



## - King Island -

By TIM BRADNER

The wheel of social revolution—slowly depopulating and destroying Alaska's old, traditional villages — is still turning.

And today the effects of the transition are only that much more apparent.

Villagers move—forced against their will by circumstance—to larger communities near hospitals, medical care, schools and a chance for a cash income in a White Man's civilization to buy the things the White Man buys.

But the chance for a cash income—a job—is often lacking, and in the "larger communities" the villagers often find themselves moving into squalor and poverty-stricken conditions that would challenge the worst Appalachia has to offer.

Appalachia's mild winter, however, is a far cry from what Alaskans have to face.

Often, after moving to the larger communities the villagers find that a return to the old village and the old way of life is impossible.

They have burned their bridges behind them.

### KING ISLAND

Today the old King Island community, perched on stilts on the side of a steep hill on the island, is a ghost-village.

Rocks tumble from cliffs towering over the village, crushing empty houses one by one. Winter storms are slowly tearing away what is left.

According to recent reports, no villagers spent last winter at the old island community and only eight from Nome went out to take advantage of good hunting and fishing this summer.

Soon no one will visit the old village and the social cycle will be complete.

Winter storms will take their toll and what is left will be for future archeologists to dig and find.

### EXAMPLES

What happened to the King Islanders, now living in a squalid shack-village located on Nome's old city garbage dump is a model example of Alaska's village revolution.

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A new example still in-the-making is Diomed Island, the small, tough group of villagers living three miles from Russia's Big Diomed Island in the Bering Straits.

For years the Diomeders have been moving in small groups to Teller and Nome. Although the island's population has been holding at 70 lately and even showed a rise to 90 last winter, signs that the village will eventually follow in King Island's path are beginning to show.

## TRAPPED

The King Islanders, after moving to Nome, found themselves caught in a trap.

Although things are better now than in years past, "King Island Village" outside of Nome is still largely the collection of shacks it has always been.

Life was rugged on the old island—but the people were hearty and there was plenty of good hunting, especially seals and walruses.

The Islanders were strong on the traditions of their culture. They steadfastly kept their dances and ceremonies and passed them on to their children.

But the move to Nome, brought about by circumstances beyond their control, has led to a disintegration among young people, to a de-

gree, of the old cultural values.

The people cannot hunt around Nome and unless the sporadic annual labor jobs are available, they are forced to live on slim welfare checks.

## CAUSES

There were many causes of the original move to the Nome area. The move itself took place over a period of years but started in a big way during the early 1950's.

A large tuberculosis epidemic swept through the community in the late 1940's and the closely-built, packed houses aided spreading of the disease.

At that time many villagers moved to the present "village" near Nome to be near the hospital there.

The BIA-operated school on the island closed when rock-slides damaged some of the buildings and the agency ran into trouble recruiting teachers for the isolated, weather-whipped islands.

Closing of the school put another pressure on the King Islanders to move. They wanted their children in classes.

## THE OLD WAY

Leader of the King Island people, chief Paul Tiulana, tried to lead his people out of the Nome trap to found a new village at Cape Wooley, 45 miles west of Nome and 65 miles north of King Island.

"There my people would not have to worry about food. There's all kinds of game—seal, walrus, oogrük, fishing, crabs and clams," Tiulana told the Tundra Times in 1964.

The Cape Wooley location would be reasonably close to Nome and the hospital there. It would be accessible by skin boat in the summers and via the now almost-complete Nome-Teller highway during the winter.

The village site could accommodate an airfield, Tiulana also pointed out.

Whatever the advantages of the Cape Wooley village site, the move was never made.

In 1964, government officials seemed hesitant to help with a housing program, and since then the King Islanders themselves have gradually lost interest.

According to reports, each year a poll of the people living in the "King Island Village" finds fewer and fewer wanting to tackle the move.

Besides gradually becoming accustomed to life in an urban area, Sen. E.L. Bartlett's Native Housing Bill now pending in Congress may give new hope to improving the Nome location.

Despite the conveniences, living near Nome is disliked by many of the older people, who feel that exposure to "White Man's Civilization" is destroying their own once-strong traditions, particularly among the younger generations.

"Out there at least we had something," an elderly man in the Nome village said. "Here we don't have anything. And we haven't learned how to get it here, either."