The story of the Pribilof people begins over 10,000 years ago when the ancestors of the first Aleuts migrated to the new World. This migration began during the last Ice Age when massive arctic glaciers had spread over large parts of the globe, reducing the level of the oceans throughout the world. Land that had been previously submerged under 30 to 60 fathoms of water was gradually exposed and remained above sea level for 15,000 years. During this time a natural land bridge between Asia and North America emerged and it was over this broad bridge that the earliest Aleuts entered the region that was ultimately to become their permanent home. The land bridge extended from Anadyr Bay in Northern Siberia to Unmak Island on the Aleutian Chain. St. Paul and St. George Islands were high landmarks along the coast of this Ice Age land. Consequently, the early ancestors of the Pribilof people may have even camped and hunted on these islands as they crossed into North America.

The first tribes that had migrated over the land bridge were hunter-gatherers in pursuit of land-based animals. Eventually these tribes spread out and populated North and South America over a period of thousands of years, and became the American Indians. In contrast with these first tribes, the second wave of migrants from Asia were seafarers who followed the coastline of the Bering land bridge in their search for new food. The tribes who followed the northern coast of the bridge were led across the top of North America and eventually into the arctic island of Greenland while the ancient sea people who followed the southwestern coastline of the land bridge were led down the coast of Alaska.
The climate of the world changed over 10,000 years ago. The earth began to grow warmer again, and the world's oceans gradually rose as the glaciers melted. Once again the Bering land bridge was flooded and the Pribilofs eventually became islands as the rising ocean covered the land surrounding them. Soon they were the only reminders for hundreds of miles in the Bering Sea that there once had been a land bridge that had invited Asian people into a new world.

**The Aleut Discovery of the Aleutian Islands**

Although the rising oceans changed the coastline of the North American continent considerably, it did not change the way of life of the seagoing tribes who migrated into North America. As each generation searched for better hunting and fishing, they moved slowly but relentlessly along the coastlines, settling where food was plentiful and moving on when it became scarce. Eventually the migrants on the southern coast of the land bridge reached a place where the coastline turned westward again, and became a series of volcanic islands which extended for 1,000 miles back towards Asia.

To anyone unfamiliar with the sea, this Aleutian archipelago would have looked isolated, barren and the victim of a violent climate. To the people who knew the sea well, however, these islands revealed a wealth of fish, sea mammals and tidewater food. Furthermore, the islands' climate was milder than on the mainland, offering the migrants a warmer but windier life. The Aleutian waters offered a variety of food, and the islands themselves provided a defense against the warring tribes in the interior of the continent. Eventually, some of the seafaring tribes chose the isolation of the islands with their abundant food to the vulnerability of the mainland.

Not all of the seafaring people who had migrated from Asia moved out on the Aleutian Islands; many remained on the coastline of the mainland where they could hunt not only sea mammals, but also the land mammals such as bears that roamed the arctic. These people, the Eskimos, faced a different environment and different challenges than the Aleuts, who had become island people. And over several thousand years the Eskimos and Aleuts became distinct peoples with different languages and customs to express their different worlds. The Aleut
language still reflects the basic structure of the Eskimo languages, although there are only a few words in common today.

**The Aleutian Islands—5,700 B.C.**

By 5,700 B.C. there was a seafaring community well established at Nikolski Bay on the Aleutians. Today, the remains of this ancient community have been carefully studied for clues to the history of the people who lived there. The village was built within sight of Nikolski on what is now called Anangula Island. Until 5,000 years ago this island was part of the Unmak Island and formed a rich corner of the Alaskan peninsula, jutting into the Bering Sea. Sea life moving between the North Pacific and the Bering Sea passed this corner, providing the ancient seafarers of this community a wealth of food and materials to enhance their lives.

Over 4,000 years ago a village called Chaluka was built near the Anangula Village on Umnak Island. The ancient inhabitants of this village, who are called Paleo-Aleuts today, left a trail of clues behind them. When these clues are pieced together they begin to tell a story about these ancient ancestors of the Aleut people. Near Chaluka a number of harpoons, spearheads, and fish hooks, which were the vital implements of their hunting and fishing, have been found. The tools bear a strong resemblance to those made in Hokkaido and Honshu, Japan, in the same era. Over time these hunting tools were varied and changed; hooks became more complex and spearheads more refined. However, the changes in the tools did not appear to have significantly increased the amount of food that was collected each year by these people.

Much can be told about what these people ate by laboriously examining the remains of their meals, eaten thousands of years ago. The most important fish in the diet of these Paleo-Aleuts were cod and halibut; the salmon had not yet become as important as it is today in the Nikolski area. The cormorant was the most important bird in their diet, although some puffins and ducks were also found in their refuse heaps. And the sea urchins were the basic invertebrates in their varied meals. The most important vertebrate in their lives was the sea otter, not only as food probably, but also because its soft pelts made such fine clothing. There was other food available in Nikolski Bay that the
elderly or very young could gather such as mussels, sea weed, kelpfish, octopus and birds' eggs. The different sources of food provided the community insurance against a serious famine.

The excavation of the homes of these ancient people indicate that they were oval and the entrance was at one side of the structure. The ribs and mandibles of the whales were used as the rafters of the structure and inside there was a slablike hearth. Stone lamps were also used for warmth and light, and buried in the homes has been found some of these lamps as well as ivory and bone decorations for the lips of the inhabitants.

The Nikolski Bay area has been continuously occupied since these first communities were established thousands of years ago. Its wealth of sea life has been a major reason why the descendants of these ancient Aleuts remained in their ancestors' homeland. Today the people who still live in Nikolski can see the site of their ancestors' village across the bay; they still eat many of the same foods that the ancient Aleuts did and hunt the same species of animals.

Over a period of several thousand years, there were two distinct migrations of people onto the Aleutian Islands, although the culture of the islands has been continuous. Archaeologists have found skulls and bones which suggest that the first people to move out on the Aleutian Islands were taller than the later migrants and had longer, narrower skulls. These skeletal remains bear a strong resemblance to the bones of the ancient Ainu people who lived in the northern islands of Japan. The descendants of these earlier, taller migrants continued to live in comparative isolation in the Western Aleutians long after the people in the Eastern Aleutians had intermixed and married with a new people who were somewhat shorter with broader faces and shorter skulls. The present day Aleuts undoubtedly are a mixture between these two different people.

The two separate migrations onto the Aleutian Chain, combined with the isolation of the islands from each other, produced variations in both the language and customs of the Aleuts themselves. Many of the islands developed their own dialect of the Aleut language and the customs of these seafaring people varies from island to island. For instance only the Eastern Aleuts, from the Shumagin and Fox Islands, mummified their dead so that the deceased's soul would remain on earth to give aid to its survivors. The dead were wrapped in beautiful mats
and placed in volcanic caves, where they were found well-preserved thousands of years later.

The Eastern Aleuts also dressed somewhat differently from their western relatives. They wore fur or leather boots, using sea lion flippers as soles and the esophagus for the leggings. The Western Aleuts, from the Rat, Near and Andreovski Islands, on the other hand, preferred their bare feet to the uncomfortable confinement of footwear. However, despite these differences all of the ancient Aleuts shared the demanding environment of the Aleutian Islands.

**The Daily Life of the Ancient Aleuts**

The ancient Aleuts had been nomadic bands of sea hunters for centuries, following the sea mammals rather than establishing settled communities. However, over time more permanent villages on the Aleutian Islands were established where food was plentiful the year round; eventually the numerous villages of these people dotted the entire coastline of the Aleutian Islands. These ancient Aleut villages consisted of 6 or 7 subterranean houses that commanded a narrow neck of land, giving them easy access to the ocean on several sides. The villages were always near a high observatory where a watch was kept for returning hunters, migrating sea mammals or invading enemies. If attackers approached from one side of the ocean the kayaks could quickly be lifted across the neck of the land to water on the other side. When sea mammals appeared they also could be pursued quickly.

The houses were dug into the ground and had roofs made of bones and driftwood that supported layers of grass and sod above the large underground structures. These homes provided shelter for between 10 and 40 families and were sometimes as large as 240 feet long by 40 feet wide. In order to enter these houses a person had to enter through one of several holes in the roof and then climb nimbly down a log ladder into the semi-darkness of the shelter. The only light and heat in these long houses came from stone lamps that burned the fat of the sea mammals caught by the hunters.

Everyone in an Aleut Village had to work. The young, the old, and the weak gathered food which was easily reached on land or in the tide waters, such as berries, roots, birds' eggs, mollusks and sea urchins. The more athletic might catch birds with large nets attached to long poles.
The women did the cooking, sewing of hides, weaving of baskets and repairing of the boats. The hardest work, however, fell to the Aleut men who hunted the largest range of sea mammals of any people in the world. The biggest sea mammals were, of course, the enormous whales that roamed the Bering Sea, but the Aleuts also hunted the sea lions, fur seals, walruses and sea otters that swarmed around their islands.

The Aleuts were almost completely dependent on the animals of the sea for their food, clothing and fuel. As a result the Aleut men became skilled sailors and navigators, travelling among the islands for hundreds of miles in their kayaks in search of animals. They learned to read and predict the weather with great accuracy and to navigate by the stars; if there were no stars to be seen they would drop floats made from the stomach and bladders of sea mammals as markers to guide them back to land. On long voyages the hunters would sleep in their kayaks strapped together with their companions so that they would not drift apart while they rested from their hunt.

The kayaks were complexly constructed to serve the purposes of these Aleut hunters. They were highly maneuverable, and easy to right if they flipped over in the icy ocean. After the hunt was over, these kayaks could carry up to 200 kilos of meat, which made the Aleut hunter much more mobile than the land based Indians who had to haul all of their own meat themselves. Perhaps most important was the fact that the kayak never became hungry and had to be fed some of the precious food from the hunt, like the Eskimos’ dogs. This highly efficient mode of transportation was limited only by the energy of the hunter.

The hunting of the large swift sea mammals took enormous skill and cooperation by the amphibious Aleuts. The killing of a sea otter required from four to twenty kayaks to surround the prey. The otter would be struck with a harpoon propelled by a flat throwing board stapped to the forearm of the hunter. The harpoon had a detachable dart at its tip painted red and black to which was attached a sea mammal's bladder. This bladder acted as a float to mark the passage of the otter underwater so that the hunters could follow the submerged otter. When the animal wearied and surfaced for air it would be killed easily by the hunters.

Whale hunting was considerably more dangerous, but took fewer men. Several kayaks were required, one acting as the rescuer of the others. The hunters had to sail close enough to the surfaced whale to hit
it with a poisonous lance that had the mark of the hunter imprinted on it. Even if the whale was hit squarely, it would take several days for it to die. During that time the hunter would isolate himself in a cave and pray that after the whale's death it would be washed ashore. If it was, it would provide his village with food, clothing and fuel. When the hunter returned to his village with his catch, the people who were in need of food would go down to the beach to greet him, and the food was divided evenly among them. The hunter may even get a smaller portion of his own catch than some people who were in more need than he was.24

The early Aleuts were extremely frugal with the resources they found on the Aleutian Islands. They used only what they had to and were careful to conserve the rest. Nothing was ever thrown away if there was potential use for it. If the dead whale was washed up on the shore several days after the hunter had hit it, no part of it would be wasted. The blubber provided fuel for their homes and food for their bodies. The skin and intestines provided waterproof clothing, which was sewn together by the sinews of the whale. The intestines made excellent rain parkas (kanleikas), which were especially important to people who were constantly plagued by the chilly wetness of their occupation. The ribs of the whale were used in the construction of their houses, and the vertebrae and shoulder blades provided tables and seats. The teeth would become combs, needles and arrowheads, and the stomach and bladders made both fishing floats and water carriers.

Other resources found on the Aleutian Islands were seaweed that was used as a fishing line, and seashells that became fishing hooks. Plates and spoons came from the bones of sea mammals and from the breastbone of ducks. Dyes were made from the octopus ink, ochres and vegetable stains found on the Aleutian Islands. And the Aleutian grasses were used to make the finest baskets and burial mats made anywhere in Alaska.25

There were three major weaving styles among the Aleut women, which were associated with the islands of Attu, Atka and Unalaska Islands. It was generally recognized that while Atka's grass was the whitest on the Aleutian Islands, the Attu grass was the strongest and when woven finely by the Attu women would produce watertight containers. Each region wove different knobs on top of the baskets to distinguish them from the baskets of other islands.26 The Aleut women collected the fine grasses in the summer, split them with their finger-
nails and dyed them with the natural dyes of their environment. Then during the long winter nights, baskets and mats were woven by the light of a stone lamp.

Watertight rain gear was very important to the Aleuts who were exposed so often to both the ocean and the rain. Rain parkas were made both from the intestines of the sea mammals and from birdskins sewn together. Rain helmets to protect the eyes of the hunters from both ocean spray and the sun's glare were fashioned from driftwood which was scrapped, steamed and bent into a conical shape. These helmets were elaborately decorated with inlaid bone, ivory and sea lion whiskers; colorful designs were carved on them, making what was practical also aesthetically pleasing.

An observer in the 19th century was most impressed with the frugality of the Aleuts: "They are quite as indifferent in regard to gain as in other desires. Contented with very little, they desire only such things as are useful, and beyond that they care not to accumulate." Their food from the seas was fortunately not dependent on the weather, but on the natural rhythms of the reproduction cycles of the animal population. The Aleuts, therefore, conserved these cycles of nature by never taking more food than they needed. During their reign in the Bering Sea no species of animal ever became extinct.

The Aleuts were an integrated part of the ecological system during the more than 8,000 years they lived on the Aleutians. They formed an essential part of the biological triangle that included the sea urchins and sea otters. If the sea urchins and otters had been left alone they would have gone through large swings in their populations. However, since both the otter and the Aleuts ate the urchins while the Aleuts also ate the otter, the population of all three elements was kept relatively stable over thousands of years.

The Political life in the Aleut Society

The Aleuts put the highest social value on a person's daring, courage and skill in hunting. His wealth was worth nothing in the eyes of his society, and if he was not generous with his people he was an outcast among them. The people who had the personality and physical qualities that the community admired most became the leaders. The highest authority in an Aleut Village resided with the Council of Elders.
which was a group of older men picked for the council by the common consent of the village. The chief of the village, called toukoo (also spelled toen or toyen) was also picked by common consent for his courage rather than for his heredity. Second in authority was the village shaman or medicine man, who was chosen because he had the powers that could insure good health and hunting for his people.

There was no need to enforce law and order in the Aleut society because of the high ethical standard the Aleuts had for their own behavior. "These people detest lying and never spread false rumors... they never boast of their exploits and despise hypocrisy in every respect. ... Fighting and murder among them is unheard of; the only retaliation may be to make a nickname for the offender. ... There are no swear words in Aleut... (The Aleut) does not flatter or make empty promises, even in order to escape reproof. But if he has once promised a thing, one can count with certainty upon it."

During peacetime the Council of Elders' and the toyen's political responsibilities were confined to settling differences among their people. In wartime much more governance was needed to insure the survival of the village. Therefore the toyen assumed absolute dictatorial control over the village, and he relinquished his control only when the people were out of danger. The only privilege of leadership that distinguished the elders from the common people and the slaves was the right to have a man paddle their canoe for them. In all other ways they were indistinguishable from the rest of the Aleuts.

**Warfare on the Aleutian Islands**

In a society where continual hunting is necessary in order to feed the people, warfare can never occupy much time. Nevertheless, the Aleuts occasionally would fight other people, especially in retaliation for attacks on their villages. Their most persistent enemy was the Koniags from Kodiak Island: (Koniag means enemy in Aleut). However, they also fought with the tribes on Bristol Bay as well as occasionally among themselves. War served several purposes; revenge was most important, but the capture of new wives and slaves was also essential to the isolated villages on the Aleutian Chain.

The Aleut arsenal contained spears, arrows and war lances that had a detachable head made from whale bone. The head was exactly the
thickness of a man so that it could not be easily removed once it had entered the body of an enemy. The Aleuts also used a dart throwing board (*atlatl*) that acted as an extension of the warriors' arms. The darts were dipped in poisons made from putrid oil and the Aleut armour was a body shield (*kuyake*) made from wood and bone slates tied together with rawhide. They also wore body armour such as wrist guards, helmets, and masks. However, no amount of armour could protect the Aleut warrior from his dead enemy's evil spirit if it was allowed to wander on earth. Therefore, whenever the enemy was killed he was immediately dismembered, allowing his soul to escape from this world rather than staying on earth to plague the victor.

**The Aleut Religious Beliefs**

The ancient Aleuts had strong religious beliefs in the God (*Agox*) who had created the world and all of its inhabitants. Their world was filled with good and evil spirits and the Aleut medicine man or shaman was the mediator between his people and these ominous spirits. The Aleuts believed in a Paradise (*Agugun'ula*) and man's ability to sin (*tumxtagug*). They also believed in a Hell (*Quagan'ula*), which was a place where there was no land to stand on, a place where the wrongdoer would be adrift for eternity in an endless sea. An ancient song tells poetically of the creation of the land and its people and hints of the death that they all will share:

These countries are created, created.
There are hills on them.
There are little hills on each of them, each of them.
There are women, there are men.
These countries created,
On them are women, on them are men.
With me they laughed and joked.
And so when we separated (they did the same)
I have not heard (such things) as if in a sleep
I heard or felt pleasure.

The early Aleuts considered both sunlight and sea water of religious importance as sources of all life. Consequently, people woke and
slept according to the rhythms of the arctic sun. They took ocean baths for all religious occasions such as at birth. The newborn child was given a rude introduction to the Aleut world by a ceremony of immersion into the chilly surf of the Bering Sea. The sea would be the child's benefactor for the rest of its life and therefore they were introduced to each other early.

There were other ceremonies of religious significance associated with birth, puberty and death that were closely observed. They all had in common a period of 40 days of solitude. After having given birth the new mother was considered unclean and was not allowed to prepare or touch anyone else's food but her own for 40 days. During this time she was not allowed to see any men until she was clean. After 40 days she was considered clean again and then her baby was named (usually after one of the Aleutian animals). At the beginning of puberty a young girl was also segregated in a corner of her house for 40 days after which she could leave. However, she could not look at the sun for 10 more days until she had thoroughly cleaned the house. Then she was considered clean again and in possession of new curative powers. At death, 40 days of solitude and mourning were observed by the spouse of the deceased.

There was no marriage ceremony as in some cultures, but there was a mutual exchanging of gifts between the families. The men and women both could have more than one spouse; the number of spouses was limited by economic, rather than religious grounds. The prospective bridegroom was required to hunt and fish often for several years, for the relatives of the girl he wanted to marry. Few men could afford to do this many times during their lives.

Dances and pantomimes were very important as an expression of the Aleuts' religious beliefs. A major religious festival was held in December in which all of the women danced naked with masks over their faces under the cold, subarctic moon. The men were forbidden to watch and if caught would suffer the penalty of death.

Another well known dance was about a hunter and the birds he caught. One bird tried to escape repeatedly from the hunter's net and when escape was no longer possible the bird became transformed into a lovely woman who fell into the arms of the happy hunter. The worlds of the Aleutian people and animals intermingled symbolically in their myths as they did in the reality of their lives.
Aleut Medical Practices

Good health was essential to people who had to face a brutal climate in order to feed themselves. An uncured illness exacerbated by the cold, wet weather would often lead to death. Therefore the Aleuts were intensely interested in learning about human anatomy and developing a regime of preventive medicine, as well as healing practices, to insure the health of their people. To the Aleuts there were two categories of illnesses, the less severe external illnesses such as headaches, rash and rheumatic pain, and the more severe internal illnesses of diarrhea and fever. Sickness was cured by the medicine man (shaman, or quagagiq) who also tried to insure good hunting. This person, who could be either a man or woman, was considered to be well-acquainted with the evil spirits so was not included at such occasions as births or marriages for fear perhaps that some of his acquaintances might follow him.

Fortunately the medicine man did not have to rely solely on his spirit friends to help him cure the sick. The Aleuts had learned a great deal about health and medical practices because of their own curiosity about how the human body functioned. They were interested in comparative anatomy and did extensive experiments on sea mammals, especially otters, which they considered to have once been men. In addition, they used to perform autopsies on their own dead to increase their knowledge of the functioning of the human organism. As a result of their experiments and autopsies they became thoroughly familiar with the human body and their vocabulary contained names for all of the major anatomical parts of the body.

Many of the Aleut medical practices were strikingly similar to ancient Chinese practices, especially the techniques of acupuncture and massage. Both the Chinese and the Aleuts used acupuncture to let out the bad airs in the sick body. Bishop Veniaminov, observing the Aleuts in the early part of the 19th century, was most impressed with the results.

This cure was also used in internal pains, as well as in ordinary colic, as the very best, especially in the latter cases; and as I have been assured by such patients themselves with astonishing success, so that a person almost dying in the morning, towards evening after the operation, became altogether well.
ABOVE: INTERIOR VIEW OF BARABARA. From an engraving by John Webber, member of Captain Cook's third journey, 1798. BELOW: CANOES OF OONALASHKA. John Webber, ca. 1798. Courtesy Anchorage Historical and Fine Arts Museum.
Arthritis was a common disease among the ancient Aleuts and acupuncture was often used to treat it. Massage was also used, most often during pregnancy, to insure an easy delivery and a quick recovery after birth.

Other Aleut medical practices included bloodletting, suturing, and the application of a variety of special beneficial brews. The bloodletting was usually done only on men between the ages of 20-40 during the month of February which was "the hungry month." Suturing, using a bone needle and sinew thread, was done on large cuts in order to hasten the healing of the wound. And fevers were cured by bitter brews and diarrhea by astringent herbs. One health problem that was nonexistent on the Aleutian Islands before the 18th century was tooth decay. The skulls of ancient Aleuts reveal almost perfect teeth with few if any cavities. Such excellent dental hygiene was due largely to the fact that they had no refined sugar in their diets.

Part of the training of the hunters included physical exercises that were at the same time rites of stoicism.

Repeated immersions in icy water would help the Aleuts build up a tolerance for the water they had to hunt in; going without food would build up their resistance to hunger. Their bodies were as finely cared for as their kayaks and together the man and his boat would travel great distances without rest, resisting the tempers of the Bering Sea and hunting the swift sea mammals in their own homes.

Partly as a result of the Aleuts' physical conditioning and healing practices they have always had unusually long lives when compared with the Eskimos on the mainland of Alaska and Greenland. The Aleuts' longevity was also due, in part, to their environment. It permitted the aged to still do useful work in the tidewaters and tundra long after they could no longer hunt on the open seas. Their long productive lives meant that they rarely became a burden on their village in the way that the elderly do in societies where productive work is restricted to the young. Between children and their parents was a strong familial feeling that would nurture the aged more than any medicine or food.

The longevity of the Aleuts created stable communities. Knowledge and traditions were passed down with more leisure than when the young died early. Their isolation protected them from ruinous wars, and the abundant food protected them from starvation. For over 5,000 years these communities thrived on the Aleutian Islands.
**Aleut Entertainment**

Despite the arduous life of the Aleuts they occasionally relaxed with games, dances and songs. Wrestling was one of the most popular games and involved the elementary forms of judo that were widely used in Asia.\(^{52}\) Another popular Aleut game was darts, which used an imaginary whale as a target. Points in the game were, of course, given depending on the importance of the part of the whale that was hit.\(^{53}\)

Each village had a large number of its own songs which were sung at their dances to the accompaniment of drums and rattles. Especially during the spring holidays many dances were performed behind the magical faces of masks. Unfortunately only 11 songs of the ancient Aleuts have been preserved, but all of them reflect the stoicism that must have been the dominant theme of their lives. Their songs told of the great adventures of their heroes, and also many of them sung of the distress of hunters far at sea:

Grateful, grateful am I for their wanting me to be at home often.
Miserable, miserable am I having wanted to find myself there.
Grateful, grateful am I for their wanting me to be at home often.
Having passed here from where I usually live, because of this I must sleep.

One of the most famous games was called by the Aleut men, "The Visit by the Devils." Several of the men would leave the village and then return in a hurry warning the village that they had seen a monster. The other men would just laugh bravely at the danger and prepare to leave to hunt the dangerous animal. The women would be told to extinguish all stone lamps so that the monster would not know where they were; the men would then courageously leave the village and the women would huddle together in darkness. Soon a frightening noise would pierce the darkness and the women would all call out to their men to return to protect them. The men, who had made the noise in the first place, would gallantly return to protect their frightened families, rescuing them from all danger, much to their own amusement.\(^{56}\)

Perhaps most revealing of the kind of life the ancient Aleuts lived is that their language had no word for "suffering." The first person to
seriously study the language, Father Veniaminov, speculated that "the endurance of physical and mental pain was for the Aleuts an experience of such everyday occurrence that they regarded it as constituting, in itself, neither a virtue nor the reverse."57

The Aleuts' stoic lives were embroidered with the decoration of their bodies, clothes and baskets. Their helmets, in particular, became a focus of elaborate designs, but it shaded a face that rivaled its decoration. Both Aleut men and women wore tattoos on their faces and ivory ornaments in their mouths, ears, and noses. In addition, some of the women wore bracelets of seal skin around their wrists and ankles. However, decoration never became a frivolous habit, nor changed the basic tenor of their hard-working lives.

Despite this harsh life, the Aleuts thrived on the Aleutian Islands and by the 18th century there were over 16,000 people living in a well-orchestrated harmony with the sea. More than half of them were living on the eastern islands, a third in the central Aleutians and the rest were scattered in the west.58 They had developed strong stable communities of hard working, long-living people who had mastered their harsh environment by becoming an integrated part of it. As a consequence of their integration, they developed a unique amphibious culture in the universe of their islands, which stands today as an example of man's ability to orchestrate his own harmony with nature's.

THE ANCIENT ALEUT WORLD