of Northeast Cape), where an estimated fifty people died in 1878–79.

- Kingeekuk (1987a:23) refers to Qangeghsaq as one of the villages that existed when St. Lawrence Island had a large population.
4. His village “B” at “Cape Siepermo,” a name derived from Teben’kov’s chart.
 5. Muir wrote that “Mr. Nelson went into this Golgotha with hearty enthusiasm,” collecting over 100 human skulls along with bone armor, weapons, and utensils for shipment back to Washington (Muir 1917:110).
 6. Nelson told Geist that Kukulek was “in all probability” one of the villages he visited in 1881 (Geist and Rainey 1936:85).
 7. Hooper does not give the location for his observation, but virtually identical Yupik descriptions place this death scene at Kukulek (Aningayou 2002:164; Geist 2002:238).
 8. Burgess suggests that “black tongue” may have been anemia, scarlet fever, or lack of vitamin B (avitaminosis) (Burgess 1974:56).
 9. Burgess suggests that strong southerly winds and warm temperatures caused a lack of ice along the north shore in the fall and winter of 1878–79, whereas sustained north winds accompanied by heavy snow in 1879–80 packed solid ice along the north side of the island so that no open leads for hunting could be found.
 10. From *A Dictionary of the St. Lawrence Island/ Siberian Yupik Eskimo Language* (Badten, Kaneshiro, and Oovi 1987).
 11. The square, walrus-skin covered *aagra* was used in summer as a dwelling and in winter as the inner living chamber of the large, skin-covered Siberian style of dwelling called a *mangteghapik*.
 12. Vera Kaneshiro is a member of the Pugughileghmii clan. Her willingness to provide a translation of Estelle Oozevaseuk’s narration does not mean that Pugughileghmiit would tell the story in exactly the same way (Vera Kaneshiro, personal communication 2006.) In fact, a number of variants may exist among the island’s fifteen clans. At least nine of these, including the Pugughileghmiit, are descended from the pre-1878 population, while others are postfamine immigrants from Siberia.
 13. Alaska Collections Project Tape 12A:427–527, Arctic Studies Center, Anchorage.
 14. Alaska Collections Project Tape 12A:527, Arctic Studies Center, Anchorage.
 15. Comment in italics added by the story’s recorder, anthropologist Dorothea Leighton.
 16. Alaska Collections Project Tape 21A:77–318, Arctic Studies Center, Anchorage.
 17. His use of a bird wing to brush the people is specified in Estelle Oozevaseuk’s first telling of the story in English (Alaska Collections Project Tape 12A:309).
 18. Alaska Collections Project Tape 12A:163 – 12B:375, Arctic Studies Center, Anchorage. Mrs. Oozevaseuk was taught these techniques by her grandmother.
 19. This detail is specified in Oozevaseuk 1987:89.

20. Alaska Collections Project, Tape 16A:248, Arctic Studies Center, Anchorage.
21. Alaska Collections Project, Tape 16A:248, Arctic Studies Center, Anchorage.

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