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HISTORY, CULTURE, POLITICS

*Edited by Maria Shaa Tláa Williams*

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*Dedicated to the elders  
on whose knowledge we have,  
as indigenous people, been able  
to survive for thousands of years,  
and to the youth, who will  
bring us to a beautiful future.*

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4. The local Anvik Athabascans were trading in St. Michael's and they mistook the Protestant missionary for a trader. They invited him to their village thinking that he would open up a trading post (Van Stone 1979, 136).

5. Father A. Parodi, S.J., came to Nelson Island in 1898. "This mission was a very difficult one at that time, as it was isolated and the food supply was scanty. Furthermore, many of the Eskimos [Yup'ik] were under the influence of the medicine men at that time, and did not exactly welcome the missionary, whom they considered an intruder. After several years at Nelson Island, the strain became too much for Father Parodi and he became mentally ill. Some of the friendly Eskimos took him to St. Mary's, where the priests and sisters took good care of him until he was able to be sent south for a complete recovery" (Balcom 1970, 88).

6. Kagri or dance houses were special structures in each community and membership was usually along kinship lines. Each dance house had its own repertoire of songs, and many of the houses were used for ceremonial events as well. Missionaries of course, destroyed most of these.

7. Mike Dunham, "Ecumenical Meeting Explores Native Christianity," *Anchorage Daily News*, November 6, 1999, E-6.

## Dena'ina Heritage and Representation in Anchorage: A Collaborative Project

Stephen J. Langdon and Aaron Leggett (*Dena'ina Athabaskan*)

*This essay emerged from a collaborative project undertaken by Stephen Langdon and Aaron Leggett at the University of Alaska, Anchorage with various Dena'ina Athabaskan organizations in south central Alaska to develop accurate representation of Dena'ina heritage in the municipality of Anchorage and Matanuska-Susitna borough. The italicized texts are Aaron Leggett's personal experiences and reflections on issues of Dena'ina heritage and representation in Anchorage, which, with over 250,000 residents, is the largest city in Alaska. Founded in the early twentieth century, the city expanded over time and displaced the local indigenous Dena'ina Athabaskan. Like most American cities, then, Anchorage has an indigenous past that has remained invisible. Stephen J. Langdon was raised in Anchorage and is a professor of anthropology at the University of Alaska, Anchorage. He has conducted numerous research projects throughout Alaska on a variety of public policy issues related to Alaska Natives but has specialized in southeast Alaska on topics related to precontact, historic, and contemporary fisheries of the Tlingit and Haida people. He is the author of *The Native People of Alaska* (4th ed., 2002) and the editor of *Contemporary Alaska Native Economies* (1986). Aaron Leggett, a historian of the indigenous people of the Cook Inlet region, is a Dena'ina Athabaskan and is a member of the Native Village of Eklutna, in the Cook Inlet region. He holds a B.A. in anthropology from the University of Alaska, Anchorage.*

The coast of south central Alaska is penetrated by a long watery arm that extends over 150 miles from the Pacific Ocean in the south to the mouth of the Knik River in the north. Dena'ina Athabascans occupy the shoreline of this inlet, which they call *Tikahtnu*, "Big water river" in the Dena'ina language. The uppermost reaches of the arm are the home to the *K'enaht'ana*<sup>1</sup> branch of the Dena'ina whose villages, fish camps, trails, battlegrounds, graves, and other sites dotted and crisscross the land and water of the area.

The *K'enaht'ana* region was never settled or colonized by Russians who

established and maintained a trading post further south on *Tikahtnu* at present-day Kenai. Following purchase by the United States in 1867, the region remained isolated until late in the nineteenth century when several military exploratory expeditions and a few mineral prospectors briefly passed through the area (Kari and Fall 2003). A small port named Knik was established at a Dena'ina village site on the western shore of *Tikahtnu* in 1906 to provide mail and supplies to Euro-American settlers, but in 1914 things changed dramatically and rapidly. At a site at the mouth of *Dgheyaytnu*, today known as Ship Creek (see Orth 1971), a tent camp was built as a construction base for the Alaska Railroad and became Anchorage; today Anchorage is the largest city in Alaska and 50 percent of the entire population of Alaska lives in this area.<sup>2</sup> Little heed was paid to the *K'enaht'ana* fish camp at the mouth of Ship Creek as the bustling tent city of construction workers, 5,000 persons strong, completely engulfed them. By 1918, the *K'enaht'ana* moved their fish camp out to *Nutul'iy* (Fire Island) where they continued subsistence salmon harvesting and processing into the 1970s. The island location could only be reached and returned from by those with a detailed understanding of the working of the tidal flows of *Tikahtnu*. On the island, the Dena'ina families were able to reestablish camps and continue their customary and traditional salmon harvesting and processing activities in a spot away from the tumult of burgeoning Anchorage. At *Nutul'iy* they were protected by the turbulent tides to whose ways they were carefully attentive.

The explosive expansion of Anchorage prompted by Cold War militarization in Alaska after World War II ignored the fact that the region was the homeland to the *K'enaht'ana*. Dena'ina lands were appropriated without recognition or compensation by the businesses and residents of Anchorage as the *K'enaht'ana*, dramatically reduced by the 1918 flu epidemic, gradually abandoned their fish camps that were being swallowed up by Euro-American expansion. The *K'enaht'ana* were left to themselves, for the most part, in the village of *Idlughtet* (Eklutna) to the north of Anchorage, where a reserve was established around their traditional home. With the loss of their fish camps, trails, trap lines, and hunting grounds, they essentially became invisible in their homeland and absent from the consciousness of the newcomers to the "last frontier," as Alaska came to be known.

*My grandmother was from the village of Eklutna and shared many of the stories that she experienced growing up. During this time of rapid growth, I believe most people were probably unaware that Natives lived and maintained a subsistence lifestyle within the Anchorage bowl until Statehood occurred in 1959. Speaking from my own experiences, the only way that I knew that there were Dena'ina people still*

*within the area was through my grandmother, and I became frustrated whenever I would try to explain this to others in Anchorage. In fact, it was not until I was 19 years old that I read an article written by Eklutna elder Alberta Stephan and realized that my great-great-grandfather and our family had fished in Anchorage until about 1918. Just as with my situation, many Dena'ina did not learn our history as we were growing up. In my case, I feel my family had to be focused on adapting to and surviving within what has become Alaska's largest city. One of the reasons for this ignorance, I believe, is there is little in the way of public representation of our Dena'ina people's prior uses of significant places, streams and other aspects of the Anchorage area.*

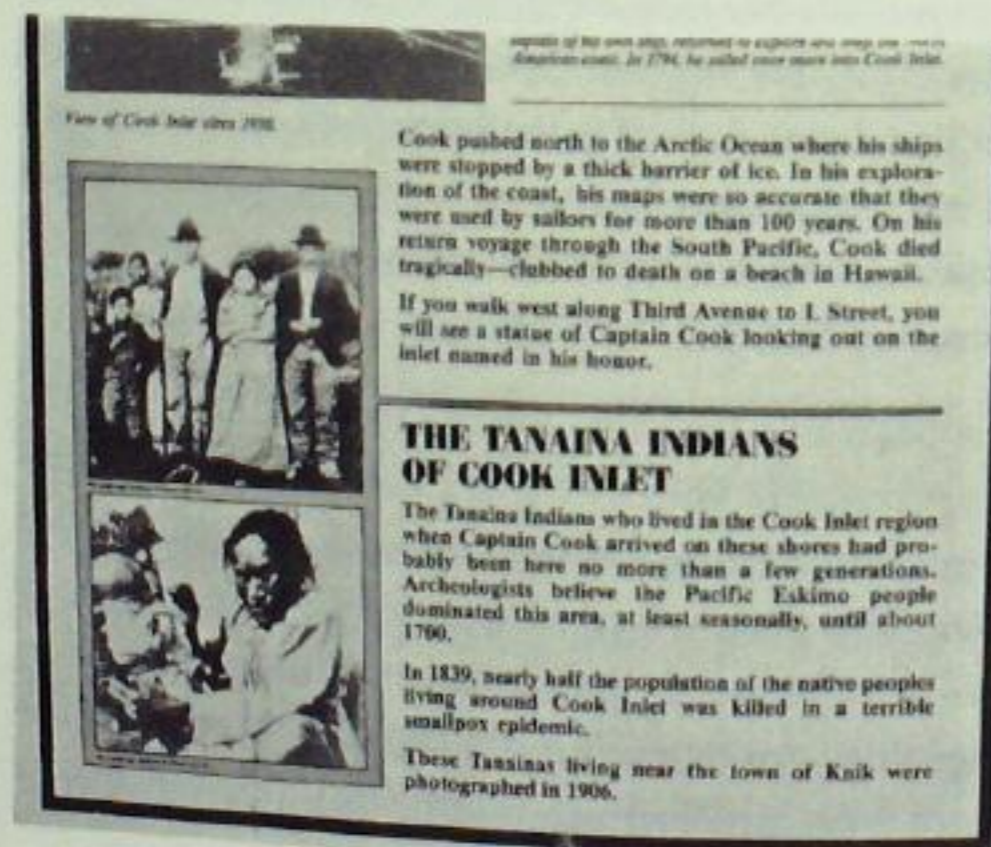
The Euro-American leaders of Anchorage have positioned the history of the city as a trajectory of European and American cultural history, primarily because the intellectual and cultural atmosphere of the mid-twentieth century viewed Native American rights and concerns as an unwanted relic to be eradicated from the political face of the United States. Federal policy initiatives in the 1950s such as termination and relocation sought to end the constitutional recognition of Native American governments and remove indigenous North Americans from their homelands through educational and employment programs (Skinner 1997; Arnold 1976). In Alaska, the tactic of promoting connection to European and American history, with no regard for its original indigenous inhabitants, was employed to raise awareness of Alaska and to create recognition of its strategic geopolitical position as a means to acquiring statehood, a status achieved in 1959.

*Within Downtown Anchorage very little in the way of public recognition of Dena'ina is available. On the corner of 3rd and F, the heart of the tourist visiting area, there is one sign that presents two facts about the Tanaina (an older outdated spelling). The sign says that we have only been here for about 350 years, which is wrong, and that half our population died off in the flu epidemic. To me what this does is marginalize the Dena'ina existence by saying that we haven't lived here that long and that when Americans came in they just utilized the land they saw in front of them in one of the last acts of Manifest Destiny.<sup>3</sup>*

This privileging of European and American history and culture is symbolically demonstrated by the prominent positioning of a statue of Captain James Cook, the first-known European explorer to view the area, in a park named after his flagship *Resolution*. The park is located on a high bluff overlooking *Tikahtnu* at the edge of the city's business district, where it fosters the impression of the commander gazing omnisciently from his ship, thereby assimilating the landscape he perceives, transforming it into what later became his



1. Signage in downtown Anchorage on the Dena'ina, the original inhabitants of the area. Photo by Stephen Langdon.



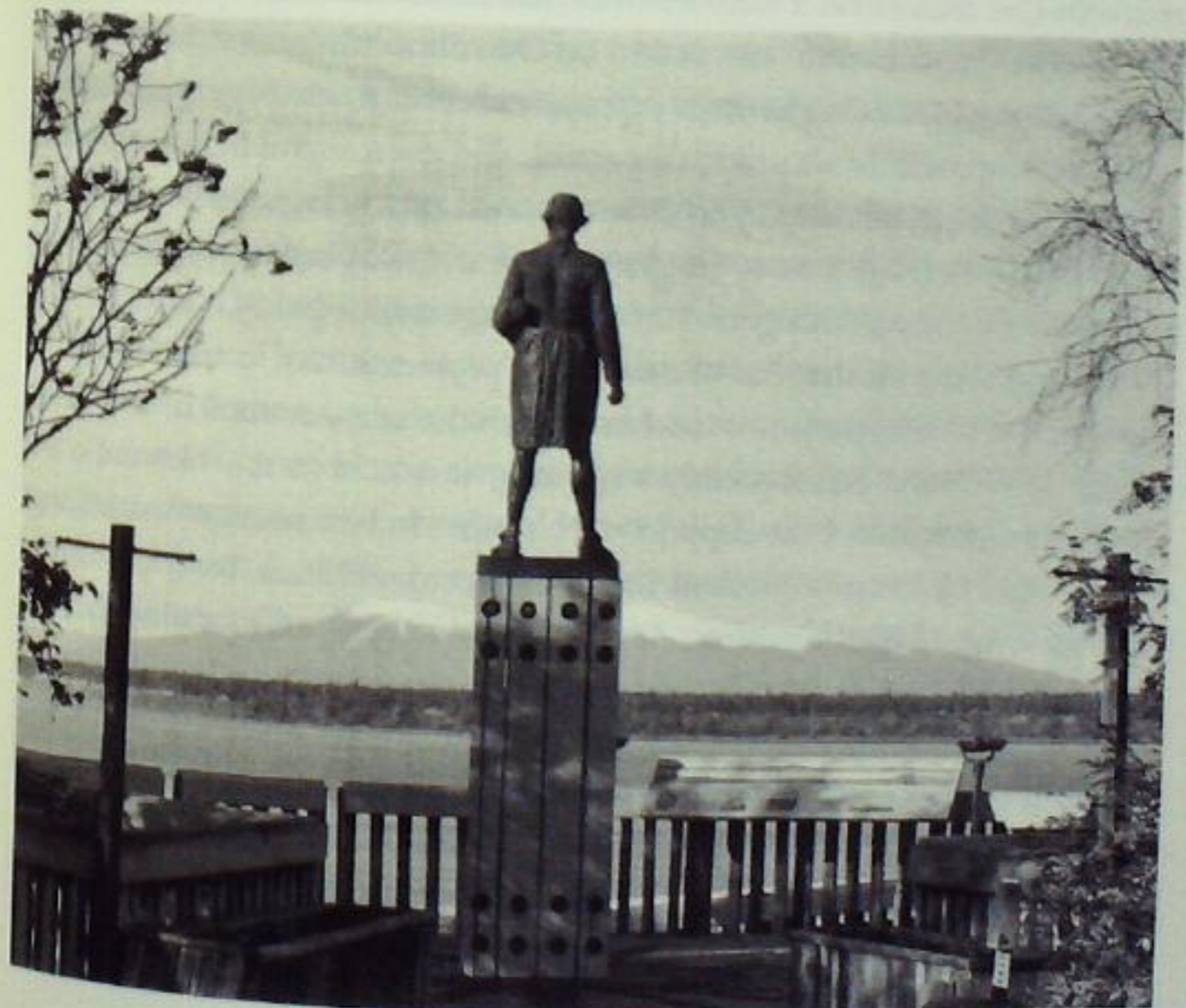
2. Close-up of the signage in downtown Anchorage, with inaccurate information on the "Tanaina" (Dena'ina). Photo by Stephen Langdon.

namesake Cook Inlet. Nowhere in this symbolic hegemony is there mention that this place is the homeland of the *K'enaht'ana*. To the authors, this constant reminder of the lack of any respectful recognition of Dena'ina heritage in the self-conscious representations of Anchorage has been both painful and a powerful prompt to action.

*Another item in Downtown Anchorage that has always bothered me is on 3rd and L Street at what is called Resolution Park where a statute of Captain Cook stands. A statue for a man who spent ten days here and never got off his boat and therefore because he "discovered" this area, we no longer use the far more descriptive name Tikahtnu or "Big water river" for the inlet.<sup>4</sup>*

Dr. James Fall, whose collaborative research with Susitnuht'ana elder Shem Pete began in the 1970s, was well aware of both the extensive knowledge of and use of the Anchorage area by the *K'enaht'ana* and the near total lack of recognition of their presence in contemporary public representation in Anchorage. In conjunction with a research project concerning Dena'ina heritage on the local military bases with Dr. Nancy Davis, Fall prepared a public lecture

3. Statue of Captain James Cook in downtown Anchorage, Alaska. Photo by Stephen Langdon.



for presentation at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art on October 14, 2004.<sup>5</sup> The title of the lecture was "Dena'ina Elena, Dena'ina Lands" and Fall announced that he was prompted to prepare the lecture by the admonition from the Eklutna historian Alberta Stephan, herself a published author. She stated, "It is important to the Athabascan Indian People that their history of a well organized lifestyle be known to everyone" (Fall 2004).

#### *Collaborative Course/Project*

In the summer of 2005, in response to the University of Alaska, Anchorage, Community Engagement and Learning Program's proposal solicitation, an idea for a course/project to address issues of Dena'ina heritage and representation in Anchorage was developed and submitted. The course/project proposal was initially voiced and developed by Langdon with co-instructor James Fall and teaching assistant Aaron Leggett, a senior anthropology major at the time. Langdon and Leggett, both raised in Anchorage, were troubled by the absence of respectful Dena'ina heritage recognition in the Anchorage area, while Fall, whose research with Shem Pete on place names and Dena'ina cultural activities in the *Tikahtnu* area dated to the late 1970s, had endeavored to bring the lack of public recognition of Dena'ina to the attention of Anchorage residents and leaders on a number of occasions in the recent past. Our idea was to combine academic instruction on Dena'ina culture and history with investigation of Dena'ina heritage representation in Anchorage, culminating in the development of accurate, respectful, and meaningful heritage posters appropriate for public display in different areas of Anchorage. We hoped to integrate the heritage poster designs into an overall plan for markers to be appropriately placed throughout the Anchorage municipality.

After agreeing on the idea of the course/project at UAA, preliminary concepts for the course/project were shared with the tribal council of the Native Village of Eklutna. Subsequently a meeting was held in the Eklutna tribal chambers and received the support of the tribe. In late summer 2005, Langdon brought UAA Native Student Services director William Templeton (Inupiaq) up to speed on the project; Templeton joined the collaboration by writing a letter of support for the Community Engagement and Learning grant proposal, identified potential Native students for the course, and invited the organizers to a Native Student Services potluck to announce the impending offering of the course in the spring 2006 semester. Templeton also facilitated the enrollment of Eklutna tribal members in the course and coordinated funding from the local Alaska Native Corporation's nonprofit arm, the CIRI Foundation.

At the same time, Langdon recruited UAA colleague Dr. Phyllis Fast (Koyukon Athabascan) to join the course/project team. As an Athabascan artist herself and a student of Alaska Native art, Fast had experience that would be beneficial in considering the aesthetic and communicative dimensions of heritage representation.

As the time for submission of the proposal grew nearer, letters of support were acquired from Cook Inlet Region Incorporated (CIRI), the for-profit corporation established by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, the Alaska Native Heritage Center, and the CIRI Foundation. Our efforts were rewarded in fall 2005 when we received notification from the Community Engagement and Learning program that the course/project had been approved for the spring semester.

#### *Course/Project Implementation*

The course/project was designed to consist of four components: (1) Dena'ina culture and history; (2) student inventory of Dena'ina representation in the Anchorage area; (3) student design of accurate, respectful, and meaningful prototype heritage posters, and, (4) development of a spatial plan for the location of Dena'ina heritage posters in the Upper Cook Inlet area. Our outreach efforts drew fifteen students, six of whom were Dena'ina. The Dena'ina students were major contributors to the course and worked cooperatively with their fellow non-Dena'ina students in the inventory and design components of the project.

Dena'ina heritage content in culture and history was accomplished through readings, lectures by Dr. James Fall, guest presentations, films, and Dena'ina elder panels. Our objective was to convey substantive information about Dena'ina cultural heritage, especially in the area around Anchorage, focusing on themes, locations, place names, and activities. A substantial amount of Dena'ina oral literature was also incorporated into the course with volumes by Alberta Stephan (1996, 2001) and James Fall (Kari and Fall 2003) being used as primary texts. A number of guest presentations were made to the class. A panel of Eklutna Dena'ina elders provided a moving discussion of their experiences as Dena'ina growing up in the Anchorage area. They commented that this was the first occasion during their lives when the university had offered any courses that dealt with their cultural and contemporary history. The chief of the Native Village of Eklutna, Lee Stephan, provided an overview of the tribe's present programs and recent issues, such as the proposed blasting of the two rocky areas located near the village for gravel in the 1990s. Gravel is a needed resource for Anchorage roads and a way to bring income into



4. Dena'ina students in Dena'ina Heritage and Representation class point to their homeland. From left, counterclockwise: Maria Coleman, Marilyn Balluta, Deborah Call, Delia Call, Trescia Coleman, and Aaron Leggett. Photo by Stephen Langdon.

the small village. He also discussed the planning for a traditional Dena'ina house and associated cultural displays to be constructed on Ship Creek that was being designed by a Native Village of Eklutna team in association with the expansion of the Port of Anchorage. Jon Ross and Donita Peter (both Dena'ina Athabascan) of the Alaska Native Heritage Center presented information on their work with Dena'ina language preservation and curriculum development. Dr. William Workman (professor of archaeology, University of Alaska, Anchorage) and Dr. Douglas Reger (Alaska Office of History and Archaeology) gave an overview of archaeological research in the Cook Inlet portion of the Dena'ina region. Dr. Aron Crowell of the Smithsonian Institution Center in Anchorage delivered information on his approach to collaborative planning for the Anchorage museum expansion and preliminary thoughts on how the Dena'ina would be represented. The class also viewed the film *Tu-bughna* made by the Dena'ina people of Tyonek and Frank Brink about their culture and history (Brink and Brink 1988).

During the middle third of the course, students were assigned the task of taking inventory of various public representations of Dena'ina heritage in the Anchorage area. The students were provided with cameras and GPS

instruments to document the locations and appearance of the images they identified. They covered much of the Anchorage bowl from Girdwood in the south to Chugiak in the north, while three students who lived in nearby Matanuska Valley communities to the north canvassed that area. The students then prepared PowerPoint presentations of their findings that were delivered to the class. The students discovered that there were very few public representations of Dena'ina heritage and that those that did exist were often inaccurate and demeaning. In addition, when any information appeared, it was typically presented in generic form, as either Dena'ina or Athabascan. Here and there streets and parks had been given Anglicized versions of Dena'ina names by some haphazard process but there was no additional information or context provided concerning the name. For example, the name Tikishla Park was based on the Dena'ina name for "black bear" but no information on the source of the name was provided on any of the signs on which the name appeared. This is an example of the random manner in which occasional nods to Dena'ina appeared within the general Anchorage municipal pattern in which the place names that are proposed and adopted reference specific persons and historic moments. Street and park names are primarily intended to provide reference points for management and use, and respectful recognition of Dena'ina or education about Dena'ina culture is not an objective of the practice.

The students discovered several other characteristics of Dena'ina representations. They observed that the information they encountered was presented in a depersonalized (named individuals were never presented) manner and paid no attention to Dena'ina knowledge of or use of an area. They also noted that Dena'ina representations were typically ahistoric with regard to the Dena'ina cultural experience prior to the coming of Euro-Americans. Dena'ina oral traditions and heritage concerning locations was nonexistent in the representations.<sup>6</sup> Another observation students made was that some organizations had erected totem poles as a form of generic recognition of Alaska Native culture. However, such poles were constructed by the Tlingit and Haida people of southeast Alaska and were not a part of the cultural heritage of the Dena'ina. Observers could misconstrue totem poles out of context and without explanatory information as either characteristic of Alaska Natives in general or of Dena'ina in the Anchorage area.

There is one exception to the above inventories. A respectful and contextualized Dena'ina representation was identified at Chugiak High School, located in proximity to the village of Eklutna, a mural depicting Dena'ina salmon fish trap construction and use; it was displayed with a detailed and relevant discussion of the design and operational principles upon which such

fish traps operated. It is noteworthy that Dena'ina elder Alberta Stephan was consulted by the designers and played the central role in the development of the exhibit.

The final part of the course was devoted to student development of accurate, respectful, and meaningful heritage posters. The plan was these heritage posters would be prototypes of permanent signage. Groupings of students with Dena'ina and non-Dena'ina memberships were created with three to four students per group. A variety of possible forms and key issues were discussed in class as the topic of indigenous self-representation was explored. Key questions included: Who would be the decision-making authority to decide what was to be presented? What materials would be presented given possible differences of opinion and sensitivity over certain issues? How would postcontact relations be dealt with? What would be said about the manner in which Dena'ina in the Anchorage area had been treated?

Following discussions that explored these questions, we returned for guidance to the earlier remark from elder Alberta Stephan concerning the importance of demonstrating the "well-organized lifestyle" of the Dena'ina. Given the nonexistent or haphazard representations of Dena'ina heritage identified by the students, this statement was a powerful guiding principle.

In the class, a number of possible forms of cultural representation were discussed. Maria Coleman, a member of the Eklutna tribe involved in the design of the Ship Creek display, indicated that the fish camps in the Anchorage municipality were associated and owned by Dena'ina families. Family stories and photos were going to be the foundation of the displays prepared by the Native Village of Eklutna for the Ship Creek. We discussed various possible cultural themes such as salmon fishing, beluga hunting, trapping, berry gathering, processing and storage, clothing, song, dance, and historic events. Another possible form of representation was place names—but in our vision, place names were to be established in association with actual Dena'ina uses and contextualized with regard to why the name was given, what story went with the name, and what the name meant. Sites and associated activities constituted another possible form of representation. The actual physical locations of Dena'ina camps were of great significance to the Dena'ina elders who spoke to the class; therefore it was decided that this would be a primary emphasis in designing the heritage representations.

A final category of representation included that of vista; vistas provide the opportunity to present a large number of place names and associated heritage information displayed across photos of broad swathes of landscape and could be placed at strategic locations in the Anchorage area. Several such locations were identified, including the 3rd and L overlook (where Cook's statue is

located); Chugach State Park, high in the mountains immediately to the east of Anchorage; Kincaid Park, which has a bluff view facing southward; and Eklutna Lake campground, from which the entire length of the lake can be viewed, backed by the spectacular looming Chugach Mountains. An important consideration in our thinking about the location of vista forms of heritage representation is that they should be positioned at places frequented by substantial numbers of visitors and residents in order to maximize the public education potential of the location.

Drawing on information and images presented earlier in the class, students returned to the field at various locations to fulfill their assignments. They took a variety of photos at their location to show how the sign could be positioned to best fit into the site. They selected various informational forms—text, art, photos, and drawings—and positioned them on PowerPoint posters. As the final component of the class, each student gave a presentation of his or her site, the information associated with the site, and the prototype design for heritage markers to be erected at the site.

Here are three examples of the Dena'ina heritage markers designed by students in the course. The first one concerns "Chanshtnu" (now known as Chester Creek) and the former Dena'ina fish camp located in the vicinity of modern Westchester Lagoon. The second is a design to memorialize a battle the Dena'ina fought against Alutiiqs (another Alaska Native group) at Point Campbell. The final example is a vista scene proposed for a parking lot at an entrance to Chugach State Park, high in the mountains overlooking Anchorage.

Our initial final objective for the course was to integrate the inventory and heritage marker prototypes into an overall presentation to deliver to the Anchorage Municipal Assembly as a call to action. Our efforts during the class to stimulate interest in the class/project in various municipal offices such as Parks and Recreation and Planning had met with little response. The mayor commended us in a letter for bringing forth important heritage information. Thus the class ended without completion of the objective of formally presenting the Dena'ina heritage representations to the municipal government. But the end of the course was not the end of the collaborative efforts or of the heritage posters prepared by the students.

### Epilogue

In the summer of 2006, initial printings were done of a number of the prototype heritage markers prepared by the students. Some of the posters are of substantial size and are suitable for public presentation while others require

additional editing and reprinting. Two of the posters ultimately did make an appearance before the municipal government in a somewhat unexpected way. In the summer of 2006, Leggett testified before and worked with a municipal committee responsible for recommending a name for the new civic and convention center being built in downtown Anchorage. After examining a variety of possible names, the committee decided to recommend "Dena'ina Civic and Convention Center" to the assembly. In August 2006, a public hearing was held prior to the Anchorage assembly voting on the recommended name of the new center. Leggett testified as the first public witness in support of the recommended name. Several of the posters were prominently displayed during the hearing, while Eklutna elders and spokespersons supported the proposed name and thanked the assembly members for the long overdue recognition. The assembly then voted 11-0 in support of the name "Dena'ina Civic and Convention Center" and following the announcement of the vote, assembly members, mayor, staff and the audience all rose to applaud the decision in a moving and memorable moment of public affirmation.

*Today, however, things are finally changing. The Dena'ina have reached a place where we feel comfortable sharing our history of what we know about this landscape and how it has shaped who we are as a people. In other words, to borrow a phrase from a distinguished Dena'ina elder, we are no longer satisfied with being the "invisible people." We have a story to tell here about our land. But it is more than that; I think finally people are starting to realize the depth that we can bring to the table. In fact our new convention center in downtown Anchorage will recognize this by being named the Dena'ina Civic and Convention Center and that it will honor the people by using Dena'ina names for the various rooms throughout. This I think is a huge step forward and through the class we reinforced something that has been beneath the surface waiting to be exposed for far too long.*

Meanwhile, on the UAA campus, Langdon and Leggett have been working on having *Chanshtnu* signs placed at key locations along the route of the creek as it flows through the campus. These waters are the upper portion of the creek that previously was home to the Dena'ina fish camp depicted in the first of the heritage markers previously shown. Dr. Herbert Schroeder, coordinator of the Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (ANSEP) and overseer of the new building under construction to house the program, has agreed to the name "Chanshtnu Commons" for a barbecue and picnic area that is located outside the new building in proximity to the stream. When she learned of this idea, Eklutna tribal member and class participant Maria Coleman wrote that it would be a good place to re-energize away from the glass and steel where sunlight, trees, and stream combine to lift your spirit.

The collaborative efforts on which the Dena'ina Heritage and Representation course/project were built have continued to grow and transform in various different contexts (Leggett 2006). While much work lies ahead, including another session of the course/project in the spring semester of 2007, the recognition of Dena'ina heritage in the municipality of Anchorage and the willingness to inclusively involve Dena'ina in Anchorage's future represent substantial strides. We hope that these positive developments will continue to grow in the future so that the residents of and visitors to Anchorage will come to know and appreciate the rich heritage of the Dena'ina Athabascans in this place.

#### Notes

1. The names "Knik" for the earliest Euroamerican town site in the area and "Knik Arm," the most northerly appendage of *Tikahtnu* (Cook Inlet), are derived from this term for the regional Dena'ina population.
2. The railroad had been routed through the area on its transit from a port to the south on the Gulf of Alaska from Seward to the gold rush town of Fairbanks on the Chena River in the middle of Alaska.
3. In the aftermath of the Anchorage Assembly's vote to name the Anchorage Convention Center the "Dena'ina Civic and Convention Center," Leggett was appointed to the board of the Anchorage Historic Properties Commission. That commission controls the signage of Anchorage's downtown streets. Incidentally, the matter of the offensive sign came up at a meeting in September 2008. Leggett indicated that the sign was offensive, whereupon the executive director invited Leggett to accompany him to the sign; he then unbolted and removed it. This act is a significant indicator of a change in attitude toward recognition and incorporation of the Dena'ina in the symbolic landscape of Anchorage.
4. In their poster presentations Dena'ina students invariably used the English phrase "upper inlet" rather than "upper Cook Inlet" to indicate their perspective.
5. Other contributors during Fall's lecture included Dr. Nancy Davis, the Dena'ina historian Alberta Stephan, and other Dena'ina elders.
6. A particularly egregious example of the lack of attention to Dena'ina oral tradition and cultural heritage is that of Mt. Susitna, a distinctive feature on Anchorage's western horizon across *Tikahtnu*. The term "Sleeping Lady" has been applied to the mountain and putatively linked to Dena'ina oral tradition in Euro-American writing. Dena'ina do not recognize the "Sleeping Lady" story and have entirely different oral traditions about the mountain (Kari and Fall 2003).