

Traditional Homes Being Abandoned for Jobs

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Last week the Tundra Times told the story of social change depopulating King Island and Diomed—two of Alaska's old, traditional villages. In their place, new villages with a cash-economy base are springing up.)

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By TIM BRADNER

Old ways are changing.

Alaska's Native people are tending to move away from the traditional old villages to places where jobs can be found and an income gained.

The hunting is not enough of a living anymore.

While some of the old villages are slowly being depopulated, such as Diomed Island and King Island, new ones are springing up where there is work and a payroll.

Northeast Cape—east of Savoonga on St. Lawrence Island—is one of these new villages.

Economy

The secret to Northeast Cape, of course, is the large Air Force radar station built there during the 1950's.

Under a new Air Force policy of replacing military personnel with civilian workers whenever possible, people from the Cape settlement are beginning to find permanent employment at the site.

According to recent reports, ten people from the village are now working for the Air Force at the station. Jobs range from kitchen helping, taking the place of Air Force "K.P.'s," to general maintenance work.

One village girl is working in an office at the site as a secretary.

"Guys at all the other isolated stations are very jealous of us," an Air Force officer said, with a smile, after the Tundra Times recently visited the Cape settlement and the station.

"They call here and they get a sweet, feminine voice answering the phone. This is really something different for an isolated station."

The girl is Theila Sevahauk, 19.

She started as a clerk in the office under Northeast

Cape's NYC program last year. Many of the other positions were started in this same manner.

The Air Force made the positions available, and the \$1.75-an-hour wage was paid through the NYC office of the state Rural Development Agency.

When the NYC programs closed down last February, many of the workers were kept on at the station as regular Air Force employees.

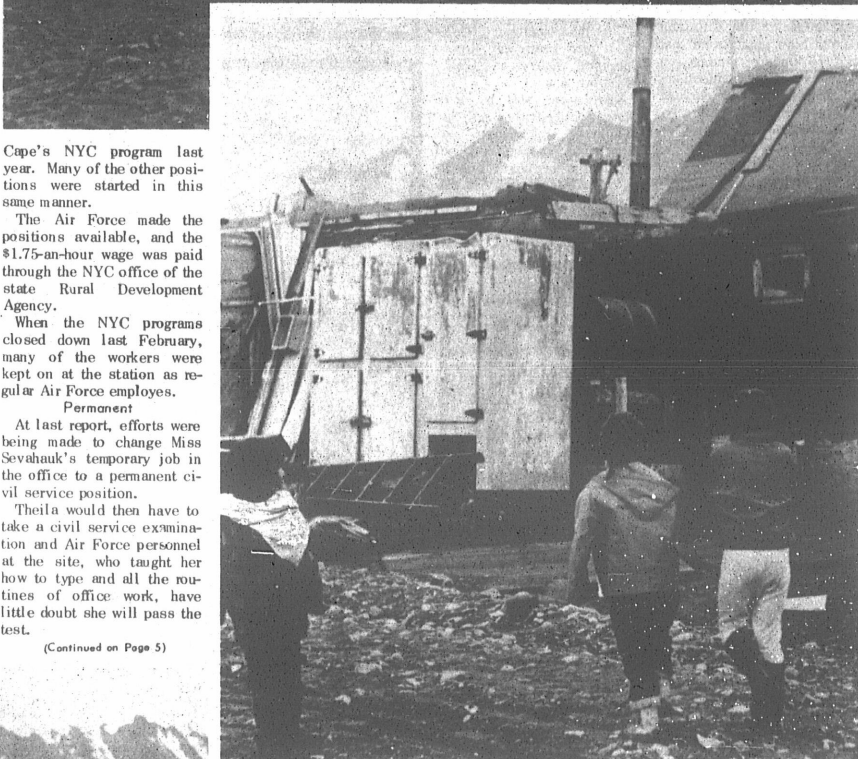
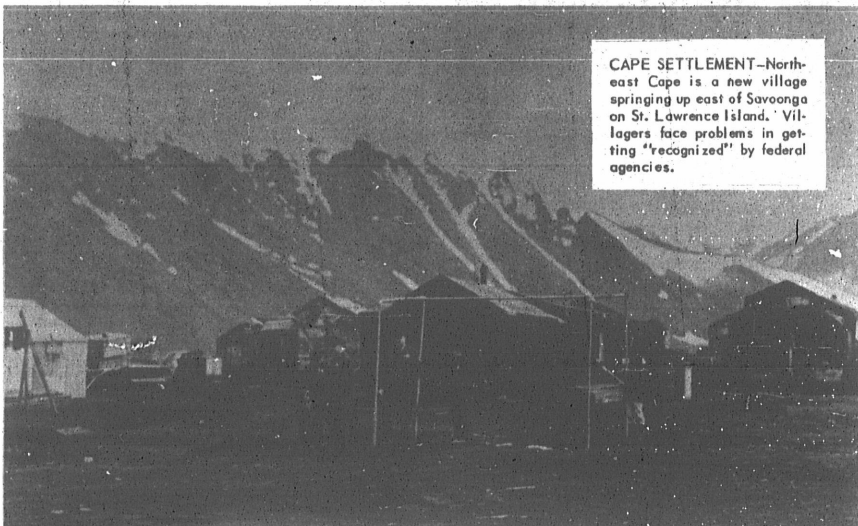
Permanent

At last report, efforts were being made to change Miss Sevahauk's temporary job in the office to a permanent civil service position.

Theila would then have to take a civil service examination and Air Force personnel at the site, who taught her how to type and all the routines of office work, have little doubt she will pass the test.

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CAPE SETTLEMENT—Northeast Cape is a new village springing up east of Savoonga on St. Lawrence Island. Villagers face problems in getting "recognized" by federal agencies.



THE NEW VILLAGES—Starting a new community isn't as easy as might be thought. Although the basic ingredient exists at Northeast Cape—a nearby military installation that offers employment—villagers have a long way to go in coming up to par with other villages in western Alaska. There is no school at the Cape. Children as these pictured (top) must go to Savoonga to attend an already-overcrowded BIA school there. There is no post office, and mail comes through the Savoonga office or courtesy of the Air Force at the radar site. Housing, already a critical problem in all villages, is double so at the Cape because of the difficulty of transporting building materials. Homes like the one at left are built of any material available. No common-carrier ship or airline calls at the Cape.

(TIM BRADNER Photos)



New Villages Slowly Springing Up Where Employment Exists

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Unusual

Although local people work at many military installations in Alaska, village people employed at "remote" radar stations manned by the military is unusual.

Remote radar sites are planned to operate on a self-sustaining, all-military force.

It was through the efforts of commanding officers at Northeast Cape, who found the village people intelligent and willing to work hard, that the jobs were made available first under NYC, then as regular employment.

And although some of the job "slots" now are only temporary, the Air Force commanders are pushing to have them made permanent.

Cooperation

Western Alaska's lone state senator, Sen. R.R. (Bob) Blodgett, recently visited the cape settlement and praised the Air Force for actively working to build a spirit of cooperation between villagers and the military.

"What we have here," Blodgett commented, "is a fine example of the military and people of Alaska working together to build something better. I hope it continues and grows."

Summer Fishing

Although the cape settlement has never before had an all-year population, for years people from Savoonga came over by skin boat to take advantage of good hunting and fishing during spring and summer.

Many still migrate back and forth to Savoonga, but more and more families are beginning to take up permanent residence at the cape.

Nine families now live permanently there.

Although the community is more stable and permanent than most other settlements in Alaska, villagers there face some serious problems.

No School

There is no school at the cape.

Villagers who want their younger children in classes must send them to Savoonga to attend the BIA elementary school there for nine months out of the year.

This puts added pressure on the already-overcrowded Savoonga school.

"Savoonga is so crowded the kids there are hanging out the school windows," Blodgett said of the situation there.

"The real tragedy is that



LONG TRIP—Northeast Cape men get ready for a four-hour trip to Savoonga by skin boat. They will travel west along the coast to reach the larger village.

some kids at the Cape are being kept out of classes because their parents don't like to send them away for long periods of time. This means not only two or three years of schooling missed, but also an endangering of a child's education potential," Blodgett said.

"Once they get so far behind, catching up is extremely difficult. Some of them never make it."

BIA Checking

Robert McLean, BIA Area Field Representative in

Nome, told the Tundra Times that his office has been "checking" reports of Northeast Cape youngsters missing school.

"We try to encourage them not to keep their youngsters at home—out of classes. Most of the cape people are from Savoonga and have relatives there. The kids usually stay with relatives when they go in for schooling."

About building a school at Northeast Cape, McLean said that letters had been sent to Juneau describing the cape

situation and that the Juneau BIA office was "fully aware."

He said he hoped a school could be built there in the near future.

"First we have to establish there will always be at least 12 children in classes. If the number of kids falls below that number, then we start thinking about the closing of school."

At least count, McLean said, there were 15 elementary-age children in the settlement.