CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND ON THE ORAL HISTORY ACCOUNTS OF UICIMAALLEQ (WALTER KELLY)

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The Anthropology and Historic Preservation—Cooperative Park Studies Unit (AHP-CPSU), a research branch of the National Park Service (NPS), was tasked with fulfilling the NPS regulatory responsibilities relative to implementation of Section 14(h)(1) of the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). Specifically, NPS was responsible for providing technical assistance to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) with respect to archaeological, historical, and ethnographic research on the ANCSA 14(h)(1) project (e.g., see Pratt 2004, 2009a). The AHP-CPSU filled that role from the mid-1970s through the spring of 1983.

One way AHP-CPSU provided the required assistance was by helping ANCSA-created Native Regional Corporations to gather the baseline data necessary to generate their ANCSA 14(h)(1) historical place and cemetery site applications. Nearly all of the Native Regional Corporations that ultimately filed ANCSA 14(h)(1) claims received assistance from AHP-CPSU research staff during the application process. For some regions in which that work occurred, the collected data were subsequently compiled and published by AHP-CPSU (e.g., Andrews 1977; Koutsky 1981, 1982; Reckord 1983).

In the case of the Calista corporate region, Susan Hansen was the lead AHP-CPSU researcher for the lower Yukon River area. The interviews she conducted in 1976 with Uicimaalleq (Walter Kelly [Fig. 1])—a Yup’ik Eskimo resident of Pilot Station, Alaska—were part of the initial ANCSA 14(h)(1) site information-gathering process. Uicimaalleq was a monolingual Yup’ik speaker, so his accounts were interpreted into English during the interview sessions by other Pilot Station residents—most notably Noel Polty (Kumkaq, 1919–1991 [Fig. 2]), to whom Walter was a role model. Noel clearly was not comfortable in the role of interpreter, probably because Yup’ik was his first language and also the language he much preferred to speak. This is reflected in part by the fact that details of Uicimaalleq’s accounts were clarified or expanded upon in separate interviews in 1976 with Noel, each of which was conducted with a Yup’ik interpreter. Noel provided further details relevant to those accounts in 1982, when ANCSA researchers field-investigated several of the sites discussed by Uicimaalleq in 1976.

Uicimaalleq was born in ca. 1898 (Kelly 1976:2) at the old fishing site of Kangi’ir (Kelly, Polty, and Greene 1976; Kelly, Polty, and Polty 1976)—sometimes called “Old Pilot Station”—and died at Pilot Station in 1982.1 His father was Petgeralria (also Petgerpiar [Kelly, Polty, and Greene 1976:30] and “Bobby” [Kelly 1976]) and his

Figure 1. Uicimaalleq (Walter Kelly), 1977. Courtesy James H. Barker.
mother, who was evidently Russian (Polty 1982b:39), was Penguq. Revered as a kind and compassionate person (e.g., Polty 1982a, 1982b), Uicimaalleq was very knowledgeable about the Native history of the lower Yukon River region.

Uicimaalleq was the maternal uncle of Noel’s father (Polty 1982a:1, 36): that is, Noel’s father’s mother was Uicimaalleq’s older sister. But Noel referred to Uicimaalleq as his grandfather (e.g., Polty and Greene 1976:2). When Noel’s father, Yugissaq (Jacob Tunucuk),\(^2\) “became an orphan” at a young age, Uicimaalleq’s mother Penguq adopted him, so Uicimaalleq and Noel’s father “grew up together” (Polty 1982a:2). Their bonds with one another probably explain Noel’s Yup’ik name, Kumkaq. That is, Uicimaalleq’s Yup’ik name was Kumkaq until the death of his older brother, after which his name was changed to Uicimaalleq (Polty 1982a:3–6; see also Kelly 1976).

The accounts presented in the translation that follows are based on a series of oral history interviews conducted with Uicimaalleq that were supplemented by testimony from Noel Polty. The first account concerns the personal history of Uicimaalleq. It provides insights into early-twentieth-century Yup’ik life in the lower Yukon River area and also reveals the significant impacts of erosional processes on former Yup’ik settlements along the Yukon’s northern bank. The second account is a traditional story centered on caribou hunting (snaring in particular) in the southern Nulato Hills; however, it also offers clues about Yup’ik social behavior and social control and Yup’ik–Deg Hit’an intergroup relations, territoriality, and land tenure practices.\(^3\)

Comparatively speaking, there has probably been less material presented about Yup’ik cultural history in the lower Yukon area than in any other subarea of the Yup’ik region. Publication of the Uicimaalleq narratives helps chip away at that imbalance.

NOTES

1. Estimates regarding Uicimaalleq’s date of birth range from ca. 1884 to 1898, and his birthplace has also been reported as the former village of Kuigpalleq (i.e., Polty 1982a:35; Pratt 2009b:145, 149). But the birth date and place indicated herein are considered the most likely.
For three years, Jacob assisted a dog-team mail carrier named Aata Polty with his mail runs, and that was the genesis of Noel’s father being given the surname Polty. As Noel (Polty 1982a:2–3) explained, “That’s when [the mail carrier] gave him his name, Polty, since there was nobody else with that name [in Pilot Station].”

Together, the *Uicimaalleq* narratives hint at the rich information that can be found in the oral history component of the BIA ANCSA 14(h)(1) collection.

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Pratt, Kenneth L.


Reckord, Holly

TWO ORAL HISTORY NARRATIVES BY UICIMAALLEQ (WALTER KELLY):
PILOT STATION, ALASKA

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ELMINEK QANEMCIKLUNI
PERSONAL HISTORY OF UICIMAALLEQ


< After I became observant, it was as if I woke up from sleeping. I don't remember where I first saw a steamboat. It was a small steamboat that rocked from side to side [as it moves on the river]. I don't remember what happened after it disappeared around the bend in the channel. Finally, it seems as if I awoke from sleeping recently. Finally, I was staying awake [fully observant]. I finally was able to observe how I was. >


< Then when I became observant I realized we were downstream at Cingik. It is upstream from Goose Island. Later I realized that we had moved [from Cingik] to Kuigpalleg. Well, it was my mother. I realized later that that summer we had moved to Kangi’ir. That winter we moved inland [upriver] to the village of Angercaq [also Angercak]. I discovered it was just before the cold weather sets in. >


< We had docked at a small beach. I found out later that the riverbank [at Angercaq] was eroding ever so slightly at that time. As time went by that village [had to move out]. Far in the back of the village was a men’s communal house [qasgiq] and it wasn’t a small one. Soon it was winter, and we left the village because of the eroding riverbank. When the erosion reached the area in front of the caches, we left the place. We sadly returned to Kuigpalleg. >


< We never went back to Angercaq because of the erosion, and the village was gone. Regrettably, winter was advancing so the people moved to wherever they could and made caches. They survived the winter. Just before winter [we made our home at] a creek in front of a mountain upstream. We had to travel a fairly long way into the channel [before reaching the place]. >
Ekvigpak, Ekvigpaknek acirluku. Katurrluteng qagililuteng-llu tuaten. Nutaan, nunaurrluteng. Kangitmun tamana waten wani neng’uluni. Kiavet! Nutaan tuani irrarraarluteng anelranqigcami mom-aurluqa nutaan ikegkun pektenaqitevkenani. Kuigpallermiungurluni taqlirluni. < Ekvigpak, they named it Ekvigpak. They came together [at that place] and built a men’s communal house. Finally, it became a village. There were houses all the way to the headwaters. To upstream! After my beloved mother moved downstream from upstream [Anqercaq], she didn’t move again from that place across there [across from Pilot Station]. Kuigpalleg became her permanent home. >

Table 1. Places mentioned in the text or shown on the accompanying map (above).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yup’ik Name</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Variant Name(s)</th>
<th>Feature Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cingik</td>
<td>“point, tip”</td>
<td></td>
<td>Summer camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuigpalleg</td>
<td>“former big river [Kuigpak]”</td>
<td>Starikvikhpak (Nelson 1899); Starry (old) Kwikhpak (Dall 1870)</td>
<td>Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anqercaq</td>
<td>“way to go out (quick)”</td>
<td>Ankachagmyut/Razboynichniy (Zagoskin 1967); Razboinik (Nelson 1899)</td>
<td>Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekvigpak</td>
<td>“big bank”</td>
<td></td>
<td>Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penarraak</td>
<td>“just a little bluff”</td>
<td></td>
<td>Village, summer/fall camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuilnguq</td>
<td>“clear water”</td>
<td>Chuihnak River/Atchuelinguk River (Orth 1967)</td>
<td>River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kang’ir</td>
<td>“corner” (?)</td>
<td>Old Pilot Station</td>
<td>Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuntutulit</td>
<td>“ones (hills) with many caribou”</td>
<td>Nulato Hills (e.g., Polty et al. 1982)</td>
<td>Mountain range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuutalgaq</td>
<td>“one with labrets”</td>
<td>Pilot Station</td>
<td>Modern village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utnguageqnaq</td>
<td>“one resembling a wart” (?)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utnguageqnaq</td>
<td>“one resembling a wart” (?)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Slough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kangigaq</td>
<td>“corral”</td>
<td>Caribou corral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aqaleq</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negeqliq</td>
<td>“north one”</td>
<td>Konneko River (Raymond 1869); Andreafsky River (Orth 1967)</td>
<td>River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qukaqliq</td>
<td>“middle one”</td>
<td>East Fork Andreafsky River (Orth 1967)</td>
<td>River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Goose Island (Orth 1967)</td>
<td>Island in Yukon River</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
They made a fall camp downstream where the fish were. Our fathers [were always together]. At the time of your beloved parent’s [Yugissaq’s] death, our father, Bobby, [put his body in a sled and] pulled [the sled to his burial place]. An epidemic had occurred just after the summer salmon-fishing season was over. Most of the people died at that place upstream. He immediately [brought his body in a sled]. [When he buried his friend’s body,] he only dug a little into the ground. At that time, we didn’t have any shovels and hardly much else. We only had small wedges that had handles made of hardwood. That’s what they used to shovel the earth.

No more epidemics occurred after that. I thought that the descendents [of the deceased] who cried did that for no reason. I found out they evidently did that because they were grieving for the people who had died. Grieving does not hold fast. The things I did, do they [the interviewers] want me to tell of the things I remember?

Our beloved mother sewed our clothing. Also in the winter, we took the scales off from the fish skins. These scaled skins were used to make mittens. Fish was [not neglected, and was very useful] during those times.

Finally, one day they start to speak of the foreigners. Well, it was a long time before the foreigners came. The different types of foreigners were not seen much. I saw those times when there was none.

TUNTUSSURYAURRLUTENG
THE MEN BEGIN TO SNARE CARIBOU

The two evidently escaped up into Ecuilnguq until they could go no farther. Finally, at a creek, they came upon a house that was on a clearing [or a meadow] above...
a lookout point. Although there were trees in some places, they were not dense. >


< They came upon a couple who were living alone. Since the two were in a desperate situation, they did not even offer the couple a gift for coming into their house. Upon entering the house, they saw the couple and noticed the husband was an old man. The woman was old also. The two didn’t respond. The two didn’t talk. The two didn’t say ayuaq. >

The two told the couple [why they were there]. The couple only looked at each other, and said something the two did not understand. The two indicated they did not understand. The couple spoke in another language, in Ingglitq [Deg Hit’an]. >


< The two [brothers] stopped [trying to communicate] since it was frustrating. Since they had nothing else to do, the couple evidently offered them caribou to eat, signaling with their hands. They evidently could only communicate with hand signals. The two [assisted the couple]. The two men were very friendly with the couple. So the two evidently stayed and they even built a house for themselves. >


< It seems the husband could only set snares. The couple evidently would leave together [to set snares]. When the husband went up to the ridges, leaving [his wife] behind, the two would go with her husband. The two men also worked with sinew, twisting and braiding caribou sinew. They made snares to catch caribou. They finally started to snare caribou. Soon the two [brothers] hunted for caribou, and since they were healthy and strong, they used their bows and arrows. Soon they had plenty [of food and skins]. >


< They stayed there all that winter. Although the two from Anqercag wanted to return home, the couple didn’t want them to leave. They all stayed together in that place. The men pitied the couple [because they were in need of assistance]. They made the place comfortable to live in. They did the same to a qasgi. They named that place Qasgiq. Well, it’s that village of Qasgiq inland. >

_Pellugitevkenani-gguq qingani tuani cali qanermiluteq taukuk. Asgurluteq tamaeqgun tua tevarakun carvakun cali pirraarluteq. [Uggaarluteq] pisnarutagaq tua elgutelreq tamana tevar’ulluku cali carvamun maavet kanaumralriamun Ecuiingurmun. Anaagluteq tamaavet tua-i._

< The two also said it did not pass on top of that while they were there [sentence is unclear]. The two would head upstream following the stream before they went through the portage. [After they climbed up] when they couldn’t go any farther they carried their canoe over the portage to the stream that goes to Ecuiinguq. That is how they came out into that area. >


< So they evidently [lived together] that winter. The couple didn’t want the two to leave. Then one winter day after the daylight lengthened, two men evidently came to check on the couple since they knew where the small cabin was. That was the only time the two [brothers] became fearful of the two men. Now, one of the men who had just arrived evidently knew how to speak our language. The other one didn’t understand and only spoke [in his] language [Deg Hit’an]. >
That was when they were finally able to tell their story to the one who understood their language and who would act as the interpreter. He told him that although they wanted to return home, the couple did not want them to leave. With much embarrassment at having to impose on the old couple, they had stayed with them that winter. That when the old couple had someone from their home village to stay with them they would leave to return home. They would not come back up. [Break in recording.]


<... that one. The two [brothers] finally returned home [to Anqercaq] after staying away for two years, to see how their home was. Well, they had relatives in the village. After speaking about how their lives might be, they wanted to try to make amends for killing a person. In exchange for their lives, they wanted to give them a place where they may set snares for as long as they can. They wanted to see whether they would be forgiven by the people from their home village. During the time when they used the bows and arrows, they hardly ever caught [caribou]. >10


< Regrettably, [they] did not speak as we do. The two did not speak in our language, only in Ingqiliq. In fall two men came looking for them. The young men had come to make sure the couple was okay; that when the days get longer, they were to take them back [to their village]. In exchange for saving their lives, they had given us their land so we may hunt there.11 Now, before it’s time to snare caribou, before they come down from out there, we are going to exchange our lives for this gift of land to you, where you may hunt caribou for as long as you shall live. >
There is much land north of us extending to Penarraak. You will occupy all that land. Those that desire to live in that land will do so. Those that have snares will set them along the caribou trail. Please [let’s make an agreement] now. We two will return to that place again tomorrow. We ask if the young men are willing to come with us to occupy that place. Therefore, the next day the other young men left with the two. They didn’t say how many went with them.


When the two [brothers] came to the place, they saw that the rack was filled with caribou skins and [dried] meat. They invited the young men to examine the place where they had set snares. They wanted them to tell the others when they return. [He said,] “Study that place. Whoever wants to come may do so, for we two will set snares soon.” They invited others to join them.


< The young men evidently returned home. Finally, after some days passed, all the young men who had come to see the place returned with their family members. The first ones who came to snare caribou were not many. Every year other people would come with them until everyone in Angercaq made it their [annual seasonal place]. That is how long the story is. >

**EPILOGUE: THE HUNTING AND SNARING OF CARIBOU**

Eh, melqurarnek napam ciungani uskurarluni. Tauna tungcartaqaku, kinisunateng kangi’iaq tauna negartullrat. Tua tua-q’ piciatnek mat’um pinritaaga una eggaanermek piokenani. Cali kellutellria ikani ikna kialirnera Penarraam melqurritellruq-gguq. Tamaani ilaapunani watpi!

< The fur piece would be hung at one end of the pole attached with a string. The fur piece is hung, no cooking was done around the corral where the snares were set. I’m not going to tell of how they would go on without someone cooking. The elders say that the one who was watching from the other side upstream from Penarraak had no fur piece. He had [no one] with him at all in that area! >


< It resembled a small qasgi. He watched the caribou appear. He had an Arctic hare–skin parka that he would use to see which way the wind was blowing. As the caribou came, he would wave [his white parka]. He would also signal the number of caribou with the parka. They say that today even the foreigners use [windsocks when they want to know which way the wind is blowing]. >


< They knew about the white parka [and kept an eye on it]. When the caribou [came], all the fires would be put out. Even while someone was cooking, the men would have him put the fire out. The butchers would prepare to butcher after [the killing]. They would come in one group as if the herd was being driven. When there were enough of them, the fastest one would be the first, followed by the butcher. That’s what they would do. The men would drive the caribou to the snares. It was chaotic. Each snare was attached to the willows like this. Soon all of them would [gather in a group]. The caribou snares were placed inside the corral. Then they began to call that place Kangiaq.

Tamakut tuagken petuinat nutem petuinat ellsatuteng. Tua uitaluteng ilait tuagken waten kepuranek cali naparrluku tuagaqam. Taumek angurarlaami. Taumun
< All the loose caribou would gather [around the snared caribou]. [The men] would stay, but some would only stand by the poles. Those poles would be pulled out. When a snare on the pole in the corral was pulled, it would kill a [snared] caribou. When it springs back, the caribou would die. >


< All the snares would be marked with the family emblem. Sometimes a caribou would have four arrows at the Aqaalleq Mountain. Aqaalleq is farther in the river. Some caribou were snared by their legs, but evidently a caribou was not always caught in this manner. Those that were snared only by their legs belonged to the one who snared them, although more than one snare would be on it. The inner snare that was on the caribou (although there would be many [snares]) was marked with the hunter’s emblem [meaning it belonged to him] and all the snares had emblems. The men would recognize their emblem. The snares were taken [by their owners]. >


< Then when a hunter itriaq,15 the one who caught five caribou would be disappointed, saying he didn’t catch any. I wonder how many caribou a hunter would catch all at once with his snares? Even the bones would be chopped, cooked, jelled, and the tallow rendered. The marrow in the bones was taken out. In this village, the [women] would say they made a mixture of berries and tallow. I caught those times when they did that. They would call the cooked tallow kaugaq. >

1. These narrative accounts were transmitted in the Middle Yukon dialect of Central Alaskan Yup’ik (CAY) and later translated by Monica Shelden, who speaks the Yukon Delta dialect of CAY. Notes meant to supplement or clarify the narratives follow the text. Those created by the translator are indicated by the bracketed initials “MS.” All other notes are by Pratt, who also compiled Table 1. Places mentioned in the text or accompanying notes are shown on the associated map (Fig. 1). We thank Robert Drozda for review comments he provided on earlier versions of this translation.

2. Here, Uicimaalleq uses the possessive in reference to Kumkaq (Noel Polty) [MS].

3. “Bobby” was the English name of Uicimaalleq’s father, Petgeraalia (Kelly 1976).

4. European contact with Yup’ik residents of the Yukon River occurred long before the birth of Uicimaalleq, so this comment should be understood to mean that the incidence of such contacts was still relatively low during his childhood.

5. The term “Allauguaq” essentially refers to something that is “different,” but Pilot Station elders used it in a categorical sense that encompassed at least two locally significant traditional stories, including the one recounted here. Both stories specifically identified as being in this category revolve around individuals from the former village of Anqercaq whose behavior violated Yup’ik norms and caused the deaths of other people (e.g., see Kelly, Polty, and Greene 1976; Kelly, Polty, and Polty 1976).

6. Ecuilnguq is the Yup’ik name for the watercourse identified on United States Geological Survey (USGS) maps as the Chuilnak River and/or Atchuelinguk River.

7. Meaning unknown, but possibly “greet them” or “acknowledge them” [MS].

8. The couple was said to be from Anvik (Kelly and Greene 1976). This underscores statements from past Pilot Station elders (e.g., Kelly, Polty, and Greene 1976:9–10) that Penarraak was originally a Deg Hit’an settlement.

9. The dwelling the two brothers built (or perhaps rebuilt) and lived in at Penarraak was, in effect, a Yup’ik men’s house—hence its designation “Qasgiq.” The narrative’s reference to Qasgiq as a village suggests it was a separate site, but that is not the case. It is possible,
however, that some Pilot Station residents recognized “Qasgiq” as a variant name for Penarraak.

10. The implication here is that Yup’ik people of the lower Yukon River learned how to both make caribou snares and snare caribou from the Deg Hit’an.

11. In other words, traditional rights to Penarraak—located in the southern Nulato Hills (Tuntutulit [Polty et al. 1982])—were passed from the Deg Hit’an of Anvik to the two brothers and, by extension, to the Yup’ik people of the Angerecaq area.

12. This was most likely the skin of a comparatively small animal, like a rabbit or fox.

13. The watcher’s position was evidently on a hill named Utngucegnaq, immediately northwest of Penarraak. The corral is believed to have been located near the southwestern base of the hill and adjacent to a slough (unnamed on USGS maps) that also is designated Utngucegnaq in Yup’ik (Pratt 1983).

14. This type of “deer snare” was described and illustrated by Edward Nelson (1899:119–120 [Figs. 34 and 35]).

15. Meaning unknown, but it sounds as if it might refer to when the men are done hunting caribou [MS].

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