

Interpretive Plan

Prepared for

**Museum of the Aleutians
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**by
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February 16, 2007

INTRODUCTION

Background

The Museum of the Aleutians is a treasure. This thoroughly professional institution has everything a museum should have: high quality exhibits, community-based education programs, a fine collection housed in a state-of-the-art storage facility, and a well-trained and dedicated staff. The Museum of the Aleutians is the cultural center of Unalaska/Dutch Harbor, and a must-see attraction for tourists and other visitors. A newcomer may be astonished to find such a high level of museum practice in a community of 4,000 residents. It soon becomes evident that Unalaska/Dutch Harbor is a cosmopolitan place. It is not surprising, after all, that talented and committed professionals should choose to live and work here.

The interests of a founder inevitably influence the form and content of a new institution. Because the Museum's first director was an archaeologist, permanent exhibits focus on abundant lithic collections from regional excavations, organized by cultural period, and on the pre-contact lifeways of Unangan people. In contrast, presentation of the modern history of the Aleutian Islands is fragmentary and episodic; in the words of one community member, "Interpretive connective tissues are not in place."

The changing exhibits gallery is a matchless community resource, well suited to mounting seven shows each year; it also serves as a gathering place for educational programs and community meetings. The permanent exhibits gallery is far less flexible. Massive plate glass vitrines make the display cases virtually inaccessible to Museum staff. It takes two strong men with suction cups to open a case; even for these skilled contractors, the procedure is not without risk.

A row of tall, bulky cases runs down the center of the permanent exhibits gallery, forcing visitors to follow a prescribed route. Unfortunately, this pathway is counterintuitive and frustrating. Visitors can't see where they're going; there is no clear organization or flow pattern. With improved design and layout, this gallery could feel comfortably intimate, rather than crowded and claustrophobic.

The special collection gallery is a serenely beautiful space, whose architecture evokes the traditional Unangan *ulax* (semi-subterranean dwelling). This extraordinary room is a fitting capstone to a museum visit. An added layer of interpretation, with some regrouping of objects and images, would make this special experience more accessible and understandable to people of all ages and backgrounds.

New Directions

The Museum welcomes more than 4,000 visitors annually. Most are local residents, while a smaller percentage consists of off-islanders: cruise ship passengers, tourists traveling on their own, and people visiting family or friends on Unalaska. An important goal for the Museum of the Aleutians is to attract a broader spectrum of community members, including fishermen and other working people, greater numbers of elders and youth,

business travelers, and people who are new to museums; and also guest workers, managers of fish processing plants, and others whose first language is not English.

Unalaska/Dutch Harbor has long been a crossroads of cultures. To serve the range of potential visitors during their sojourn in the Aleutians, the Museum's storyline and exhibits should encompass three interrelated subject areas: the deeply rooted traditions of the Unangan people, the rich history of this island chain, and the ongoing challenges of life in a dynamic and ever-changing environment.

To this end, the Museum of the Aleutians has undertaken an exhibit renewal effort. In the words of Zoya Johnson, the Museum's executive director, "Remodeled exhibits will be highly personal, issue-based, participatory, and uniquely Aleutian in character... They will incorporate the community's vision of its identity, local history, and life on the Aleutian chain."

Since the Museum opened in 1999, the collections have been greatly enriched through ongoing donations of family heirlooms. Recent archaeological and historical research has contributed new knowledge about the anthropology/ethnography, archaeology, and history of the Aleutian Islands. Renewed exhibits will incorporate many of these artifacts, and will benefit from this research. Exhibit elements will be readily accessible and changeable, enabling staff to rotate objects on and off display, and update graphics and text.

New exhibits will also be more interactive, encouraging participation and involvement by community members and other visitors. Interpretation will be highly personal, sharing the experiences and perspectives of Aleutian islanders through first-person, eyewitness stories.

The renewed displays will be issue-based, equipping visitors to connect present-day concerns to related historic events. The ensemble of interpretive experiences will create an unforgettable sense of the uniqueness of this place, inspiring visitors and residents alike to expand their firsthand knowledge of Unalaska and the Aleutian Islands.

The goals of interpretation

Interpretive planning for the Museum of the Aleutians is grounded in the institutional mission:

The mission of the Museum of the Aleutians is to preserve and share the human history of Unalaska and the Aleutian Island region. The museum will promote a greater public awareness of the rich cultural legacy of the indigenous people of the Aleutian Islands, as well as the peoples, events, and artistry that have impacted the region. In pursuit of these goals, this museum will collect archaeological, ethnological, and archival materials from the Aleutian region, and preserve these collections in a repository which will be open to the public. The Museum of the Aleutians will also encourage and facilitate research on Aleutian culture and history. The results of this research will be made available to the public through museum exhibits, publications and presentations.

According to Freeman Tilden, author of *Interpreting Our Heritage*, the aim of interpretation is "to reveal meanings and relationships...rather than simply to communicate factual information." Interpretation provokes attention and curiosity, relates concepts and facts to visitors' own lives, and reveals key messages in unforgettable ways. Making use of a variety of objects, experiences, and media, interpretive exhibits and programs appeal to as many senses as possible. Interpretive displays and activities seek to engage visitors intellectually, emotionally, and physically.

Take-Home Messages

The first step in interpretation is to identify the important take-home messages to be communicated to all visitors. Working with interpretive planner Alice Parman, the planning team for the new museum identified four key take-home messages. Exhibits will be designed so that visitors come away from their museum experience with some or all of these "big ideas" in mind:

- Unangan villages in the Aleutian Islands are among the world's oldest continuously inhabited settlements.
- Unangan people developed one of the most successful and sophisticated adaptations to a maritime environment in human history.
- Since the Aleutian Islands became part of a world economy in the 1700s, the region has gone through resource-related cycles of boom and bust.
- The distinctive and enduring Unangan culture has survived and thrived in the face of natural disasters over many thousand years, as well as successive invasions and occupations in recent centuries.

Interpretive Objectives

Take-home messages provide the conceptual framework for organizing the visitor's experience of the Museum of the Aleutians. Interpretive exhibits focused on take-home messages are intended to influence visitors' understanding, attitudes, and behavior. We expect that after their visit, many museum visitors will:

- Feel that the Museum is relevant to them, and that their voices can be heard;
- Understand that their personal experiences and knowledge are valued by the Museum;
- Feel motivated and encouraged to share their own perspectives about life on the Aleutian chain.

NARRATIVE WALKTHROUGH OF VISITOR EXPERIENCES

Arrival and Entry

As visitors approach the Museum from the south, they see a “ladder” pointing skyward from the “smokehole” that caps the building. The Unangan and English words “Welcome” are clearly visible on the façade, along with the Museum’s name. This attractive supergraphic enlivens the building exterior, and directs visitors toward the main entrance. Along the ramp to the doorway, tiles made by school children display words of welcome in the many languages that are spoken in the Aleutians today.

In the *Foyer*, visitors are drawn to a detailed relief map of the Aleutian Island chain. Molded in resin or carved in hardwood, the tabletop map is designed to be touchable. Both sighted and visually impaired visitors can grasp the region’s immensity, the scale and spacing of the islands, and the number and location of volcanic peaks.

Born of Fire is a graphic display with touchable geologic specimens, presented on a reader rail along one side of the curved relief map. An artist’s rendering depicts the Aleutian Island chain in cross-section, from the ocean floor to the mountain summits. Brief, evocative text portrays the dynamic geology of these islands, created by volcanic forces, and continually reshaped by eruptions, earthquakes, and tsunamis.

Island Hopping, a changeable slide show, gives visitors a brief, energizing visual tour of many different islands in the chain. Captioned images highlight landscape features, historic villages and present-day communities, as well as distinctive plant and animal populations. Interspersed throughout are candid shots of people of today, contributed to the Museum by Aleutian islanders.

Cradle of Storms: Aleutian Weather displays the on-site temperature and wind speed in real time. By pressing a button, visitors can listen to an up-to-the-minute marine weather forecast. An enlarged window (protected by shutters in bad weather) offers a seasonally changing view of Margaret Bay. Visitors browse in an album of photos taken from this window at different times of year, with commentary by Museum staff, board, and visitors. This changeable display gives newcomers and off-island visitors some idea of the island’s fluctuating and often extreme weather, and illustrates some of the warning signals of an impending storm.

(When feasible, the ALSEC mosaic in the Foyer should be integrated with other exhibit elements that interpret World War II in the Aleutians. In the meantime, it would be advisable to protect this one-of-a-kind artifact by elevating it on a pedestal, and/or covering it with a protective shield.)

In the *Reception Area*, a large color photograph over the counter shows people engaged in a subsistence activity, such as berry picking or digging for clams. A bold quote captures the spirit of life in the Aleutians. (For example, this quote from an Unalaska resident: “The geology is very young and dynamic. The weather is dynamic, the fishing is dynamic. This affects our thinking. People don’t say, ‘We need to do a five-year plan.’”)

Nothing is certain. We don't even plan what we're going to do on Monday. We say, 'We'll see about that on Monday.'"

Opposite the reception counter, two exhibits flank the doorway to the Permanent Gallery:

Welcome to Unalaska, a graphic display, shows seasonal highlights of the natural world (length of day/night, salmon runs, bird ecology, whales and marine mammals, flowers, fall colors, winter snows) and community life (festivals, church holidays, sports events, culture camp, etc.). Produced inexpensively using computer graphics technology, the display can be readily updated.

Out and About is a map of Unalaska/Dutch Harbor, showcasing sights and landmarks (the Museum, World War II Interpretive Center, the Orthodox church, main creeks and coves, public hiking trails, recommended driving routes, the airport, the hotel, the post office, etc.). This map might also be produced as an inexpensive printed piece, and sold in the Museum Store.

Crossroads of Continents is a changeable, glass-enclosed bulletin board featuring snapshots of people who have come to Unalaska from all over the world: managers and processors, teachers and other professionals, service workers, business owners, etc. Each photo is captioned with a brief statement telling what brought that person here. An adjacent case holds objects representing international connections through many centuries: Spanish coins, artifacts from 18th century Russian and the 19th century United States, a carved ivory staff from the Unangan people of the Commander Islands, and more.

Along the corridor that leads to the restrooms, a fun interactive gently instructs visitors and newcomers about local etiquette and safety precautions, while correcting stereotypes and misconceptions. *Insider's Guide* features the *Top Ten Dead Giveaways that You're Not From Here*. A fun photo accompanies each clueless statement. By lifting a board or sliding a panel, visitors uncover useful information about each topic. The Top Ten list might include statements such as:

What language do people speak here?
Where can I buy one of those Eskimo wood hats? I can spend up to \$25.
Where can I see a bear?
How far is the drive to Anchorage?
How far are we above sea level?
I absolutely need to fly out on Tuesday or I'll miss my son's graduation.
Where is the Indian reservation?
I wonder what's inside this abandoned building?
Boy, those waves are coming in pretty fast!
What a beautiful day! I won't need a jacket.

At the end of the corridor, visitors relax on vintage seats from a Reeves Airways plane, and learn about that pioneering aviation company from Reeves memorabilia and images displayed nearby.

PERMANENT EXHIBIT GALLERY

The permanent exhibit gallery unfolds a three-part story. The first segment, *The People*, is devoted to the Unangan people who have made their lives here for millennia, creating one of the most sophisticated adaptations to a maritime environment in human history. A transitional zone, *When Everything Changed*, evokes the profound shifts that began when Unangan people first encountered strangers from outside the region. The final portion of the gallery, *Sojourners*, traces the social and environmental history of the Aleutian Islands since those first meetings, nearly four centuries ago.

The People

Entering the gallery, visitors immediately notice large wall-mounted images of land and sea in continual flux: storm-tossed waves, an erupting volcano, the tundra in flower, snow-covered hills in the moonlight, spawning salmon churning up a stream, throngs of nesting birds, sea otters among the kelp beds.... Visitors sense the grandeur of the natural setting of these islands; they may also take note of the unpredictability of the weather and the potential for sudden, violent geologic upheaval.

A subtle audio track animates the space with natural sounds of wind, waves, salmon spawning, the cry of an eagle, a raven's croaking, barking sea lions, a whale surfacing and blowing, footsteps on the tundra, a paddle slicing through water, sounds of stone being worked, roots being dug, meat being chopped. These timeless sounds add a layer of welcome, and deepen the sense of place.

Woven throughout the exhibits are images of plants, mammals, fish, birds, and sea creatures, shown in the contexts where a hunter, fisher, or forager might find them. Tools and tool fragments found by archaeologists are made more understandable with the help of commissioned replicas, artists' drawings, and contemporary versions of traditional tools. Images and quotes from the Qungaarux culture camp show the tools in action, honoring the knowledge and skills of tradition bearers.

The exhibits in *The People* are organized around issues and challenges that Unangan people have always faced in the unique environment of the Aleutians. Archaeology plays a subordinate role; although examples are drawn from specific sites and cultural periods, the culture sequence is not an organizing framework. Technical terms (e.g. "microblade," "labret," "plummet") are explained in familiar language.

Unangan: the People

Entering the permanent exhibit gallery, visitors are drawn to a dramatically lit Unangan artifact of great antiquity. Surrounding this treasured object, portraits of Unangan people and first-person quotes convey two basic messages: "We have lived here a very long time!" "The Russians called us the Aleuts, but we are really Unangan—the seafarers, or people of the passes."

An adjacent panel contrasts contemporary transportation and communication technologies, through a shadowbox display of backlit photos and models of planes,

container ships, radio and TV, phone and Internet, box stores and automobiles. A neon circle/slash overlay blinks on and off, signifying “NO” (as in “no parking”). Brief text asks visitors to imagine that supplies to the Aleutian Islands have been cut off, and we have to make do with the resources at hand. People lived here for many thousands of years, relying on the bounty of land and sea. They developed a depth of knowledge and range of skills to enable them to survive and thrive. What can we learn from their achievement?

The People is laid out in two concentric circles:

The Unangan Tool Kit celebrates the spirit of innovation and the exceptional cultural achievements of people in these islands. This inner circle presents marvels of design and production, invented or borrowed and then perfected, with a specific purpose in mind. The centerpiece is the skin boat or *iqyax*, with accessories such as a bailer and a rudder. A detailed set of plans for an *iqyax*, drawn by an 18th century Russian naval architect, shows his respect for the seamanship and artistry of Unangan boat-builders.

Surrounding the boat, beautifully displayed and lighted, are the essential tools needed in this place: fishing gear, hunting weapons (e.g. toggling harpoon, throwing board, aconite), a bentwood hat, a gut parka, microblade technology, a basket and digging stick, snares and traps. Insightful comments by Unangan people, archaeologists, and ethnographers help visitors understand the life-and-death importance of each tool, and gain insight into its cultural meaning.

A Body of Knowledge: Each set of specialized tools connects to a related exhibit in the outer circle. Here visitors learn how an intimate knowledge of both land and sea, and a wide range of skills, equipped each person to make a vital contribution to the community. Photos of contemporary Unangan people engaged in subsistence activities are juxtaposed with historic images. Visitors learn about current fishing, hunting, and gathering regulations. Succinct graphic summaries convey the status and prospects of relevant animal and plant communities today.

Catch of the Day: Artifacts and replicas help visitors understand the diversity of gear designed for taking different kinds of fish. Photos, illustrations, maps, and diagrams show where and how people fished; how they made hooks, line, and nets; what kinds of fish they caught, and the state of those fish populations historically and today. Visitors can twist dried kelp into cord, and tie knots to help weave a replica net.

The Hunter’s Quest: Photos of sea mammals in groups are juxtaposed to one or more life-size cutouts of individual animals. An artist’s rendering shows people making a skin boat, skin clothing, and a bentwood hat. Touchable replicas invite visitors to experiment with a toggling harpoon and throwing board; they can also handle fur and skin samples. An interactive game challenges them to match sets of tools to the hunter’s prey: whale, sea lion, sea otter, and seal. Historic images by Louis Choris, Waldemar Jochelson, and others depict traditional hunting methods.

Quotes from elders convey what a bentwood hat meant to a hunter. Visitors learn to identify some of the animal parts (ivory, walrus whiskers, etc.) used to decorate these hats. A graphic summary shows the contemporary status of sea mammal populations in the Aleutians. Excerpts from relevant laws convey the exclusive rights of Native people to hunt sea mammals; quotes from elders explain the reasons for this.

Warm and Dry: Actual examples of gut parkas are supplemented by historic photographs and artists' renderings to show them in action, along with the waterproof skirt that kept the inside of an *iqyax* dry. Eyewitness accounts by Ivan Veniaminov and others attest to the effectiveness of gut parka technology, especially in combination with an oil lamp as a heat source. Other images show women wearing birdskin parkas. Quotes and illustrations give visitors insight into the time, skill, and amount of raw material required to make these essential garments. Visitors can touch samples of gut and birdskin.

Home Cooking: A historic drawing by Levashov, showing a woman with household tools, is keyed to artifacts from archaeological sites and to touchable replicas. Illustrations and diagrams show visitors how microblade technology made tool manufacture more efficient, and how different tools were used to butcher, cook, and preserve meat and fish. A (blackened) griddle stone is the subject of a "history mystery"; visitors are challenged to figure out what it is and how it was used. A sidebar display illustrates how Unangan people used the fuzzy white flowers of the cotton plant to make their cookfires, using a bow drill.

A Bountiful Harvest: A basket and digging stick introduce an extensive and detailed exhibit on foraging activities. Photographs show Unangan people of today gathering plants for food, medicine, dyes, and basketmaking. Dried specimens and close-up photographs highlight some of the most important plant species; first-person quotes recount each plant's traditional uses. A photo essay shows a basketweaver preparing rye grass and dyes, and starting a gathering basket. Visitors can try their hand at weaving, using a raffia start; in season, they can handle samples of rye grass.

A painting by Louis Macouillard shows people digging for clams, using both traditional and modern tools. A photograph of a beach at low tide shows a rich array of marine animals and vegetables. Children enjoy unpacking and repacking a basketful of soft toy versions of clams, sea cucumbers, kelp, and other shoreline fauna and flora.

Historic photos show Unangan people scaling steep cliffs to gather bird eggs. Illustrations show the use of snares and traps to capture birds. Bones from middens are evidence of birds as an important part of the Unangan diet. In contrast, full-color images highlight the world-class bird-watching opportunities available in the Aleutian chain today. Quotes from scientists and Unangan elders attest to the devastating effects on bird populations of introduced species, especially rats and foxes.

A changeable photo essay brings visitors up to date on recent oil spills, exotic organisms, and other threats to native fauna and flora of the Aleutians. A bulletin board highlights current conservation efforts, and announces opportunities for volunteer participation.

Tucked into the two corners of the Permanent Gallery nearest the entrance, smaller exhibits shed further light on Unangan prehistory:

How Do We Know?

A graphic exhibit showcases the work of archaeologists and ethnographers whose research interests have brought them to the Aleutian Islands. Candid photographs, notable artifacts, and brief text convey the essence of each person's contribution to knowledge of Unangan lifeways and history. A browsing shelf offers a selection of reports and books.

A changeable case presents objects and findings of a current or recent archaeological dig. Visitors have the opportunity to learn the makeup of an archaeological team and the roles played by different specialists.

How Did They Do It?

Visitors rotate a circular, year-long calendar to learn what people did during each season. In the process, they find out that although Unangan people worked hard, they didn't do everything at once! Each season had its own hunting, gathering, and handcrafting activities; and time was set aside for visiting, socializing, and fun.

A photo essay on the Unangan character is captioned with quotes from Russian Orthodox priest and self-taught ethnographer Ivan Veniaminov. His observations, illustrated with historic and contemporary images, vividly describe the personal qualities and cultural values that have enabled Unangans to live here successfully for thousands of years. These include patience for intricate, time-consuming tasks; endurance to keep going—for days at a time—even though you're cold, wet, and hungry; and ingenuity and adaptability to cope with new and unexpected situations.

When Everything Changed

A stylized floor-to-ceiling screen separates the two halves of the gallery, marking the interruption of the Unangan lifeway by the arrival of strangers from far away. The screen is made up of unfamiliar colors, textures, materials, shapes, and motifs, symbolizing a radical shift from the time-honored Unangan palette of stone and bone, skin and fiber. Portions of the screen are solid, with inset artifacts, touchable replicas, period images, and first-person quotes. Other portions are soft and pliable, curtain-like; they might represent sails, bolts of cloth, or written documents. Windows and doorways in the screen enable visitors to see beyond, into the *Sojourners* section, and pass through when they are ready.

Embedded in the screen, selected artifacts represent the flood of manufactured goods, unfamiliar tools and weapons, new symbol systems, powerful institutions, and outlandish customs that threatened to engulf Native traditions and lifeways. These exotic objects might include coins, trade rings, navigation and survey tools, maps, ship building and stores, wool and cotton clothing, mirror, cards, chess, watch, calendar, tobacco and alcohol, guns, letters, and books. Some of the inset objects can be viewed from both sides of the screen; quotes on one side interpret these early encounters from the perspective of

Unangan people, while first-person accounts on the other side express non-Native perspectives on the same phenomena and events.

Design, construction, and installation of *When Everything Changed* could be approached as a collaborative project involving artists, elders, historians, museum staff, and the exhibit designers/fabricators.

Sojourners

Passing through the screen, visitors are aware of a shift in the look and feel of the exhibit space. Colors, textures, typefaces, case design, and the large images on the gallery walls work together to create a visual chronology. In place of nature in its raw state, visitors encounter images and vignettes that reveal the human costs and benefits of historic change.

Boom and Bust Timeline

A multi-layered timeline highlights important roles played by the Aleutian Islands in world history and in the history of Alaska. Beginning with the fur trade, the timeline documents successive ventures in resource exploitation, and the resulting “boom and bust” cycles of economic and social change.

The timeline consists of a series of double-sided panels, laid out along a zigzag pathway through the center of this section of the permanent gallery. Each panel is devoted to an industrial cycle, contrasting the “boom” on one side with the “bust” on the other. Visitors can walk around each panel, considering that industry from both viewpoints before moving to the next chronological segment.

On the “boom” sides, visitors see large photo cutouts representing the resources, from sea cows and foxes in the 18th century to crab and pollock in recent times. Historic images represent each industry in full swing; the bills and coins that people earned are shown as actual artifacts, or in images. First-person quotes convey the hard work and dangers involved, as well as the potential rewards.

The “bust” side features inset artifacts, contemporary photos, works by regional artists, and first-person quotes, evoking the hard times that followed each boom. Visitors learn to recognize some of the characteristic marks and traces left on the Aleutian landscape by each historic era. Simple graphs, using iconic symbols of each resource, show the collapse or extinction of populations because of over-exploitive methods. Objects (including some touchables) and images depict imported technologies that have brought devastating changes to the 10,000-year-old balance between people and animals, in the past three centuries.

Above the timeline, a continuous graphic wave ties the separate segments into a unified whole. The traditional wave design oscillates between peaks and valleys, to represent prosperity and hard times. The ups are visible on the “boom” side of the panels; the downs can be seen on the “bust” sides. From both perspectives, bold dates mark each

half-century, beginning with the establishment of the Russian fur trade in the Aleutian Islands in the mid-1700s.

A knowledgeable historian will script the details of timeline content, focusing on successive economic cycles. Topics will include (but are not limited to) the fur trade and fox farming, the Gold Rush: boat-building and freighting, the herring fishery, whaling, the crab fishery, bottom fishing and charter fishing, and fish processing.

The timeline's finale is a changeable bulletin board with news about fish processing, the Aleutians' current boom industry. This portion of the display could be modified to tell the next chapter in the story, should economic circumstances change.

The Tsunami of History

In a series of alcoves on both sides of the timeline, clusters of related exhibits invite visitors to explore selected periods in the history of the Aleutians. Interpretation focuses on the general population residing and working in the chain, while always highlighting the effects of historic change on the Unangan people.

A Culture Under Siege

The centerpiece of this display is a dramatically lit assemblage of artifacts from the Aleut revolt. A succinct label conveys the essential facts. On either side, clusters of touchable replicas represent the Unangan and Russian participants in this deadly conflict. A brief object theater production (audio with sequential lighting), activated when visitors approach, orchestrates narration and eyewitness quotes, conveying the motivations and perspectives of both sides. Cones of sound contain the audio within a small area.

A case displays firearms, shown in action in period illustrations. Brief text explains why cannons and rifles were next to useless in the Aleutian setting. Eyewitness accounts describe what Russian fur hunters were up against, and the historical roots of company practices of enslavement and hostage-taking.

A display of touchable furs with information about prices challenges visitors to calculate the potential profits of a fur-hunting venture. Quotes from Unangan elders and historians bear witness that Native people resisted Russian incursions with everything they had.

Citizens with Souls

Photo blowups of architectural details from Unalaska's Russian Orthodox church, period illustrations from Russian publications, and Russian typefaces symbolize a new relationship between Russians and Unangans, mediated by law and religion. An old Russian law book is accompanied by a bold quote, proclaiming that Native people of the Aleutians cannot be enslaved; by law they have the rights of Russian citizens.

A second quote, from Ivan Veniaminov, affirms his intent to minister to the spiritual needs of the Unangan people, while respecting their culture and traditions. Historical portraits, memorabilia or period replicas, and a reproduction of Unalaska's icon of Saint

Innokenty illustrate a brief biography of this amazing man, who began his career as a village priest in Unalaska and eventually became the Metropolitan of Moscow.

New customs introduced by the Russians are the focus of interactive opportunities. Visitors write Unangan words using Veniaminov's system of Aleut orthography. They use a replica peg calendar to mark today's date. They try to solve a chess problem, using the special rules that prevailed in the Aleutians. Visitors also view a collection of watch parts that belonged to Alexei Yatchmanoff, juxtaposed to a quote from Veniaminov about the Unangans' aptitude for watchmaking.

A photo essay introduces the Church of the Holy Ascension. The images are captioned with quotes from members of the congregation.

New Rulers

An oversize headline (in period newspaper typeface) announces that the United States has purchased Alaska from Russia for \$7.2 million. A montage of historic photos, artifacts, and documents creates an impression of sweeping changes: a military presence, new laws and an unfamiliar system of government, a new official language, schools and churches conducted in that language, and an unwillingness to accommodate Russian and Unangan speakers.

An interactive reader rail surrounds a model of the Revenue Cutter *Bear*. When visitors push different buttons, certain parts of the vessel light up, along with backlit images and text. First-person accounts describe the influence of the revenue men on medicine, law, and other aspects of life in the Aleutian chain. Visitors learn that under American law, Native people were not considered citizens, but wards of the state. Their traditional rights and customs were not protected.

A photo essay depicts the Jessie Lee Home in its heyday, dedicated to teaching Unangan people job skills for the new cash economy. Quotes, advertisements, photographs, and illustrations show the prevalence of stereotypes and misconceptions, traceable to the prevailing racism of mainstream American culture.

Making Do

Period images (some from family albums) show Aleutian residents, both Native and non-Native, relying on subsistence practices to feed, clothe, and house their families during many decades of "boom and bust".

A case full of changeable artifacts illustrates some of these do-it-yourself skills. A few objects from the Museum's collection are the starting point; residents of Unalaska and other islands are encouraged to donate or loan their own treasured mementoes. Brief labels convey what is known about each object. Blank notepads invite visitors to add information, comments, and stories.

The starter artifacts include a stone knife with its blade wedged in glue instead of sinew; wool from the sheep ranch at Chernofski; a pair of child-size pants, recycled from an

adult pair; a tool made from copper sheathing, found on the beach near the wrecked vessel that had been carrying fur trade merchant Grigorii Ivanovich Shelikhov to Kodiak.

Forced to Leave

Enlarged historic photographs captioned with first-person quotes depict some of the experiences of Unangan people during their forced evacuation from the Aleutians in 1942. A period suitcase, stuffed with clothing and utensils, also contains a rolled-up icon, one of many that were saved from Unalaska's church. Images and quotes tell the story of the icons' importance to those who were forced to leave.

A U.S. Army duffle bag opens to reveal a silver oil lamp, nestled among uniforms and gear. Excerpts from a letter describe how the donor found the lamp in the ashes of a church; he took it home after the war, and his widow donated it to the Museum many years later. Documents and photos give a partial paper trail of the causes of the evacuation and the order to burn the villages. Family photos and additional quotes show how people lived and died during their evacuation to Southeast Alaska, and what the survivors found when they returned to the Aleutians.

An empty sack of rice is the backdrop for information, quotes, and photos related to the imprisonment of Attu residents in a Japanese concentration camp. Family snapshots honor survivors, as well as those who did not return.

Generations

Visitors turn the pages of an oversize book to view a collection of newspaper clippings and memorabilia from the post-World War II era. Each page represents a 25-year period. Visitors get an overview of nationally significant events that involved the Aleutian Islands (the DEW Line, the war in Vietnam, the Amchitka test, etc.). They also learn about statewide, regional, and local changes and trends that affected life in the Aleutian Chain, such as the creation of Native corporations, and the construction of a bridge between Unalaska Island and Amaknak Island.

Flanking the oversize book, two graphic panels give visitors insight into the complexities of life in the Aleutians today. *Sign Here* takes visitors on a quick tour of the regulations governing new construction on Unalaska. Examples of documents are captioned with explanatory notes, handwritten in red Sharpie. Visitors learn that regulations apply to Native allotments, historic preservation, flood plains, formerly used defense sites, midden sites, places where paddlewheelers were built for the Gold Rush, recent contaminated sites (e.g. oil tanks), previously unknown objects buried during WWII, the Endangered Species Act, and more. *An Island Unto Itself* is modeled on the yellow pages; visitors can peruse a changeable directory of service businesses that supply both commercial and residential customers. For each business, photo and text give an insiders' perspective, rather than a generic advertisement; visitors learn what makes each company a valued community resource.

People Are Talking About...

This finale experience of the *Sojourners* exhibit is a bulletin board, with posted news articles, editorials, letters, and visitor comments on a current, controversial issue in Unalaska or the Aleutian Chain.

Visitors consider a changeable pair of questions, one for Unalaska residents, and one for visitors to the island. They write their thoughts on 3x5 cards and drop them in a box. A selection of representative comments is posted for all to see.

SPECIAL COLLECTION GALLERY

The Enduring Spirit

Entering the special collection gallery, visitors immediately sense a shift in mood and color. This soaring, light-filled room feels spacious, yet intimate. Objects of great beauty and power, arranged and mounted for close-up viewing, are lovingly lit to bring out subtle details of craftsmanship and design. Accessible cases allow staff to change out objects from time to time, drawing on the Museum's ever-expanding collections.

A thought-provoking introductory experience honors the enduring values of Unangan people, steadfastly held even in the face of misunderstanding and discrimination. Approaching the center of the room, visitors become aware of design elements that echo a traditional dwelling. Moving freely through the surrounding space, visitors encounter masterpieces of Unangan artistry, created during the long nights of the Aleutian winter.

Portraits of Unangan artists are found throughout the gallery. Living artists are alongside those who have gone before, revealing the continuity from generation to generation. As visitors view works of art from recent centuries and treasures from archaeological sites, they begin to understand the extraordinary legacy of artistic achievement in the Aleutian Islands. A changeable display on the annual culture camp for youth conveys the commitment of tradition bearers to share their knowledge and skills with artists of the future.

A portion of the gallery is devoted to family and community. Exhibits convey the special qualities of each village, including places where people no longer live. Changeable displays showcase family collections and traditions. Another cluster of exhibits conveys the importance of subsistence activities on the Aleutian chain. Images and oral histories emphasize connections: materials are gathered through traditional means, works of art are created in the context of families and communities. The ensemble offers insight into a way of life—and a view of the world—that is perfectly suited to the unique conditions of these islands.

The underlying purpose of *The Enduring Spirit* is to inspire all visitors to understand, respect, and admire the living arts, culture, and traditions of the Unangan people.

Two Versions of a Woman

Just inside the gallery entrance, visitors find two different versions of a portrait of an Unangan woman. A simple pencil sketch by John Webber, entitled *Woman of Oonalashka*, captures the open self-assurance and quiet competence of an Unalaska resident. Inquiry-based questions invite visitors to compare and contrast Webber's firsthand impression with an exoticized copy, subsequently engraved and printed for widespread distribution. Brief text tells how the museum acquired this internationally significant original sketch, drawn in 1778 by the official artist for Captain James Cook's third expedition.

Soundscape

Once visitors are inside the gallery, they begin to hear voices of people living and working in the shared communal space of the *ulax*. A low-key, intermittent sound track is made up of culturally appropriate conversations, involving all the generations. The soundtrack can be turned off at the touch of a button, to facilitate gallery tours and storytelling in the space.

A Well-Appointed Home

In the center of the space, a whalebone ladder fragment points toward the smoke hole. A mask is hung nearby. These objects are enclosed in a clear plexiglas case, mounted and lit as if suspended in air. Around this central feature, an interpretive reader rail introduces the *ulax*. Eyewitness sketches by Levashov and others, historic photographs of semi-subterranean houses, artists' renderings, and eyewitness descriptions convey the many functions of this warm, well-organized dwelling. Visitors can touch samples of whalebone, driftwood, and woven matting to get a sense of the types of materials used to build and maintain the *ulax*. A simplified dollhouse version invites young visitors (and their grownups) to explore *ulax* life through imaginative play.

The Spirit of Welcome

An oversize book reproduces Ivan Veniaminov's hilarious account of how *ulax* dwellers welcomed visitors from other villages by rigging a "funny ladder", then watching their guests slip down the steps one by one and fall unceremoniously on the floor. This is followed by his description of the elaborate theatricals that kept hosts and visitors entertained for days. Artists' renderings and images of artifacts illustrate these excerpts from a pioneering ethnographic study of the Unangan people.

Creativity and artistry

This beautifully composed display offers a changing selection of masterpieces from the Museum's collection. Visitors marvel at the Lady of Amaknak; a tethered magnifier allows them to view this ancient wonder up close.

A comprehensive array of basket styles and forms is accompanied by images of weavers at work. Artifacts from the collections add a special dimension to historic photographs; an actual sadiron next to an image of a weaver using a sadiron, for instance.

Historic and contemporary baskets, and objects made of gut, highlight the arts of embroidery and applique. Photos of birds help visitors identify the source of decorative feathers; keys and guidelines enable them to estimate the date of beaded objects.

Examples of labrets and tattoos, from archaeological digs and expedition publications, are compared to piercings and tattoos seen in Unalaska/Dutch Harbor today, with examples from younger residents and from indigenous people who are here as guest workers. (This portion of the display could be developed in collaboration with high school students.)

The work of noted Unalaska artist Gert Svarny is the subject of a special presentation, featuring her sculpture, *The Basket Weaver*, her extraordinary bentwood hat, and other pieces from the Museum's collection. Captions by the artist and by art historians document how Gert Svarny has connected past and present through her creativity and artistry. A second mini-gallery presents a changing selection of woodcuts by Ray Hudson, accompanied by basic identifier text. Visitors are invited to contribute thoughts and memories inspired by these images, by writing on a clipboard hung next to each woodcut.

Family and Community

A schematic map of the Aleutian Islands displays the names and locations of all the Unangan villages, past and present. Visitors use a touchscreen monitor to find out more about specific villages, along with representative images. Images and text describe how many people live(d) in each village, and notable natural and cultural features. They meet Unangan people who trace their ancestry to particular villages.

Fragments of armor, and a historic drawing of a warrior, are accompanied by quotes that illustrate and explain the history of conflict in the Aleutians, as well as traditions for resolving conflict.

A changeable display presents the history, traditions, and some of the heirlooms of one or more Unangan families. Quotes from family members share genealogical background, along with stories that reveal core values and special memories. Visitors learn about the bonds that link different families: intermarriage, visits, celebrations, and ties to the same village.

Close to Land and Sea

A montage of images shows what residents of the Aleutians do for fun: berry picking, hiking, snowboarding, diving, birding, fishing, clamming, goose hunting, blue mussel picking, gathering sea urchins, crabbing, sport fishing, and more.

A series of brief videos, made by high school students using affordable, computer-based technology, take visitors out on hunting, fishing, and gathering trips with knowledgeable locals. Interviewees tell unforgettable stories of close encounters with wildlife, survival on the open sea, and childhood experiences with their parents and grandparents.

Tradition Bearers and Sharers

A photo essay with handmade artifacts and works of art recognize the knowledge, skills, and wisdom of elders, focusing on people who have shared their knowledge at Camp Qungaayrux.

This annual culture camp, sponsored by the Qawalangin Tribe, is also the subject of a changeable display that is updated each year. Snapshots, quotes from participating youth and tradition bearers, newspaper clippings, and participants' hand-crafted products convey the unforgettable lessons learned by Native and non-Native youth in the course of an exceptional learning opportunity.

CHANGING EXHIBITS GALLERY

An ambitious program of seven changing exhibits per year brings a stream of new and repeat visitors to the Museum of the Aleutians. Exhibit openings are important social occasions for the community, and associated educational programs draw sizeable audiences. The Museum has attracted traveling exhibits from as far away as Russia, and also organizes high-quality displays in-house.

To involve community members in the planning process for redesign of the permanent exhibits gallery and the special collections gallery, Museum staff might select changing exhibit topics with special appeal to target audiences. Some examples: an exhibit on fishing and fish processing, an issues-oriented display on the future of Dutch Harbor as a port city, or a yearly display of art by guest workers. An all-comers show would introduce the arts, cultures, and values of the many indigenous people (from Africa, Asia, the Pacific Islands, and elsewhere) who are part of Unalaska's workforce.

The changing exhibits gallery also presents a naming opportunity. With its open and innovative spirit and range of exhibit topics, perhaps an appropriate designation would be the Umiak Gallery. The gallery could also be renamed in honor of a major benefactor.

OUTREACH PROGRAMS AND VISITOR SERVICES

Education programs

The Museum's four staff members plan and implement more programs than are found at many larger museums. Lecture series, special tours for cruise ship passengers, school tours, artist talks, and more make the Museum of the Aleutians the cultural center of Unalaska.

Within established parameters of staff time and budget, there may be opportunities for engaging new audiences. Some of the evening lecture sessions could be designed by and for fishermen and fish processors. Open houses and introductory tours could be scheduled at different times of day and varied days of the week, for the convenience of working families. A welcome program for newcomers could be part of this series.

Consider organizing brown bag lunch (or dinner) conversations around particular topics: high school memories, fishing, the Aleutians during the Vietnam conflict. Ask members

of target audiences to suggest a topic and bring their friends. Use photos from the collection to get conversation started. Videotape the session.

Buy a sturdy, compact serving cart and load it with touchables from the Museum's teaching collection. Staff and trained volunteers can wheel the cart into the exhibit galleries, enriching guided tours and lectures with the opportunity to handle and study original objects.

When preparing materials for loan to schools, get classroom teachers involved. Find out what they need, and how they would like to make use of the Museum's resources. With grant funding, the Museum could run a one-week summer workshop where master teachers collaborate with Museum staff to create simple, effective loan boxes and associated curricular materials. In exchange for a grant-funded honorarium, teachers agree to test the boxes and materials in their classrooms. A class field trip to the Museum should be an essential part of the school loan materials program.

With support from business sponsors, hire high school students to assist staff with a variety of tasks. Ask teachers and counselors to refer 9th graders who have the potential to learn and grow at the Museum throughout their high school years. To thank participating businesses, host an annual party for their employees, and invite the high school students and their families.

Website

The website is well designed and easy to use, offering a wealth of intriguing images of artifacts and historic photos. Most visitors to your site need information to understand these images. As a short cut to generate information, try an experiment. Ask people who browse the site to share information and thoughts about the various artifacts and images. Invite knowledgeable experts to participate, including Museum staff and board members, area residents, elders and scholars, Museum members, and other interested people. Review the comments, delete those that are inappropriate or obviously wrong, and post the rest. It may be that over time, a rich storehouse of information will accumulate. If the experiment doesn't work, it can be abandoned in favor of captions written by an expert, or a return to no captions at all.

The links are a highlight of the Museum's website; it's important to keep them updated. Though underutilized and out of date at present, the events calendar has high potential as a communications tool. Members of some of the Museum's target audiences, such as guest workers, youth, and working families, may rely on Internet resources to find out what to do for fun. The Museum of the Aleutians could apply for grant funding to develop a sustainable way to develop a community-wide, web-based events calendar focused on arts, cultures, and traditions.

Museum Store

The museum store is outstanding, with a comprehensive selection of books and other items that are consistent with the mission. At some point, the Museum might consider partnering with publishers and manufacturers to develop a product line related to Alaskan

prehistory and history. Paper models are very popular; a bentwood hat, a Christmas star, and a vintage airplane are possibilities.

Interpreting World War II

The Ounalashka Corporation's World War II visitor center is the appropriate location for artifacts, images, and interpretation of the military history of that period. Some objects owned by the Museum, such as a U.S. army latrine sign, a bomb manufactured in a converted Japanese ceramics factory, and an autographed photo of Joe E. Brown, should be part of displays at the visitor center. Redesigned exhibits at the Museum will complement the World War II visitor center displays, by interpreting the wartime experience from the viewpoint of the Aleutian Islands' Native residents.