Chapter 11
Makushin

As chief of Makushin, Elia Shapsnikoff was, as far as is known, an effective community leader for the decade beginning around 1910. The economy was based on "hunting, fishing, and basket making," as he told Captain Joyhnes of the U.S. Revenue cutter *Tahoma* in August 1911. "There being," Joyhnes wrote, "I am informed by their chief, an abundance of fish and ducks in the bay, and some ptarmigan and a few foxes in the surrounding mountains. The men occasionally obtain a few days' employment in Unalaska, with which place they have communication by trail, and there dispose of their skins at a ruinous rate of trade with the Alaska Commercial Company, the most inimical factor in this country to the natives."[1] The captain found people suffered from "favus, trachoma pediculosis, pulmonary tuberculosis and kindred complaints" which the ship's physician attributed to "the poor ventilation of their dwellings" along with poor personal hygiene.

When the U.S. Revenue Cutter *Manning* visited in August 1915, William C. Witte described the barabaras.

> These Barabaras consist of two rooms about six feet square and about six feet high. One room is used as sleeping, eating and living room and usually has wooden floors and one window which cannot be opened. In this room they have a bed, a table and several boxes or chairs. The air is foul, damp and has a musty odor. The other room has dirt floor, dirt walls and in one end is dug an open fire place in which the family cooking is done. This room is also used as storehouse for dried fish. The entrance to the Barabara is through the latter room.[2]

The short-lived Pacific American Fisheries salmon cannery in Makushin Bay had no lasting impact on the village. After operating about

a year, the company shut down, removed its machinery, and left the buildings in care of a watchman. In 1919, when Henry Swanson visited the plant, Jack North held that position. "He was a funny old guy," Henry said. "We used to go in there and visit him, and he was happy when somebody came to visit him. But one day only. Next day—if you stayed to visit two days—he was crabby and trying to get rid of you."[3]

The run of red salmon in 1920 was unusually heavy and the watchman felt the company could have made a profit had it remained open. Villagers at Makushin, in addition to what they prepared for their own use, salted about 100 barrels for sale that year.[4] PAF kept a watchman at Cannery Point until the last watchman, Charlie Rose, was shot to death in September 1926 and his body taken to Makushin Village for burial. The murder was never solved.[5] International Packing Company leased or bought the property and used it to store their gear and boats. They stationed their own watchmen at the site. John Peters, a German immigrant to the Aleutians, held the position for many years. He died in 1937, "one of Unalaska's oldest most respected citizens," the same year that another watchman A.A. Mattox, after eight years in Unalaska and Makushin, harvested the last of his garden at Cannery Point, packed up his belongings and his chickens and took the S.S. *Starr* to Seward.[6]

Nick Galaktionoff's account of his childhood provides a clue as to when wooden houses were introduced. Not long after his birth in 1925, his father, Akenfa (sometimes called Akim) built a house. The lumber may have come from the cannery site and been hauled to the village by baidarka and dory. The family had been living with Akenfa's mother, Marva Borenin. (After Akenfa's father had died, Marva had married John Borenin.) "So then my mom and dad was ready to go," Nick recalled in an interview with Moses Dirks. "I had an older sister named Malaanyaa [Molly]. They went out and pack things over. And me, I was left with my grandmother. So my grandmother grew me up all the way." Although she told Nick who his mother and father were, he grew up thinking of her as his mother. "But I never called him my dad," Nick said. "I always call him Ludang, 'my oldest.'" Because Akenfa referred to his wife as *Ayagang*, Nick grew up using the same word, "my wife," when he spoke about his mother.[7]

Elia Shapsnikoff moved to Unalaska in the early or mid-1920s—his name appears in minutes of the St. Pantelaimon Brotherhood from that time onward. Nick Lekanoff remarked that Elia went to Unalaska to find work and also so his children could attend school.[8] When Shapsnikoff died October 28, 1935, Chief Alexei Yatchmeneff provided information for the death certificate, and noted, "He served as chief at Makushin about ten years."[9] Among his survivors was his son Sergie, who had been born and raised at Makushin.

Close ties continued between Makushin and Kashega. Makushin folks traded at Jacobson's small store, and Kashega people used Makushin as a resting stop when traveling by baidarka into Makushin Bay to make

the trek across to Unalaska.[10] When together, people played *kakana,* a gambling game. The villages may also have traded berries because, while there were blueberries at Makushin, there were none at Kashega.[11]

The Norwegian John Peter Halberg Olsen arrived at Unalaska sometime prior to April 1920. That month the U.S. census enumerator recorded that he had immigrated to the U.S. in 1898. He may have first gone to Adelaide, Australia and then to Astoria, Oregon, after which he settled in Nome from 1901 to 1906.[12] By 1920 he was definitely at Unalaska. He was thirty-nine and single. Nine months later, on New Year's Day 1921, he married Tatiana Golodoff from Chernofski. They had no children of their own, but in 1922 they adopted Annie Sokolnikoff whose parents had died in the 1919 flu pandemic. Although records show that three years later they adopted Annie's brother Willie, he was in fact raised by Afenogin Ermeloff of Nikolski. By 1930, Olsen had bought or had built a home at Unalaska. By this time, he had also established relations with Makushin Village and had probably started his blue fox business on an islet in Anderson Bay. He and Tatiana adopted John Borenin who was born at Unalaska around 1926 but whose parents, Matfey and Natalia Borenin, lived at Makushin with several of their other children. Frank Galaktionoff, also with Makushin roots, was a boarder in the Olsen's Unalaska home. According to Henry Swanson, when Olsen began raising blue fox on what became known as Peter Island, he built a small house. "He built quite a nice house there, too," Swanson said. "He had dug a well there even. 'Course he had a lot of slaves there to dig it—the Makushin people."[13]

Pete Olsen.
Photograph courtesy
Lael Morgan.

Swanson's comment reflects the notoriety that eventually enveloped Olsen. After the islet had been stocked with fox, the story was that one winter Anderson Bay froze over and all his fox walked away. He tore down his cabin and reassembled it in the village. Initially, the residents were pleased that he was there.[14] Olsen is generally credited with transforming the appearance of the village. Wooden cottages were built along a straight wide pathway that ran from the creek to the Olsen's larger home that locals dubbed the "Olsen Hotel." He had a small store attached to the dwelling. He constructed a barn for use with his sheep raising efforts. He purchased a boat from the International Packing Company at Cannery Point and named it the *Katie-O,* after his wife.[15] It was a 35-foot double-ender, small, but large enough to carry a few people to Unalaska.[16] The water in front of Makushin Village was swept by strong westerly seas and so Olsen kept his boat anchored in Anderson Bay. He used a skiff to travel back and forth from the village.[17] Tatiana was accomplished as a traditional healer. She served as a midwife for many years, and, unlike almost all the other residents, she could speak English.

"One gains the impression that he is a man of action," wrote a visiting officer of the Coast Guard cutter *Tahoe*. "The orderly appearance of the village would indicate that he is undoubtedly the driving force behind the natives."[18] Olsen ran his small store, trapped, bought and sold fox pelts, and raised sheep. (In 1933 his herd numbered 112.[19]) He rented his house at Unalaska. He was not, however, a good manager and his debt to the AC Company steadily grew. At the end of October 1932 he owed a little over $2,280. He viewed his debt as belonging as much to the village as to himself and when men returned from summer work in the Pribilof Islands he would send their checks to Unalaska as payment towards it.[20] The company expected to receive his exclusive business in return for the credit they extended, but A.H. Proctor, the company agent at Unalaska, suspected Olsen purchased goods from their competitors, such as Captain Larsen on the *Dorothy* and Captain Anderson on the *Polar Bear*. Nevertheless, Proctor tried to keep on good terms with him as he gradually paid more on the debt. After an amicable dinner with Captain Anderson and Olsen, who was making his first visit to Unalaska in a year, Proctor described the situation in a letter to company headquarters.

> Mr. Olsen had the STARR bring up his seasons supplies on this trip and says he now has on hand more merchandise than he ever had at one time before and at a price very much lower than he could [have] obtained from or through us. He talked strongly about what he considered the outrageously high prices we charged him in comparison with what he now knows as the Seattle wholesale prices and at first was inclined to the idea that there seemed no basis on which he and the company could get together for future trading however before he left he came around to the belief that a conference with the Company while

he is below this time might and possibly would be the means of bringing around a resumption of the relations which had been so pleasant for so many years. While he is below he will also take up with Home office the matter of settling his account…. Under the circumstances the writer did not press for an additional payment at this time….[21]

In March 1932 Olsen and what was termed the "Makushin Native Community" jointly purchased and installed an electric light plant. Four of the 14 shares were owned by Olsen and ten by the community. Community shares had to remain in the households of present families while Olsen's four shares would belong to whoever owned his house and store. Each share entitled the owner to five lights of 24 watts each. Olsen had enough power to operate a small electric range. The signatures on the agreement provide a census of the families or adult males at Makushin in 1932:

*Akenfa Galaktionoff
*John Borenin
‡Philip Galaktionoff
*Peter Petekoff
Simeon Petikoff
*Mat Petikoff
‡Aken Petikoff
*Mat Borenin
*Elia Borenin
*Simeon Lekanoff
Nick Lekanoff
Arthur Lekanoff
‡Frank Galaktionoff.[22]

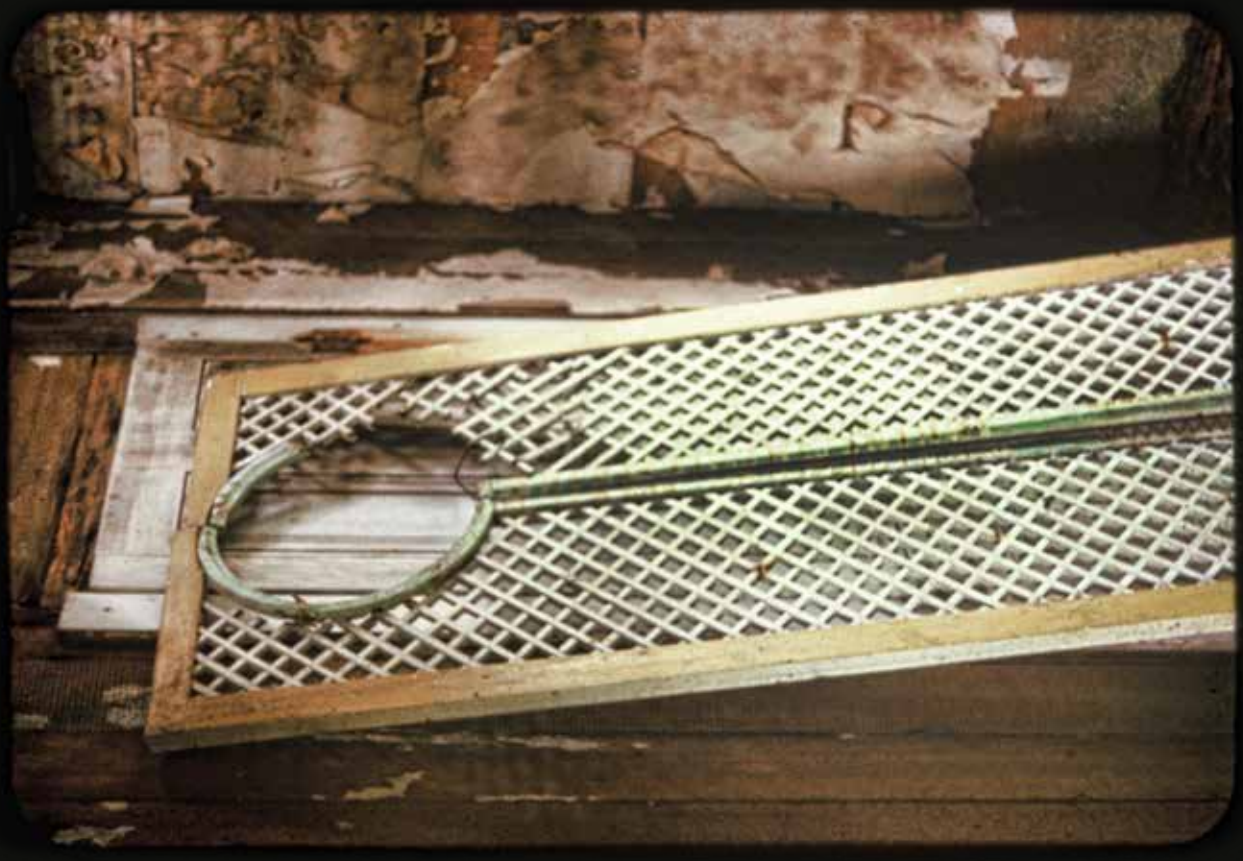
*Head of household 1930 U.S. Census
‡Not at Makushin for the 1930 U.S. Census

Frank Galaktionoff, whose name appears on this list, held "dual citizenship." He had been born at Unalaska but he was related to the Galaktionoffs at Makushin. Later in 1932, after being part of the purchase of the electric light plant, Frank found himself pitted against Olsen when John Yatchmeneff, son of the Unalaska chief, filed an assault and battery charge against Olsen with the commanding officer of the Coast Guard Cutter *Itasca* on December 3 while at Makushin.[23] In February Frank Galaktionoff joined John and his father, Alexei, in making sworn affidavits against Olsen. However, when Lt. Commander J.S. Rosenthal of the *Tahoe*, acting as a deputy marshal, tried to investigate the accusations on July 29, 1933, he found that any witnesses were then working at St. Paul in the Pribilof Islands."[24]

Frank Galaktionoff, 1946. Photograph courtesy Ray Hudson.

Nick Lekanoff was seven months older than Nick Galaktionoff.[25] Both were born in 1925. Nick Galaktionoff's mother was Parascovia Lekanoff, Nick Lekanoff's half-sister. Although they were technically uncle and nephew, they were more like cousins. They were two of seven or eight children of about the same age who played, often barefoot, along the shore and in the high growth of grass and wild celery in front of the village and climbed the hills that rose around the village. Both boys had sisters. Molly was five years older than Nick Galaktionoff while Stepinida was a year younger than Nick Lekanoff. A favorite pastime was hide-and-seek, *kuukalax̂* or *kuukaadalix̂*, in the high wild rye in front of the village. Yakeem Petikoff, tall and thin and 24 or 25 years older than the two boys, occasionally donned a disguise, complete with horns, and frightened them home. He didn't want them down near the water too late. "We'd run like hell from the beach to home," Nick Galaktionoff recalled. The boys played with the boat Pete Olsen had built for his adopted son, John, big enough to get into but never used on the water. They would sometimes go to Olsen's pigeon coop and admire the birds. Olsen occasionally lined up

Facing page: Two views of the chapel ruins at Makushin, 1970. Photographs by Ray Hudson.



the children and marched them down the short road that ran through the village and had them pull out weeds along it. Then he would turn them around, walk them back, and reward them with candy.

Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings all Unangaŷ attended church where Simeon Lekanoff, with assistance from Akenfa Galaktionoff and Matfey Petikoff, read the service. All three men could read *Unangam tunuu*. The Chapel of the Nativity of Christ was rebuilt by the mid or late 1920s, if not earlier. It was 20 feet by 30 feet, a modest wood-frame structure, with a single bell hanging over the entrance. It was not unlike the chapel at Kashega.[26]

Makushin men worked summers in the Pribilof Islands. While they were away, Pete Olsen would take women in a skiff to gather driftwood and stockpile it for the winter. The gardens in the village were fertilized with kelp. They grew turnips, rutabagas, cabbage, carrots and potatoes.[27] The village had a community steam bath. Wood was scarce but people donated pieces for the fire. There were two platform levels and the bath could get very hot. Men bathed first, followed by the women. But when the women bathed, a man kept guard, for fear that an outsider, most likely somebody connected with prospecting around Makushin Volcano, would enter the village. Some years before either of the Nicks had been born, a woman had gone to her storage shed after Sunday services. She was found the next day, lying in the creek, bludgeoned to death.[28]

Preceeding page and above: Interior views of the Makushin chapel, 1970. Photographs by Ray Hudson.

Both boys recalled their fathers taking time to be with them. Simeon Lekanoff took his son to his camp in Portage Bay, "way inside, facing the north," where he had a cabin built like a barabara. It was furnished with a stove, but the beds were little more than a bench or a corner on the floor covered with grass.[29] Once Akenfa Galaktionoff took his son out in a kayak. "Barely had my head sticking out [of the hatch opening]," Nick recalled. His father rowed down to the creek and then back to the opposite end of the village, toward what was called West End, before returning to the village where Nick's grandmother waited. She had shouted from the shore, "Don't take him so far out!" and when they arrived back she plucked him out of the hatch and took him home.[30]

Makushin Village had five kayaks (baidarkas) in the 1930s. These were two-hatch craft and belonged to brothers Matfey and Yakeem Petikoff, brothers Matfey and Elia Borenin, Peter Petikoff and his son Simeon, Simeon Lekanoff and his eldest son Constantine, and to Akenfa Galaktionoff.[31] When not in use, the skins were removed and the frames were stored in Olsen's barn. When it was time to recover the frames, the sea lion skins were soaked for several days in the creek to soften them. They were then rubbed with old seal oil and the men positioned them around the frame. The women would then "go out there and they'd sew them together. And they'd use lots of seal oil."[32]

There were also about five dories in the village. Nick Galaktionoff recalled that once his father had money to purchase a new one. His grandfather, Simeon Lekanoff, had two, one with an inboard engine and one with no engine.[33]

Twice in the fall of 1933 Olsens traveled to Unalaska for medical attention. In August they brought Annie and John aboard the *Kanaga Native*. "The daughter was brought in for treatment at the Hospital, presumably for T.B." reported A.H. Proctor. "It should be stated that Miss Olsen does not look like a T.B. case. In fact she is a very healthy looking young person."[34] The family was given accommodations at the Company House. On another occasion, Tatiana was admitted to the hospital and underwent surgery for an abdominal tumor. Dr. Leslie White allowed her to return home only after getting her to promise that she would return for observation. While at Unalaska, they again stayed at the AC Company House, in a large upstairs room. This kindness on the part of the company was explained by Proctor: "Such a mark of consideration would find appreciation and under conditions existing would rebound to the benefit of the Company. Mr. Olsen and his wife were grateful and their attitude enabled the writer to get closer to Mr. Olsen than would have otherwise been possible." One immediate result was that Olsen suggested that Andrew Kashavaroff, who worked for the AC Company, go to Makushin to purchase furs.[35]

In addition to Tatiana Olsen, midwife services were provided by other women. Traditional herbal remedies continued to be used including

Sixsiqax̂ (wormwood; *Artemisia unalaskensis*) in the steam bath and *Saaqudiigamax̂* (strong putchki; *Angelica lucida*) for painful or strained muscles.[36] *Alix̂siisix̂* (leather-leaved saxifrage; *Leptarrhena pyrolifolia*) was boiled and the liquid was drunk for illnesses such as influenza.[37] Teas were made from fireweed leaves and natural hot springs were used for restorative purposes.[38]

Two more complicated procedures practiced by his grandmother were described by Nick Galaktionoff. The first was the reduction of an infection by the use of wood that had been around "for years and years" and decayed almost to the point of dust. This was collected and, after being thoroughly dried on the stove, it was crushed into a powder, "just like brown chocolate." The infected wound was washed and somehow treated with a medicinal plant and then the powdered wood was applied. "As soon as they did that," Nick said, "the wound dried up. All the greasy oily parts dried out." This procedure was repeated three or four times. An infected head wound Nick developed (after running into the sharp end of his father's spade) was treated this way.[39]

The other procedure was one Nick saw twice. Although imperfectly remembered, it suggests some of the complexity of Unangax̂ medical practices. It involved "a special root on this island" that was applied to the body to relieve pain. This sounds as though it were the root of the strong putchki, *Angelica lucida*, that was heated and placed on the affected body part, always over a protective covering such as a fine layer of grass. It could not, however, be applied to legs without precautionary steps or the "pain" from the wound would travel upwards and attack the heart or the brain, causing death. Nick saw his grandmother take the necessary safeguards prior to treating Philip Galaktionoff for a serious injury that had swollen his ankle. A cloth was soaked in a red solution that Nick suspected had been rendered from some part of a seal or octopus. After the cloth had dried, Marva tied it just below Philip's knee. Only after that did she apply the root to his ankle. After two or three daily treatments over the course of two or three days, the pain was gone and the red tourniquet was removed.

> I asked my grandmother why they used that red band in that way. She said the red band was used to prevent the pain from traveling to the heart. The pain in the leg couldn't go under the red bandage. It just disappeared right at that point. If the red band wasn't used, the pain could travel and locate anywhere else—in the heart or in the brain.[40]

A parallel might be drawn between this procedure and the practice, described by Andrew Makarin, of the grass rope strung across Beaver Inlet to prevent the escape of whales.

One summer Philip Galaktionoff fished for Pete Olsen, preparing smoked and salted salmon. Nick once described Philip as a bald-headed

and comical guy, "for every little word you said, he had something to make you laugh."[41] He would bring a skiff filled with fish to the village where women helped him split and prepare them. One day, while collecting driftwood for the smoke house, Philip found a nest of eaglets. Before he knew what had happened, an adult bird dove at him, swept off his hat, and dropped it in the bay. Philip needed his hat and he charged after it. A little later, Nick saw him coming into the village from across the river. "I noticed his hand was bandaged and his face was bloody," Nick said. He didn't think much about it until he saw Tatiana Olsen dressing his uncle's head wounds "and everyone was laughing away."[42]

Other illnesses or medical complications often meant death. Eva Lekanoff, wife of Constantine Lekanoff, gave birth on the first of February 1935 and died of post partum hemorrhage a few hours later. Their son survived only a month and a half.[43]

Arletta Carter, the teacher at Kashega, visited Makushin for a few hours on May 26, 1933. She was so impressed that she lobbied to have the Kashega school transferred there, a suggestion the Office of Indian Affairs agreed to in 1934. She listed seventeen possible students between the ages of 5 and 21. Her description of Pete Olsen and his "charming, cultured Native wife, and two worthy adopted children" is effusive. Despite what she had heard about him while at Unalaska, Carter found Olsen "thrifty" and "progressive." She described his home as having electric lights, electric stove, bathtub and toilet, a radio, a piano, ukuleles, and a friendly dog. His store was stocked with food, clothing, and household articles. His sheep provided fresh meat for the village; his chickens, fresh eggs. The community gardens he oversaw provided fresh vegetables. He did not allow alcohol in the village. He had trained and disciplined the Natives "to work efficiently." If all that were not enough, he had built "a swing at the beach where the children may swing at leisure and enjoy the music of the waves." Makushin was a village with "innumerable future possibilities" and, if given a choice, she would prefer teaching in Pete Olsen's barn to returning to Kashega where her time was wasted in fruitless effort.[44] It is difficult to imagine how Carter could have been more mistaken.

Annie Olsen was in the hospital again, perhaps from July 1935 through January 1936.[45] Her health may have been one of the reasons Dr. Leslie A. White decided to walk to Makushin in December 1935. Winter hiking in the Aleutians can be either extremely difficult or remarkably easy, depending on whether or not the snow is frozen hard enough to provide a smooth firm surface. He traveled with four men and a boy from Unalaska. They took the frequently used trail that began at the head of Captains Bay and ended in Makushin's Portage Bay. The trip was reported in an article in the *Seward Gateway* in which the trail was described as the one "for which the road commission has been asked to provide shelter cabins." This request had been spurred because it was "the same trail upon which Harry Olsen [no relation to Peter Olsen] was found frozen

to death two winters go." "Handsome" Harry had put down the mirror he was fond of gazing into and ventured out into the weather one time too many. The doctor's hike, according to the article, was "15 miles of rugged mountainous traveling which ends with a pleasant little muscle developing row in an open boat of 10 miles or more."

With the exception of two cases of tuberculosis, the 42 residents of Makushin were in excellent health. There were 12 school-aged children. The houses and surroundings were "clean and neat." This "must have been an every day cleanliness," the paper concluded, because the doctor's arrival had been unexpected. The village had only a "meager supply of staple articles of food." The author was almost flippant about the poverty.

> The natives of Makushin are a very uncomplaining type of people and the fact that they were short of food and obliged to travel all the way to Unalaska to purchase the small amounts their funds warranted, and then pack their supplies on their backs over a 15-miles mountain trail, did not seem a matter to raise much fuss about.

"Things have to go very radically wrong in Makushin," the article concluded, "before any complaints are heard."[46] Things would go radically wrong, and soon.

Arctic Foxes, Alopex lagopus, From *Mostly Mammals: Zoological Essays* by Richard Lydekker, 1930. The lower figure shows the white phase in winter coat; the upper and central figures are likely the same phase in summer dress (with center in blue phase). http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arctic_Fox#mediaviewer/File:ArcticFoxesLyd.jpg