

Chugach Alutiiq remains returned to Kachemak Bay

Nearly twenty-five guests gathered in Homer last month for the service and burial of numerous ancestral remains of Chugach Alutiiqs that had been removed 60 years earlier from their resting places on Yukon Island and Cottonwood Creek in Kachemak Bay. The event culminated efforts of nearly four years to repatriate these human remains to Alaska.

The service was conducted by Father Simeon Oskolkoff, Archpriest of the Russian Orthodox Church, with the assistance of two lay readers. Divine liturgy service was held the following day in Port Graham for nearly 20 descendants who wanted to receive Holy Communion.

After the service at the Pratt Museum on Friday, the two cedar coffins containing the ancestral

remains were taken by air to Seldovia and interred on September 13, 1993 on Yukon Island in compliance with a site permit issued by the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge. The Refuge owns the northern half of the island.

Following the service in Homer there was a community potlatch in Port Graham to commemorate the repatriation event, hosted by the Port Graham Tribal Council under the leadership of Eleanor

McMullen, President.

"These ancestral remains are the evidence that represent our Alaska Native aboriginal land rights which were the basis for the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971," said Fred Elvsaas, President of Seldovia Native Association, Inc.

For others, the ancestral remains were reminders that Chugach Alutiiqs had an ancient presence in the Kachemak Bay

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area. And for others, it was significant that these remains finally had been returned to their homeland to be laid to rest.

The Yukon Island repatriation project began with a letter of inquiry in 1989 from John F. Johnson, cultural resources manager for Chugach Alaska Corporation about the inventory of Chugach Alutiiq human remains and cultural materials in the custody of the University of Pennsylvania Museum and later followed by a formal request to

repatriate the human remains to Alaska. In response to his letter, the fragmentary remains of over 82 Chugach Alutiiq men, women and children, dated approximately between 500 B.C. and 500 A.D., were repatriated to Alaska from the museum in June 1993, as provided in the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act enacted by the U.S. Congress in 1990.

The 1993 Yukon Island repatriation project was a cooperative undertaking involving intra-regional planning and cooperation

among several organizations. They include Chugach Alaska Corporation, Cook Inlet Region, Inc., Chugach Alaska Heritage Foundation, The CIRI Foundation, Seldovia Native Association, Port Graham Tribal Council, Port Graham Corporation, English Bay Corporation, Nanwalek Tribal Council, the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, the Pratt Museum of Homer and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge.